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# **Globalization and Education in Japan**

## **The Case of Junior High School History Textbooks**

RYO OSHIBA

### **Importance of the History Textbook Issue**

History education and textbooks have been used as tools for building national identity among people in many countries. This is particularly true in the case of Japan, where the government has adopted a screening system for primary and junior high school textbooks. The screening system is a governmental device for educating people about national memory and creating national identity. As a result, junior high school textbook issues have been politicized in Japan. The Ministry of Education (MOE), teachers' unions, parent-teacher associations, nationalist groups, local civic groups, and transnational gender networks joined the political game of the textbook issue while all of those actors have been influenced by multidimensional globalization. I will examine the Japanese junior high school textbook issue of 2001 in order to examine the role of public institutions—the MOE and education committees—in the globalization process. See Jim Dator's *Further Thoughts*, "Globalization and Japan," on page 296.

### **Screening Process for Junior High School Textbooks**

The screening process for Japanese junior high school textbooks consists of two stages: an approval process and a selection process. The MOE provides guidelines for editing textbooks and writing content. Textbook writers and publishing companies submit their draft textbooks to the MOE for approval. Then, screening officers appointed by the MOE examine incorrectness and appropriateness of expression. China, South Korea, and Vietnam bitterly criticized Japanese history textbooks in 1982, and the MOE decided to take into consideration the relationship with Asian countries in screening history textbooks.

The selection process commences after textbooks are approved by the MOE. The education committees in individual municipalities officially have the right

**Table 19.1** Textbook Screening/Authorization System in Major Countries

		PUBLISHER		SCREENING/AUTHORIZATION	
		<i>Government</i>	<i>Private Publisher</i>	<i>Screening by National Government</i>	<i>Authori- zation by Local Authorities or Civil Organization</i>
<i>Asia</i>	Japan		◦	◦	
	Korea	◦	◦	◦	
	China	◦	◦	◦	
	Thailand	◦	◦		
	Malaysia	◦	◦	◦	
	Singapore	◦	◦		
<i>Europe and North America</i>	UK				
	Germany		◦	◦	
	France		◦		
	Sweden		◦		
	US		◦		◦
	Canada		◦		◦

*Source:* Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, [www.mext.go.jp/a\\_menu/shotou/kyoukasho/gaiyouK020901c.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/kyoukasho/gaiyouK020901c.htm)

to decide which textbooks are to be used in their districts. Members of education committees are appointed by the executive heads in individual municipalities. The education committees usually ask their own subcommittees, which are composed of schoolteachers, to undertake a detailed examination of textbooks for all subjects published by all companies. The education committees have usually followed the recommendations of the subcommittees.

### **Politics Over Junior High School Textbooks in Japan**

The problematic history of the junior high school textbook can be classified into three periods. The first period is characterized by the so-called Ienaga court trials. Ienaga Saburo, a professor of Tokyo Education University, brought this issue to trial in 1955.<sup>1</sup> Ienaga alleged that the official screening system was unconstitu-

tional under the Japanese Constitution. This trial ended in 1997, and the details will be described later. The second period began in 1998, when historians and educators shifted their concerns to monitoring the management method of the official screening system rather than criticizing the system itself. The third period began in 2000, when the Atarashii Kyokasho wo Tsukurukai (New History Textbook-Making Group, hereafter Tsukurukai), established in 1997, submitted their own junior high school textbook, which led to great controversy and public debate.<sup>2</sup>

### The First Period (1955–1997): Views of the Left

Professor Ienaga brought the problem of his junior high school textbook on Japanese history to trial in 1955. He pointed out that the system for official screening of textbooks infringed upon the Japanese Constitution. Ienaga also claimed that the MOE's examiners went beyond their jurisdiction in screening the content of his junior high school textbook.

In the cases of 1980 and 1983, Ienaga and the MOE clashed over the following issues.

1. Ienaga wrote that Japanese Combat Unit No. 731 engaged in medical experiments using live bodies, but the MOE examiners criticized this argument as lacking wide academic support. (In 1997, the Supreme Court decided that MOE's request to delete this sentence went beyond MOE's jurisdiction, since there was no strong academic opinion to negate the existence of Combat Unit No. 731 when the textbook was written.)
2. MOE examiners requested that Ienaga add the following sentence: "Collective suicide in Okinawa was one of the most decisive factors in increasing the number of deaths in Okinawa." (The Supreme Court accepted MOE's opinion as reasonable because the collective suicides, as well as the killings of residents in Okinawa by Japanese soldiers, were important events for demonstrating the disaster of the Okinawa battle.)
3. MOE examiners requested that Ienaga delete the expression "Korean people's resistance to Japan" because this simple expression is ambiguous. (The Supreme Court also saw it as vague in 1997.)
4. MOE examiners advised Ienaga to change the expression "Aggression into China" to "Advance into China." (The Supreme Court approved the MOE's behavior as legal because it was advice rather than a request.)
5. MOE examiners requested that Ienaga change the expression "Nanjing Massacre and other cruelties committed by the Japanese military." (The Supreme Court decided the MOE's request was illegal because it went beyond the MOE's jurisdiction.)

## **The Second Period (1998–2000): Shift to the Viewpoint of Global Civil Society**

The second period began in 1998, when historians and educators established a new group for monitoring the textbook screening process. This group undertook three functions. First, it aimed at checking whether or not MOE examiners' requests and advice were within the MOE's jurisdiction. Second, it examined how to reform the textbook selection process. Third, the group demanded an increase in the transparency of the MOE's screening system and the selection process for junior high school textbooks.

The major issues being debated in this period were as follows.

### **Appropriateness of topics for junior high school students**

MOE examiners were reluctant to include the description of “comfort women” in junior high school textbooks. When discussion of this topic appeared in textbooks for the sixth grade in 1999, MOE examiners judged it inappropriate for boys and girls under fifteen years old. The MOE said that it suggested revisions rather than requested them, but most textbook publishers said that there was no big difference between suggestions/advice and requests.<sup>3</sup>

### **Changing original expressions in literature**

Words that discriminate against minorities and/or the handicapped are not permitted in junior high school textbooks. How, then, do we treat those words or expressions when they are written in historical documents and/or classic literature?

Twice between the years 1998 and 1999 MOE examiners requested that publishers change the word *Shina* (a derogatory word for China) to *Chukoku*, the official name for China. Nosaka Akiyuki, a writer, used *Shina* in his novel *Hotaruru no Haka* (Tomb of firefly), and a part of this novel was quoted in a Japanese textbook. The publisher followed the MOE's advice and changed it without the permission of the author in 1998. The same word—*Shina*—was also used in a Japanese textbook in which a part of *Kinosaki nite*, written by Shimazaki Toson, was printed.

MOE examiners saw their advice as appropriate, but some people argued that those words should be printed in their original form because such words and expressions were frequently used at that time. They insisted that it would be more effective for students to understand what happened in the past.

### **The national flag and national anthem**

The problem of the Japanese national flag and national anthem has been a controversial topic in Japanese politics since the end of World War II. Though

widely used as such, there was no legal rule declaring that *Hinomaru* be the national flag and *Kimigayo* the national anthem. However, nationalism in Japan has been strengthened by globalization. The National Flag and National Anthem Act was passed in August 1999.

Following this, MOE examiners requested that all publishers include a photo of the Japanese emperor in textbooks for sixth graders. Two publishers refused to follow this request, saying they did not have any pictures of the emperor that could be used for explaining his role. Then, MOE examiners requested a revision because the MOE's *Shido Yoryo* (Course of study) asked writers to describe respectfully the emperor's role in order to understand it better. Once these two publishers included a picture of the emperor, the MOE approved their two textbooks.

### **The Third Period: (2000–2001): Rise of the Nationalistic Viewpoint**

#### **Approval Process**

The representative of Tsukurukai, Professor Nishio Kanji, of the University of Electoro-Communications, and his nationalistic group submitted its textbook to MOE for approval in April 2000, leading to great controversy.<sup>4</sup>

The textbook had the following characteristics: first, it describes in detail the Japanese origin myth. National myths are generally used as a symbol of national integration, and in fact these myths were much described in the history textbooks of prewar Japan. Second, it stresses the role of race. For example, the Russo-Japanese War is described as a conflict between races, ignoring its aspects as an imperial war. Third, World War II is described as an imperial war, ignoring the fact that Western countries appealed to the principles of self-determination and democracy in their colonies, even if it was a matter of “lip service.” Western democracies could not help but appeal to these principles in order to mobilize the support of people in their colonial areas, while Japan did not appeal to the principles of democracy to justify the war.<sup>5</sup> In December 2000, MOE examiners requested that the publisher of the textbook written by Tsukurukai make 137 revisions. The supporters of this nationalistic textbook insisted that various interpretations of history should be accepted. Even so, the publisher revised its textbook in February 2001.

On the other hand, left-wing groups were critical of the textbook. They warned that the MOE would be criticized by China and South Korea if it officially accepted the Tsukurukai textbook. They insisted that the MOE must be responsible for the content of textbooks that it approves, since the MOE maintains an official screening process.

A third group criticized the left wing as well as nationalistic textbook writers. They saw the role of the Left as critics to be solely confined to the Cold War period. They believed that it was more important to help students become members of a “global” civil society through education in the twenty-first century, rather than educate children as members of nation-states. They argued specifically that textbooks should describe the historical facts that are empirically tested. They also insisted that teachers should teach the traditional interpretations of historical facts while also informing them of alternative interpretations. Multiculturalism is important in interpreting historical facts.

China and South Korea bitterly criticized the description of the following topics in the nationalistic textbook.

1. The Nanjing Massacre. The Tsukurukai textbook argued that killing people is unavoidable during war and that the incident in Nanjing was totally different from the Holocaust. However, they deleted this sentence after MOE examiners requested a revision. The final expression was, “There are various opinions over the incident in Nanjing and the debate over it still continues.”
2. The number of people killed in the Nanjing Massacre. Those who criticize the Japanese government often argue that 200,000 Chinese people were killed in the Nanjing Massacre, but the Tsukurukai textbook is skeptical of this figure. They argued that the population of Nanjing was around 200,000 at the time and that the population increased to 250,000 one month after the Japanese attack on Nanjing. They argued that it is unlikely that 200,000 people were killed.
3. View on war. The Tsukurukai textbook argues that it is difficult to judge what constitutes a “just” war, although many people in Japan are critical of this way of thinking because it can be used to justify prewar Japanese aggression.
4. The Pacific War. The textbook stated that the Japanese did not choose the option of “surrender without fighting with the U.S.” After being criticized, they revised this to “Let’s think over the reason why Japan engaged in a war against the U.S.”
5. The Western colonial powers and Asia. The textbook emphasized that Japan recognized the independence of Asian countries from the Western colonial powers.
6. Annexation of Korea. The textbook stressed the legality of Japan’s annexation of Korea. It also argued that there was no alternative for Japan but to become a great power like the European countries had been in the late nineteenth century. The MOE advised the group to take into consideration

the fact that Japan promoted the policy of assimilation after colonizing Korea. The publisher then revised the expression as follows: “Japan developed railway networks and irrigation water systems in Korea. However, Japan pursued assimilation policies such as teaching Japanese to Korean people, which caused anti-Japanese feeling among the Korean people.”

The Korean parliament also passed a resolution not to support Japan as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council because of the nationalistic history textbook. Korea warned that it would reverse its policy of opening the Korean market to Japanese cultural products unless the nationalistic textbook was revised more thoroughly. On the other hand, Korean academics and students seem to have different attitudes. They were highly critical of the Tsukurukai textbook, but they were also critical of the Korean textbook system and the content of those textbooks.

The Chinese government showed ambivalent attitudes. On March 7, 2001, China warned that the nationalistic junior high school textbook would negatively impact China-Japan relations unless more corrections were made, but on March 16, 2001, China announced that China-Japan relations as a whole should be separated from the textbook issue.

### Selection Process

Tsukurukai criticized the selection process: they demanded that education committees select textbooks by themselves rather than choose textbooks based on the recommendations of their subcommittees, which are mainly composed of left-wing teachers.

As in the Cold War period, liberals such as Ohe Kenzaburo (a Nobel Prize-winning writer), Miki Mutsuko (wife of a dovish former Liberal Democratic Party prime minister of Japan), and Inoue Hisashii (supporter of the Communist Party) urged the MOE not to approve the nationalistic textbook. They also requested that the selection process be more transparent.

Recently, local communities have played important roles in the selection process as well, changing the politics over textbook issues in the post-Cold War period. Many people in local areas attended the education committee meetings as observers and issued information about what was going on in their local education committees on their individual Web sites. This led to the development of anti-nationalistic textbook networks among local people and groups.

In addition, various kinds of transnational networks have helped the anti-nationalistic textbook movement. In particular, transnational networks of women such as the Violence against Women in War Network (VAWNET) have contributed to clarifying the situation of “comfort women” or “sexual slaves” to the world. These networks have helped women around the world share his-

torical memory based on the perspective of gender. This transnational group has provided strong support to the critics of the nationalistic textbook.

In the end, Tsukurukai's textbook was adopted by seven private schools and three special public schools in Tokyo (whose governor is Ishihara Shintaro, a famous right-wing politician). The percentage of the share of the nationalistic textbook was 0.039. The number of students who use this history textbook is 521. The majority of Japanese people were critical of the nationalistic history textbook, which explains the low adoption ratio. However, the debates in individual education committees were heated, and the opinions of education committee members were split in many districts.

As a result, textbooks whose content was relatively moderate were more likely to be selected (table 19.2). The textbook by Nihon Shoseki is the most liberal. It uses the term "comfort women" and describes the issue of war compensation for a full page, but its share dropped from 13.7 percent in 2001 to only 5.9 percent in 2002. Alternatively, the textbook of Teikoku Shoin, liberal but more moderate, increased its share from 1.9 percent to 10.9 percent. All textbooks by Kyoiku Shuppan, Osaka Shoseki, and Tokyo Shoseki, which avoided using the terms "comfort women" or "comfort facility," can be seen as falling in the middle. The textbooks of the first two look relatively liberal when they refer to the issue of war compensation, while Tokyo Shoseki's textbook made no mention of the problem. However, the shares of Kyoiku Shuppan and Osaka Shoseki dropped from 18 percent to 13 percent and from 19 percent to 14 percent, respectively, while Tokyo Shoseki increased its share from 40 percent to 51 percent. This finding is based on a preliminary analysis, but there is a clear tendency to select moderate textbooks.

To summarize the history of the textbook issue, in the first period ideological conflicts affected the textbook issue: pro-Marxist writers and teachers' unions challenged the MOE's textbook screening system. In the second and third periods, after the Cold War, nationalists rather than left-wingers challenged the MOE's screening system. Further, the left-wingers appealed to the MOE not to approve a nationalistic textbook in its textbook screening system.

### **Conclusion: Seeking a Transnational History in the Age of Globalization**

Globalization may contribute to an increase in the number of people who behave as members of global civil society when a country is on the winning side of globalization. However, nationalism is likely to rise to the surface when a country is on the losing side. Japan has suffered from an economic recession since its "bubble economy" burst. That may explain why Tsukurukai published a nationalistic history textbook when it did.

Table 19.2 Comparison of Textbooks by Seven Publishers: Description of War Responsibility Issues and Share of Textbooks

TOPIC	PUBLISHER						
	Nihon Shoseki	Teikoku Shoin	Kyoiku Shuppan	Osaka Shoseki	Shimizu Shoin	Tokyo Shoseki	Nihon Bunkyo
<i>Nanjing Incident</i>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Does the textbook describe that Japanese were not informed at that time?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Does the textbook describe that Japanese celebrated the fall of Nanjing to the Japanese Army?	No	No	Yes (by photo)	Yes (by photo)	No	No	No
How does the textbook describe the number of victims killed	200,000 people killed	Many	Many	Many	Many	Many	Number of victims uncertain
<i>War Compensation</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (in a column)	No	Yes (explanation of photo)	No
Does the textbook describe this problem under a headline?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (in a column)	No	Yes (explanation of photo)	No
How much space does the textbook give to this topic?	One page	Half page	One page	Two lines	None	None	None
<i>“Comfort Women”</i>	Comfort women	Comfort facilities	None	None	Comfort facilities	None	None
What words does the textbook use for this topic?	Comfort women	Comfort facilities	None	None	Comfort facilities	None	None
<i>Share</i>	13.7	1.9	18.0	18.8	3.9	40.4	3.2
% of share in 2001 before the Tsukurukai proposed its textbook	13.7	1.9	18.0	18.8	3.9	40.4	3.2
% of share in 2002 after the Tsukurukai proposed its textbook	5.9	10.9	13.0	14.0	2.5	51.2	2.3
Change in shares between 2001 and 2002	Down (-7.8%)	Up (9%)	Down (-5%)	Down (-14.8%)	Down (-1.4%)	Up (10.8%)	Down (-0.9%)
<i>Overall Impression</i>	Liberal (radical)	Liberal (moderate)	Middle (radical)	Middle (radical)	Middle (moderate)	Middle (moderate)	Conservative

Source: Table created by the author. N.B. Overall impression is mainly based on the two factors of “comfort women” and war compensation.

However, their textbook was adopted by only a small number of districts/schools. What are the reasons? First, Japanese people, in fact, fear globalization, but neither anti-foreign attitudes nor protectionism of trade dominate their thinking.<sup>6</sup> Japanese interests have already been structured around the globalizing economy, and many people perceive that Japan will not be able to achieve its interests without reforming its public/corporate governance appropriate for the globalized economy.

A change in the perception of “nation” is another reason for the Japanese to reject the nationalistic textbook. A nation is not composed of just majority groups; minorities are now perceived as an important part of the “nation.” As a result, there has gradually developed a movement to guarantee the rights of Korean residents and other foreign people in Japan. The participation of foreign residents in local politics is now being examined. At the same time, the number of people who have dual nationality is increasing. They are ethnically Japanese, but they behave unlike traditional Japanese people. Many Japanese people are facing the question of who is “Japanese” and what is “Japan.”

Tsukurukai’s textbook gave no answer to these questions but reasserted simple and traditional arguments of the “nation.” It failed to address new ideas of “Japan” as a nation and the “Japanese” as a people in a globalizing world.

Can we share historical perceptions between nations if globalization develops further? Multiculturalism is often mentioned as a way to stimulate the reinterpretation of national history. However, Laura Hein and Mark Selden suggest that revising the interpretation of the Vietnam War or the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is still very difficult in the United States.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that multiculturalism can change historical memory as far as it relates to domestic issues, but it faces difficulty in providing a new interpretation when it relates to U.S. foreign policy.

Globalization of the economy will contribute to the gradual expansion of multiculturalism, even in Japan, but, as the American case suggests, the spread of multiculturalism is not always effective in the reinterpretation of national history.

We may develop a viewpoint of global/human history because globalization of information presents us all with common problems. For example, conflicts in Rwanda were reported by CNN and the genocide in Kosovo was broadcast around the world so that people everywhere discussed the legitimacy and effectiveness of humanitarian intervention.

Can we reinterpret national history and share historical memory as we accumulate our common experiences of current events? The idea to publish a common history textbook in Asia is often proposed for this purpose. The European experience suggests that it is not an easy task, however.

The case of the Japanese history textbook issue suggests that sharing his-

torical perceptions between transnational groups is possible even if building a global/human history is still unrealistic. In fact, various kinds of transnational networks have developed. For example, as we have said, VAWNET has contributed to clarifying the situation of “comfort women” or “sexual slaves” to the world. It may help women around the world share historical memory based on the perspective of gender.

Democratization around the world can help build a transnational history. For example, democratization of Asian countries in the 1990s has stimulated the growth of pluralistic societies in Asian countries. People in these countries have developed critical views of their governments as well as of the nationalistic textbooks in Japan. For example, Koreans criticized the nationalistic textbook and the MOE’s approval of it in Japan, and yet at the same time they were also critical of their government’s textbook policy. Textbooks of Korean language, social studies, and ethics are published by the government in Korea. Critics see the history in these textbooks as an “official” history, and they raise questions of whether or not it is a “public” history. The answer depends on the definition of “public,” which is usually used in three contexts: “official,” “common,” or “open.” Is the history contained in Korean textbooks commonly shared by many Korean people?

National governments have used history textbooks as a tool for building national identity among people, and they have developed screening/authorizing systems. History textbooks screened/authorized by public institutions are assumed to reflect the public memory, or commonly shared historical perceptions. The history textbook issue has not been politicized in the United States, where public memory of major wars is established, but it has been a big political issue in Japan because Japan has no single public memory of World War II.

Under this situation, it is difficult for Japanese to build a shared memory with people of other nations. Creating a transnational history is a realistic alternative beyond national history in the age of globalization, and it is a first step toward building a public memory in the Asia-Pacific region.

## FURTHER THOUGHTS

### **Globalization and Japan**

*Jim Dator*

JAPAN IS ONE of the few countries in the world that has had two chances to respond to massive global pressures for governance reform. The first opportunity, already discussed briefly in chapter 16, was in the second half of the nineteenth century, when Japan was forced to end its centuries-long self-imposed global iso-