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The History Textbook Problem in Japan

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Introduction

One of the most important problems of the international relations in Far East Asia since the 1980s is the problem of recognition of historical past by the Japanese people and the Japanese Government led by Premier Koizumi. And the most important issue of the problem is the Japanese history textbook problem.

The **Japanese history textbook problem** is a problem over the government-authorized history textbooks used in the secondary education of Japan (junior high school and high school).

This problem has a long history starting from 1950s but it has become so serious in the 1990s under the Koizumi Government. The history of the problem could be divided into three periods.

- 1) From 1950s-1982
- 2) From 1982-1997
- 3) From 1997- present

1. The Textbook Authorization System in Japan and Ienaga Textbook Review Case

The textbook of all subjects for elementary, lower and upper secondary (junior high and high) schools in Japan are written and published by several major publishers such as Sanseido, Yamakawa and Teikokushoin. School Education Law (教育基本法) requires schools to use textbooks that are authorized by the Ministry of Education and Sciences. Textbook companies first submit the drafts of their proposed textbooks written by historians to the Ministry. Textbook Authorization and Research Council (教科用図書検定調査審議会) at the Ministry checks the drafts in accordance with the Ministry's curriculum guideline (学習指導要領) to ensure that the contents of proposed textbooks are "objective, impartial, and free from errors." The Ministry advises the textbook companies opportunities to revise their drafts when they were found to contain descriptions inconsistent with the national guideline. The local boards of education of cities and prefectures then determine which authorized textbooks to use at each school

in their locality. Textbook authorization is conducted every four year, and the the results is notified to the public in the following year of authorization.

This sytem has been criticised as a kind of censorship depriving authors to express their opinions.

The government authorization system of textbook has been criticized since 1950s for rejecting textbooks that depict the Imperial Japan in a critical manner, such as reference to Nanjing Massacre and other war crimes committed by the Japanese military during the wars.

In this context, we have to mention the so called Ienaga trial. The draft that he wrote as a Japanese History textbook for high school was rejected by the Ministry in 1952 but somehow passed the authorization and was published in 1953 from Sanseido. He again applied for the authorization in 1955 but the Ministry suggested that 216 items should be corrected. After some corrections, his draft passed and was published in 1956. As the curriculum guideline was changed, he applied for another draft in 1956 and 1957 too, which went through the same process with the case in 1955.

Ienaga claimed that the system of textbook authorization was unjust and unconstitutional. The authorization system was against Article 21 of the constitution that guarantees the freedom of speech and expression. Writing and publication of history textbook is a form of speech that is protected by the Constitution; however, the system of school textbook authorization conducted thought control and prohibited publication and use of textbooks at schools that were deemed inappropriate according to a particular political ideology held by the government.

But his lawsuits were not favourable to him.

2. History texbook as a diplomatic issue

1) “Invasion” problem

On June 26, 1982, the Japanese textbook authorization system became a major diplomatic issue for the first time when Asahi Shinbun, one of the big three leading national newspapers in Japan, reported that the Ministry of Education demanded a textbook that wrote that the Japanese army *invaded* (侵略) Northern China to rewrite it to "*advanced* (進行) into."

This was not a mere scoop of Asahi Shimbun, but it was the case. I was also one of the authors of a textbook of the world history for high school and threatened to be advised to rewrite my section on imperialism. Fortunately I was not surmoned to the

Ministry but my colleagues were.

Having heard this news the Chinese government and the South Korean government strongly protested to Japan.

In response, on August 26, 1982, Kiichi Miyazawa, then the Chief Cabinet Secretary of Japan (later Prime Minister), made the following statement:

1) The Japanese Government and the Japanese people are deeply aware of the fact that acts by our country in the past caused tremendous suffering and damage to the peoples of Asian countries, including the Republic of Korea (ROK) and China, and have followed the path of a pacifist state with remorse and determination that such acts must never be repeated. Japan has recognized, in the Japan-ROK Joint Communiqué of 1965, that the "past relations are regrettable, and Japan feels deep remorse," and in the Japan-China Joint Communiqué (1972?), that Japan is "keenly conscious of the responsibility for the serious damage that Japan caused in the past to the Chinese people through war and deeply reproaches itself." These statements confirm Japan's remorse and determination which I stated above and this recognition has not changed at all to this day.

2) This spirit in the Japan-ROK Joint Communiqué and the Japan-China Joint Communiqué naturally should also be respected in Japan's school education and textbook authorization. Recently, however, the Republic of Korea, China, and others have been criticizing some descriptions in Japanese textbooks. From the perspective of building friendship and goodwill with neighboring countries, Japan will pay due attention to these criticisms and make corrections at the Government's responsibility.

3) To this end, in relation to future authorization of textbooks, the Government will revise the Guideline for Textbook Authorization after discussions in the Textbook Authorization and Research Council and give due consideration to the effect mentioned above.///

4) Japan intends to continue to make efforts to promote mutual understanding and develop friendly and cooperative relations with neighboring countries and to contribute to the peace and stability of Asia and, in turn, of the world.

In November 1982 the Ministry of Education adopted a new authorization criterion, the so-called "Neighboring Country Clause" (近隣諸国条項): Textbooks ought to show understanding and seek international harmony in their treatment of modern

and contemporary historical events involving neighboring Asian countries (近隣のアジア諸国との間の近現代の歴史的事象の扱いに国際理解と国際協調の見地から必要な配慮がされていること).

This attitude of the Japanese government was not enough from the historians who insisted that the government should admit the fact of “invasion” etc., but it was accepted by the wide circle of the Japanese people.

Although the criticism from China and South Korea ceased to be heard, they kept to be keen to the textbook policy of Japan.

2) “Comfort women” problem

In the 1990s, there occurred another problem that was much more delicate. In December that year, three Korean women who were the “comfort women” of the Japanese army during the Second World War filed the Japanese Government to court for compensation. The problem of these “comfort women” was already found and mentioned in some historical works by the Japanese historians but they were not recognized by the Government and other conservative circles.

The Japanese Government after a long investigation made in August 1993 a statement admitting that there were lots of “comfort places” with many “comfort women” that were organized by Japanese army and that those women were forcefully gathered by the Army and were set under inhuman conditions. Thus the Japanese government apologized the “comfort women” in Korea.

In response to this statement, the textbooks of history for the high schools to be used from 1995 introduced the description on the “comfort women”.

This trend of recognition of war sacrifices further advanced in August 1995 by the statement of Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama, a socialist, who expressed “a profound remorse and apology for the colonial rule and invasion”.

As a result the textbooks of history for the junior high schools adopted the description of the “comfort women” and the concept of “invasion” ceased to be an omen.

Thus the relationship between Korea and Japan advanced through the recognition of the past crimes of the Japanese military forces.

This very fact, however, got the nationalists of Japan into a lot of hot water. They insisted that the “comfort women” were not forced to go to the fronts but they went there of their own will to get money and that the number of them is not able to be ascertained, probably not so many as it was told or that it is not suitable to describe the “comfort women” from an educational point of view.

3. Toward a “New” history textbook

1) Japanese Society for a New History Textbook

In January 1997 a group named **Japanese Society for a New History Textbook** (新しい歴史教科書をつくる会) was founded by conservative nationalist scholars to promote a revised view of Japanese history. This was supported by the nationalist fraction of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan. This group criticized the existing history textbooks that were published so far by calling *masochistic*.

In 2000, Japanese Society for a New History Textbook, a group of conservative scholars, prepared *New History Textbook* (新しい歴教科書) that was intended to promote a "positive view" of Japan by omitting reference to negative facts such as war crimes committed by the Japanese military. Their textbook was approved by the Ministry of Education in April 2001 through many amendments. This was exactly when Junichiro Koizumi organized his first cabinet.

The new textbook published from Fusosha instantly caused a huge controversy in Japan as well as in China and Korea. A large number of Japanese historians and educators protested against the content of *New History Textbook* and its treatment of Japanese war crimes. It was heavily criticised for not including full accounts of or downplaying wartime activities of Japan during the World War II, such as reference to the Nanjing Massacre (南京大虐殺) as "Nanjing Incident" (南京事件) and forgoing use of the term comfort women (慰安婦). Of course, it did not accept the concept of “invasion”.

As the result, *New History Textbook* was adopted by only 0.039% of junior schools in Japan as of August 15, 2001.

2) Koizumi Government

After Mr. Koizumi came to power in 2001, the nationalist force became much more active. His statement in the Diet that he would go to the Yasukuni Shrine on the day of Japanese defeat, on 15th August activated the nationalists on the one hand and irritated China and Korea on the other.

The Yasukuni problem has itself a long history.

Yasukuni Shrine, a Shintoist religious body corporate, is the shrine where the soldiers and civilian employees of the military who died in modern Japan's wars have been enshrined as 'heroic spirits'. It was controlled by the army and navy up until the

time of defeat in the war. From the Sino-Japanese War(1894-95) to the Asia-Pacific War the noblest virtue was to die in battle for the emperor, be enshrined as a god at Yasukuni Shrine, and be the recipient of the emperor's visits. Yasukuni Shrine was a religious and military facility indispensable for the prosecution of aggressive war. State Shinto compelled not only the people of Japan itself but also people of occupied territories such as Korea to participate in worship at the shrine. Japan's religious minorities were subjected to harsh coercion and repression in the process. It was reflection on this that led to the separation of religion and politics being spelled out in the present constitution, and throughout the post-war period Yasukuni Shrine has been a religious body corporate.

Already since the 1960s some Prime minister visited there, which was criticized as violating the principle of separation of religion and politics. This relationship, however, became more complicated in 1978. In October 1978, Yasukuni Shrine enshrined 14 war criminals of A rank of International Military Tribunal for Far East set up after the War. This was not decided by the Cabinet still less by the Diet. Even the LDP asked the Shrine to give up the enshrinement but the Shrine rejected it. Since this time, the Prime Ministers ceased to visit the Shrine on 15th August..

But Mr. Koizumi declared in the Diet that he would visit the Shrine on the Day of Defeat of Japan. In spite of the strong protest from China and Korea as well as the Japanese majority, he dared to visit there on 13 August. Since this time he visited the Shrine every year not necessarily on the Day of Defeat. He visits there in honor of dead Japanese soldiers, where the enshrined include the names of many convicted and executed war criminals

This hard line nationalism encouraged the conservative scholars at home and enraged China and Korea. During the Koizumi government, criticism against the *masochistic history* gained power. With ample material resources, the conservative scholars published lots of books and pamphlets and propagated their opinion through mass media.

3) Anti-Japan demonstration

Four years has passed since the last authorization of the history textbooks and publishers have prepared for the new version for the junior high school. The Japanese Society for a New History Textbook also prepared one from a publishing house named Fusosha. And it passed the authorization process, though with many amendments.

Hearing this, strong **Anti-Japanese demonstrations** happened in spring 2005 in

China and Korea to protest against the "*New History Textbook*".

It showed much more emperor worship, chauvinism and affirmation of war than the former textbook.

It downplays the nature of Japan's military aggression in Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910 and in the World War II. It whitewashes wartime atrocities, de-emphasizes the subject of the Chinese and Korean comfort women.

The Society for a New History Textbook made a better fight for gaining support for the textbook owing to the rightist policy of Koizumi. It is surprising that many blue-colored and managers of the enterprises are in favour of the opinion of the Society.

It was because of this that Sugunami Ward in Tokyo adopted the *New History Textbook* in spite of strong protest. Sugunami Ward is the very place where the Anti-Nuclear Movement started in the 1950s.

However, the *New History Textbook* was adopted by only 0.5% of junior high schools in Japan as of August 15, 2005.

4. What are the issues?

Let me introduce some typical descriptions of the *New History Textbook* and analyze the contents. (A) is the text from the version (or draft) presented to the Ministry for authorization, while (B) is the final text that appeared in the textbook after the authorization process.

«Annexation of Korea»

(A) The Japanese government thought it necessary to annex Korea to prevent the security of Japan and interests in Manchuria. After Russo-Japanese War Japan intensified the rule of Korea by establishing the Korean Governor. In 1910 Japan resolutely carried out the annexation suppressing by force the opposition within Korea. *Western acknowledged Japanese annexation of Korea*, in exchange for the recognition by Japan of their ruling colonies such as British India, *French Indochina*, American Philippines and Russian outer Mongolia.

Although some were willing to accept the annexation in Korea, there occurred fierce resistance against losing the independence and thence the movement for restoring independence was to last tenaciously.

(B) After Russo-Japanese War(1904-05) Japan intensified the rule of Korea by

establishing the Korean Governor. *Western powers dare not raise objections to Japan exerting influence upon Korea*, in exchange for the recognition by Japan of their ruling colonies and spheres of interest such as British India, American Philippines and Russian outer Mongolia.

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In the first version(A), the annexation of Korea was described as if some Koreans accepted it and the western powers also admitted it. This was changed according to the advice by the Ministry into the version of (B). But still it is openly insisted that Japan annexed Korea for the interest of Japan and Manchuria.

《Chino-Japanese War》

(1) 1937.7.7 : Someone fired against the Japanese army on the Marco Polo Bridge (Rokokyo Bridge) near Peking that was doing field practice. This led to a state of war between the Japanese and Chinese army.

(2) 1937.12 :Nanjing Massacre (南京大虐殺) as "Nanjing *Incident*" (南京事件):

On this occasion lots of Chinese military and civil people were dead or wounded because of the Japanese military action(Nanjing Incident). Concerning the reality of this incident including the number of the sacrificed people, there is still discussion going among various opinions, with questions concerning historical materials.

These are interesting cases. In the first case(1), it has been almost clear that the Rokokyo incident was a fabrication by the Japanese army, though there is a small room for discussion. But the textbook dare say “someone”. Thus the textbook ignores the result of the historical researches.

While in the second case(2), the textbook makes the event ambiguous by pointing to the existence of discussion. This is the typical method of the textbook.

It is said by many Japanese historians, International Military Tribunal for the

Far East and Chinese government that more than 100,000 (up to 400,000) military and civil Chinese (including women) were killed by the Japanese army for six weeks after Nanjing was occupied by the Japanese army on 13 December 1937. But the conservative scholars around the New History Textbook insists that the number is not so great and those who were killed were soldiers, insisting that the Nanjing Massacre is a mere diplomatic propaganda of Chinese government.

《World War II--1》

(B) *The initial victory of Japan gave to the people of South East Asia and India dreams and courage for their independence.* The unresisted advance of the Japanese army toward South East Asia was possible only with the cooperation of the local inhabitants. /// In order to request the cooperation for the war of the people in these regions and to show the unity of the people there, Japan held the Great Asian Congress in Tokyo in November 1943. *In opposition to the Atlantic Charter of the Allied Powers*, the Congress issued a Joint Declaration of Great Asia, which declared the independence of the people, economic development through mutual cooperation and abolition of racial discrimination. Since this Congress Japan held up as her war cause the construction of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere *that excluded European and American powers.*

The textbook wants to insist that the war was welcome by the Asian people like the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 because Japan was the liberator of Asian people from the western powers. The textbook also wants to insist that the war was fought against western invasion into Asia.

《World War II--2》

(A) Japan established military administration everywhere she occupied. The local leaders of the movement of independence cooperated the Japanese administration in order to achieve the independence from European and American powers.

There were, however, some resistances *against Japan.* There occurred some anti-Japanese guerillas that were connected with the Allied powers, which were severely suppressed by the Japanese army. *Sometimes the thoroughgoing military training of the local population became unpopular.* Toward the end of

the War, when the war situation became unfavorable for Japan, there were often such cases when people suffered from short of food and local population was forced to work in hard situations.

Later, however, in about ten years or so after the evacuation of the Japanese army, these colonial countries achieved independence by themselves one by one. Among the Japanese soldiers were found those who stayed and participated these wars of independence. The advance of Japan into the south *had an effect of promoting the process* for independence of Asian countries, *though it was "for self existence and self-defence"*.

(B) *This war gave great damage and suffering to the people of the Asian regions that became battlefields. Especially among Chinese soldiers and common people were many sacrifices who suffered from the invasion of the Japanese army.*

Japan established military administration everywhere she occupied. The local leaders of the movement of independence cooperated the Japanese administration in order to achieve the independence from European and American powers.

There were, however, some resistances against *the obligation of education of Japanese language and paying respect to shrines*. There occurred some anti-Japanese guerillas that were connected with the Allied powers, which were severely suppressed by the Japanese army, *resulting many sacrifices including common citizens*. Toward the end of the War, when the war situation became unfavorable for Japan, there were often such cases when people suffered from short of food and local population was forced to work in hard situations.

Later, however, in about ten years or so after the evacuation of the Japanese army, these colonial countries achieved independence by themselves one by one. Among the Japanese soldiers were found those who stayed and participated these wars of independence. The advance of Japan into the south was one of the factors that moved forward the movement for independence *that had already begun in Asian countries*, though it aimed originally *the acquisition of natural sources*.

The original version(A) ignores the damages done to the people in Asia but

insists that Japan helped the independence of Asian people. Following the direction of the Ministry, the revised version(B) describes the damages and sacrifices. But it does not mention “comfort women” problem (Form 2005 almost all the Japanese textbooks ceased to mention “comfort women”).

《Atomic bomb and Siberia》

(A) Actually there were no countries that did not commit murders or cruelty against unarmed people. *Japan was not exceptional.* Toward the end of the war, the United States dared nonselective bombing against many cities of Japan including Tokyo and attacked Hiroshima and Nagasaki with atomic bombs. Soviet, on the other hand, violated the Japan-Soviet Neutrality Treaty to invade Manchuria, thus reiterating plunder, violence and murder. Then Soviet took about 600,000 Japanese to Siberia to make them work in hard conditions, thus about 10% of them being dead.

(B) Actually there were no countries that did not commit murders or cruelty against unarmed people. *The Japanese army also committed unjust murder and cruelty toward the soldiers and civilians of the hostile countries who were taken prisoner.!!!*

The original version(A) was obscure in the Japanese murder and cruelty. This was revised by the new version(B). Except this there is an interesting point here. As for damage by the atomic bomb, the textbook does not mention the number who died from it, though it is estimated as about 150-200 thousand including both cities, while it mentions the number of those who were taken by the Soviet to Siberia and died there after the War as 60,000. Of course it does not mention the sacrifice of the miserable war on Ryukyu Island that killed more than 190,000 soldiers and population owing to the military policy of the Japanese leadership including Emperor.

In this way the textbook describes the historical events vividly when they seem to strengthen its inclination(anti-communist and imperial inclination).

Conclusion

The essential characteristics of *New History Textbook* are as follows:

1) The Emperor(Tennno) system is the pillar of the Japanese history. The New

History Textbook emphasizes the unbroken line of Emperor starting from Jinmu Tenno, though Jinmu is a mere legendary person. Tenno is thought to have been always behind the bushi (samurai, warrior) power since 12th century? and the Meiji Restoration of 1868 is interpreted as the product of those bushis who were loyal to Tenno; the Second World War was also ended by the decision of Tenno. There is no mention on the responsibility of Tenno for the beginning and prolonging the War. Japan was and is a peaceful nation who lives comfortably around the Tenno.

- 2) Chauvinistic Nationalism: This is already illustrated in the above mentioned citations. The general argument is that the western powers always wanted to invade Asia from the 16th century (from the age of Columbus) and it was Japan who resisted and tried to expel them from Asia.
- 3) Distortions of historical facts and selfish interpretations: These problems are already mentioned. To make the story along the line of 1) and 2), distortions and selfish interpretations are made much use of. This is not the way how the historical studies should go along.

Last but not the least, I should emphasize that this *New History Textbook* has been widening the social background under the Koizumi regime. Not only conservative scholars, nor conservative politicians, but elite and middle salaried men also have greater sympathy to this trend of historical explanation. “We have enough of *masochistic* history, we want more positive history” is their argument.

But this led to the deterioration of the diplomatic relation of Japan with China and Korea and to the isolation of Japan from Asia.

We, Japanese historians, are faced with serious problems to fight against this kind of ego-centric history and for constructing Japanese history in a more wider perspective.