

Critical New Stage in Japan's Textbook Controversy 歴史教科書の引き続く受難

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A Conflict Behind Closed Doors: Bureaucrats, Politicians, and Ideologues

In April 2012, a group of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) congressmen, calling themselves the Diet Members Group for Considering Japan's Future and History Textbooks,¹ met with officials from Japan's Ministry of Education (hereafter MEXT) along with LDP Education and Technology Division members to view samples of the new high school textbooks that the Ministry had screened and authorized.

In order to be eligible for use at public and even private schools, Japanese textbooks must be compiled by private publishers in accordance with the National Curriculum Standards and then endorsed by a MEXT organ, the Textbook Approval and Research Council, and finally authorized by MEXT in accord with their Textbook Examination Standards. In the process, scrutiny by "textbook experts" and "specialists" "ensures that the textbooks are objective and impartial" (MOFA: undated).² MEXT explains this process as follows:

The Textbook Approval and Research Council is an affiliation [sic] with MEXT and textbooks are examined on the basis of a report submitted by the Council. The regular and non-regular members of the Council are chosen from university professors and teachers of elementary, junior high and

senior high schools and other educational institutions.

Each textbook for which an application for examination has been filed is studied by textbook experts prior to screening by the Council. When necessary for the examination of specialized issues, specialist members are appointed to serve on the Council to undertake a specialist investigation. Textbook experts are full-time officials of MEXT and are appointed based on university teaching experience and other relevant experience.

The Council undertakes a comprehensive screening of textbooks in which it considers the findings of textbook experts and specialist members, as well as the findings of its members. This mechanism ensures that the Council's screening process reflects the result [sic] of investigations undertaken by a large number of experts from various perspectives.

The textbook samples presented by the MEXT officials for the LDP members' viewing had already been deemed compliant with the National Curriculum Standards and "objective and impartial" by the experts, specialists, and bureaucrats.³

At the meeting, Abe Shinzo, who became prime minister a few months later, took a dislike to one particular history textbook because it mentioned the forceful recruitment - described as “mobilization” in the textbook - of women to the Japanese military’s sanctioned brothels - described as “comfort women” - during the Asia-Pacific War (1931-1945). Abe started grilling the MEXT officials; “When I was Prime Minister [in 2007], I made it clear in the Diet that there was no forceful recruitment of comfort women by the Imperial Japanese Military or by the Military Police. Since when has this official stance changed? Why did you ignore my official government statement?” (*Kyoiku Saisei Mail News* Vol. 215, 2012/4/10; *zakzak* 2012/05/09).⁴ Other LDP members at the meeting, joined in: “Since when do you prioritize the opinions of the textbook experts over the Prime Minister’s?” (Saisei Kiko 2012/04/11)⁵

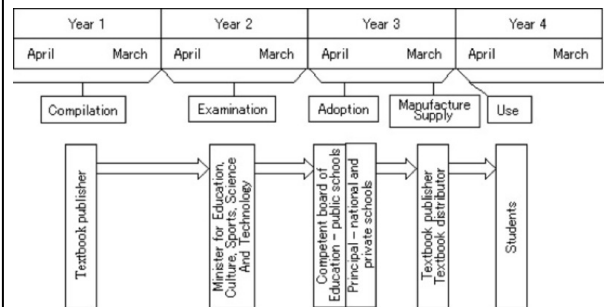
Close Abe ally Yagi Hidetsugu, a conservative academic and prolific author of neo-nationalist tracts, including works which denigrate Japan’s neighbors and assume that women would play a “natural” subservient position, also attended the meeting.⁶ Yagi drew the attention of participants to the mention of other acts of the Imperial Japanese Military in the newly approved history textbooks such as the Nanking Massacre and the Three-All Policy (“Kill all, loot all, destroy all”) during the Asia-Pacific War, fueling the LDP members’ rage. The assemblymen sharply criticized the Ministry officials; “For what country did you authorize these textbooks?” “There’s no love of country in these textbooks,” “It’s unthinkable to pass the [description of the] Three-All Policy without requesting a change,” and “Explain to us why you didn’t request the publishers to change these descriptions.” (Saisei Kiko 2012/04/11)

Yagi joined the chorus of denialism: “If the state authorization screening allows textbooks to become political propaganda pamphlets

funded by tax money, the screening is not fulfilling its purpose.” He suggested that appointments of the Ministry’s Textbook Approval and Research Council, including the specialists and experts, should be “reconsidered.” He also urged that the National Curriculum Standards, issued by the Ministry, more minutely dictate textbook content so publishers cannot “willfully” add topics to their textbooks. Although these suggestions came from a member of a blatantly ideological private institution, the Ministry officials agreed to consider the suggestions and report back their deliberations to the LDP members. (Saisei Kiko 2012/04/11)

In retrospect, this intense grilling behind closed doors was the first sign of renewed attack on high school history textbooks by politicians and ideologues. Just months later, the LDP returned to power with Abe as prime minister and political intervention in the high school textbook adoption process intensified.

How a textbook becomes part of a school curriculum



The periods indicated above for the date of publishing, supply and use of textbooks are applicable for textbooks to be used in the first semester.

Read “Competent board of Education [sic]” as “Local education boards.”

Source

MEXT's original Japanese flowchart in “教科書制度の概要”

Translated by Mitani (2012).

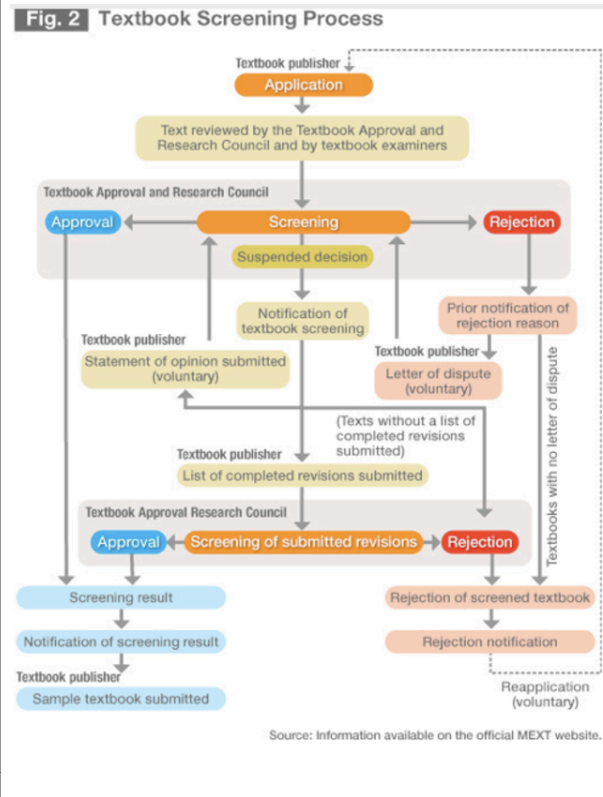
The original MEXT flowchart “教科書検定の手続” (MEXT 2013) is here: [MEXT-A](#), and here: [MEXT-B](#).

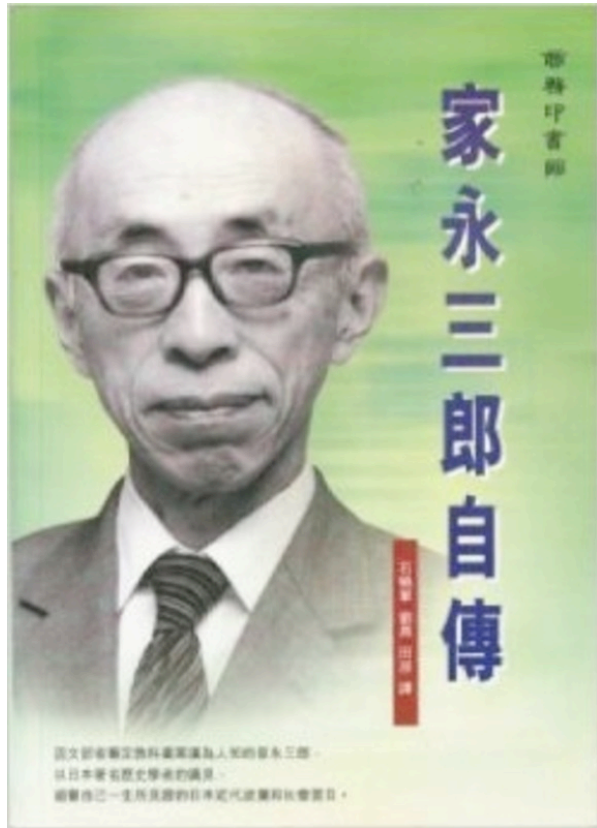
The State vs. Textbook Authors

Although Abe and his nationalist associates attacked MEXT for not exercising enough control over history textbook content, in reality, MEXT is not shy about pressing publishers to change textbook contents, particularly in history textbooks. Publishers who have submitted textbooks for review have the right to submit counterarguments in writing,^{vii} but this often results in outright rejection of the text, so in practice, publishers have no option but to comply. For these reasons, the Ministry's intervention has been likened to state censorship (e.g. Nozaki and Selden 2009).⁸

The first instances of intervention in textbooks took place back in 1955 (Nozaki and Selden 2009), when eight social studies textbook manuscripts were rejected (Sakamoto and Yamamoto eds. 1992: 158-9). About this time, one publisher received rejection notifications for all of its history textbooks for grades 2 to 6 on the basis of the fact that the manuscripts featured labor movements and peace thought rather than emphasize the place of the emperor in the postwar order (Ibid. 176). During the elementary school textbook screening in 1959, 82% of the submitted drafts were rejected (Ibid. 191). The result was that many publishers left the business in the 1960s, and manuscripts from the remaining publishers all came to take on a homogenous and relatively uncritical character (Ibid. Horio 1994: 244-6, 249-53).

Textbook screening process





Ienaga Saburo

Respected historian and high school textbook author Ienaga Saburo tried to maintain a critical edge in his history textbook draft, which was unusual in the 1960s as the Ministry sought an “objective” chronological list of historical events, not detailed explanations or critical reflection on the significance of events, which the Ministry deemed “subjective, one-sided, and ideological” (Nagahara 1990: 186-192). Ienaga’s manuscript did not pass the official screening in 1963, and when re-submitted in the following year, it was directed to make over 290 revisions. Ienaga was faced with little choice but to either stop writing textbooks, or agree to the revisions and send the distorted textbook to classrooms. He chose, however, a long, hard third path. In 1965, he brought the case to court in what became postwar Japan’s most famous challenge to textbook censorship (Horio 1994: 254-9;

Sakamoto and Yamamoto ed. 1992: 191, 272-3. On the Ienaga case, see Nozaki and Selden 2009).

Despite Ienaga’s court challenge, the Ministry maintained its aggressive posture toward textbook narratives of Japanese history. During high school textbook screening in 1980, social studies textbooks were subjected to hundreds of revision requests, particularly concerning topics such as human rights, pollution, national defense, and peace thought (Sakamoto and Yamamoto eds. 1992: 160). One author, in the course of a ten hour meeting with a Ministry specialist, was instructed to rephrase “the rights of the elderly” as “the welfare of the elderly,” to reword “consumer rights” as “consumers’ life,” to delete the Preamble of the Constitution, which states that “government is a sacred trust of the people, the authority for which is derived from the people, the powers of which are exercised by the representatives of the people, and the benefits of which are enjoyed by the people,” to state that the Self-Defense Forces were legally legislated, and so on. (Ibid.: 163). In 1982, another author was instructed, “Don’t use the word ‘confiscation’ for land confiscation in Korea under Japanese rule,” “It’s not that Japanese occupation of Manchuria was illegitimate; it’s just that it wasn’t deemed legitimate (by the Lytton Commission),” “Under Japanese rule, Koreans were Japanese nationals, so ‘forced recruitment of Korean laborers’ is not an appropriate description.” (Nagahara 1990: 211-2).

The grip of the Ministry loosened after 1982 when sections of the mass media finally made an issue of the longstanding practice of the Ministry’s intervention, and especially of the watering down of depictions of wartime atrocities in history textbooks. The media reported that the Ministry requested some high school publishers to reword “aggression [towards China]” as “advance [into China]” (Kim 2008. The original terms were 侵略 and 進出).⁹ The alleged “request” turned out to be a

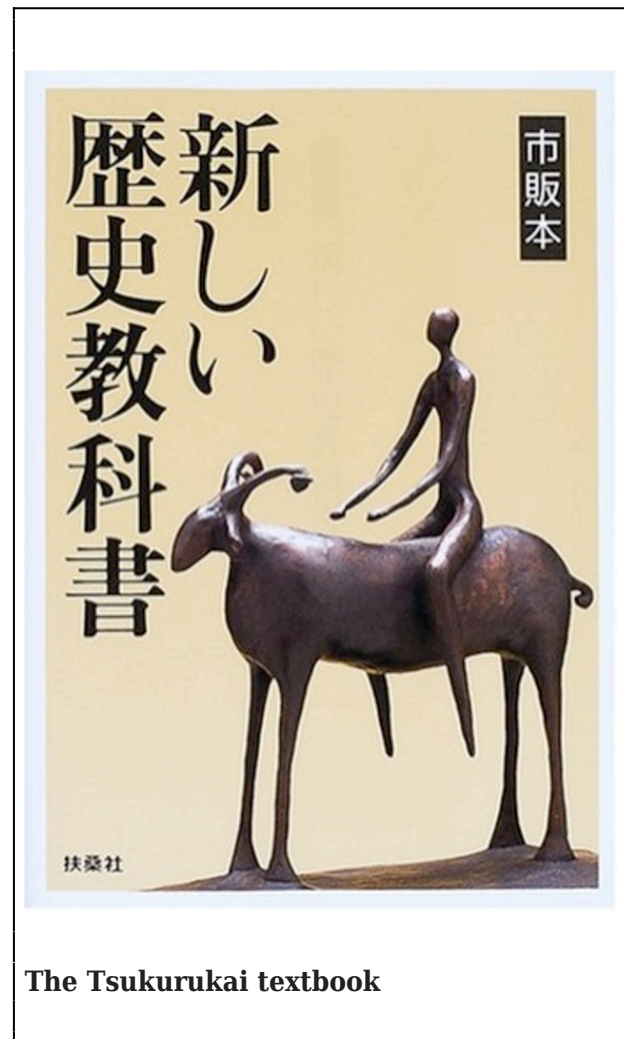
non-binding revision opinion. Nevertheless, textbook depictions of wartime aggression and brutality by the Imperial Japanese Military had often been muffled, and the allegation, repeated by Chinese and Korean media, triggered heated protests from neighboring Asian governments and peoples (Kim 2008). To settle the “textbook controversies,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Miyazawa Kiichi announced a government resolution that “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.” He promised that “the Government will revise the Guidelines for Textbook Authorization after discussions in the Textbook Authorization and Research Council and give due consideration to the effect mentioned above.”¹⁰ This promise was embodied as a “neighboring countries clause” in the Textbook Examination Standards specific to social studies subjects, requiring that “Sufficient regard ... be given to international understanding and harmony when dealing with modern historical events that involve neighboring Asian countries” (Minati 2012).

Thus, in the early 1980s, writers and publishers were able to touch upon wartime atrocities in history textbooks more freely at both the middle and high school levels, including topics like the Nanking Massacre and Unit 731’s wartime program of human experimentation. The forced recruitment of comfort women and their victimization at the hands of the Japanese military could also be mentioned in textbooks in the early 1990s (Kim 2008; Ishiyama 2003).

The New Battleground: Historical Revisionists

The government’s conciliatory posture toward neighboring countries in the 1980s and early 1990s led to a counterattack by historical revisionists. Claiming that revised social studies textbooks would propagate a

“masochistic view of history” and that younger generations should learn to take pride in Japan’s past, neo-nationalist ideologues formed the Japan Society for History Textbook Reform (Tsukurukai),¹¹ which proceeded to draft its own history and civics textbooks for middle schools. MEXT authorized their drafts in 2001.



The Tsukurukai textbook

When the books debuted, however, they were widely criticized for downplaying the brutal aspects of Japan’s modern history, particularly atrocities and the oppression of colonial and imperial controls Japan imposed on other Asian countries (Ishiyama 2003; Tawara 2008). At first, only a handful of education boards adopted these controversial textbooks for schools in their jurisdictions. One of the few was the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education

which chose this publisher for Tokyo's prefectural special education schools and six-year elite middle schools (grades 7-12), based on "what kind of constituents Tokyo wants to nurture" (cited in Sasaki 2001: 31). In 2006, the Japan Society for History Textbook Reform split into two.

Although few revisionist books were actually used in schools, their impact in the early 2000s was considerable. Their claim that existing textbooks were "masochistic" entered popular discourse, echoed by newspapers such as the *Sankei Shimbun* and repeated ad nauseam by political pundits like Yagi Hidetsugu, Osaka governor/mayor Hashimoto Toru, and Saitama Governor Ueda Kiyoshi. Other textbook publishers began to "reform" their own editorial guidelines for fear of being labeled "masochistic" and thus inviting the ire of conservatives or reducing their market share. Self-censorship rippled through the textbook industry and amplified the revisionist voice.

Fujioka Nobukatsu, the leader of the original Japan Society for History Textbook Reform, has published a study of the spread of what he terms the "proud view" of Japan's past in textbooks. Comparing drafts of middle school history textbooks submitted by eight publishers along with the first submission of their own revisionist textbook for authorization screening in 2000, he categorized the drafts into three groups: namely, publishers who had moved closer to the revisionist "proud past" view; publishers who kept the same editorial tone since the previous screening in 1996; and a publisher who "enhanced" what Fujioka called the "masochistic view" since the last screening. He concluded that for the 2000 round, many textbook publishers provided subdued descriptions of Imperial Japan's war crimes and aggression compared with the 1996 books. Then he compared the number of education boards that adopted textbooks from each category in 2001. The results were obvious; while publishers in the first group dramatically

increased their share, the one publisher (Nihon Shoseki 日本書籍) that dug in its heels and hewed to the historical record lost market share. (Fujioka 2005: 227-232).¹²

Of course Fujioka's statistics were skewed; the loss of market share of the "third category" publisher Nihon Shoseki was due to heavy administrative intervention. For example, schools in Hiroshima had been longstanding customers of Nihon Shoseki (*Ryukyū Shimpō* 2007/11/13).¹³ But in 1998, the Ministry of Education instructed the Hiroshima Prefectural Board of Education to "normalize" educational practices in the prefecture.¹⁴ Under pressure, the Prefectural Board revoked its official statement issued in 1992 that the anthem *Kimigayo* (*Your Reign*) condoned "hierarchical social order and discrimination by birth," and re-interpreted the lyrics as "a wish for the nation's prosperity." It ordered school principals throughout the prefecture to ensure that the flag and song would be "properly handled" at ceremonies (*Chugoku Shimbun* 2008/05/20). The Prefectural Board also ordered school administrators to "separate" education from political and civic activities. Consequently, many schools stopped "peace education" projects, many of which had involved close examination of history and yearlong participation in local peace building gatherings.¹⁵ In this atmosphere Nihon Shoseki lost market share in Hiroshima.



Fujioka Nobukatsu

In Tokyo too, Nihon Shoseki's loss coincided with a campaign that the Metropolitan Board of Education, revisionist local assemblymen, mass media like *Sankei* and right-wing activists, launched in 1999.¹⁶ The loss of longstanding customers in these two prefectures led to the publisher's bankruptcy in 2004 (*Ryukyu Shimpo* 2007/11/13).

Thus, in the early 2000s, the revisionist campaign against the "masochistic historical view" and administrative intervention dramatically affected the contents/descriptions as well as market shares of middle school history textbooks. Fujioka celebrated the change as coming directly from the impact of his group's textbook's presence in the market, but he understood that the market shift was the result of the political and administrative intervention; "What has caused this shift? It was because the power to select textbooks for public schools changed hands from teachers in the classrooms to education boards" (Fujioka 2005: 232).

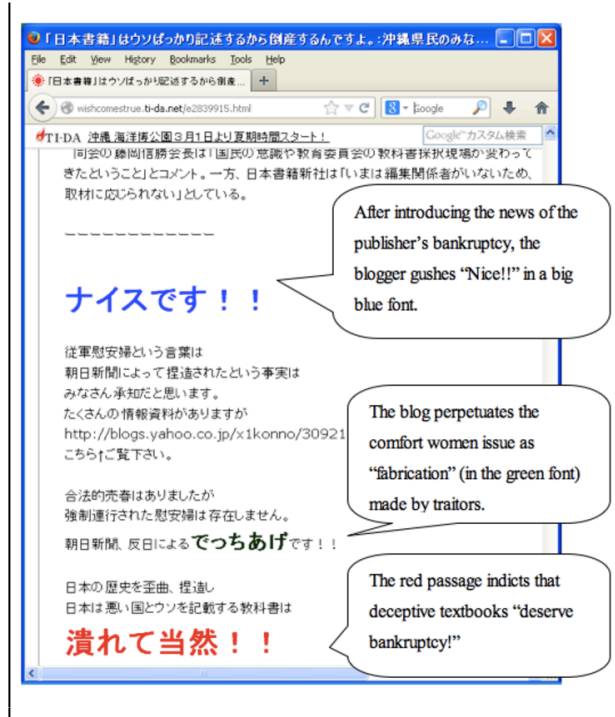
With the elimination of the Nihon Shoseki textbook, in textbook authorization screening in

2004, no middle school textbook mentioned forceful recruitment of comfort women (Fujioka 2005: 261; Japan Conference 2005/07/02),¹⁷ and today, as PM Abe boasted during the showdown with the Ministry officials outlined at the beginning of this article, no middle school history textbook mentions these topics. The critical editorial principles adopted during the 1980s and 90s were all but obliterated by this campaign in the early 2000s.

The United Front: the Media, the LDP, and Municipal Administrators

Through attacks on the "masochistic historical view" in the middle school history textbooks, revisionist forces consolidated their forces and organized a renewed campaign seeking to intervene in textbook adoption processes at the municipal level. After the split of the Japan Society for History Textbook Reform into two offshoots, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) chose to support Ikuhoshu, the one close to Yagi Hidetsugu's neo-nationalist institute. In December 2010, mobilizing local assembly members, the LDP launched a campaign to promote the Ikuhoshu textbooks. Assembly members, arguing that textbooks currently in use at schools in their jurisdiction were "masochistic," pressed for adoption of "proud and confident" textbooks (Reported by Children and Textbook Japan Network 21 2011/07/21).¹⁸ Aside from the LDP campaign, conservative mayors and governors across Japan began to appoint handpicked revisionists as education board members. The campaign proved effective. In 2011, several prefectural education boards such as Ehime, Kagawa, Saitama and Tokyo under pro-revisionist governors (such as Governor Ueda of Saitama) adopted textbooks from Ikuhoshu, (*Sankei Digital* 2011/09/02).¹⁹

A blogger celebrates the bankruptcy of a longstanding history textbook publisher



schools included in selection districts (as most junior high schools are), a district selection council is established, and it makes the selections on the basis of investigation and research conducted jointly by teachers and others.

The new unilateral top-down adoption style, reducing the role of teachers in textbook selection, spread from a small number of prefectural middle schools to the much more numerous municipal middle schools. In Yokohama City, population 3.6 million, former mayor Nakada Hiroshi replaced four out of six education board members during his term. For the 2011 textbook selection, the new board adopted the Ikuhoshia textbooks for both civics and Japanese history, affecting 27,000 students at 148 middle schools (*Sankei Digital* 2011/09/02; *Kyozai Shinbun web* 2011/09/09).²² Something similar happened in neighboring Fujisawa City - the mayor replaced four board members including the superintendent. While the investigation and research report from the pre-selection committee did not positively evaluate the Ikuhoshia textbooks, the reformed education board selected both the Ikuhoshia civics and history textbooks for the city's 19 middle schools (*Shimbun Akahata* Sunday edition 2011/10/23).²³ In Musashimurayama City, a suburb of Tokyo, the administration appointed a former official of the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education Bureau, Mochida Hiroshi, as superintendent. He then led the adoption of the revisionist textbook (*Ibid.*)²⁴

Since the 1960s (Horio 1994: 244),²⁰ local education boards have been responsible for adopting textbooks for elementary and middle schools. However, education boards are mandated to conduct research to identify the most appropriate textbook for schools in their jurisdiction.²¹ The task of choosing the most appropriate textbooks had hitherto involved schoolteachers. As of 2012, Mitani writes:

A textbook selection committee is established in each prefecture, consisting of school principals, teachers, and academics. These committee members prepare selection reference materials on the basis of studies conducted by small groups of teachers for each subject, such as math and world history; they then provide guidance and advice to those responsible for the final selection. In the case of prefecture-run schools..., the committee's input is directly reflected in the final selection. In the case of municipal

Bypassing the opinions of teachers was the key to the adoption of Ikuhoshia textbooks. In Higashi Osaka City, based on the customary procedure, each school within the jurisdiction recommended three textbooks per subject, and a pre-selection committee consisting of teachers, parents and education board

members compiled the recommendations and delivered the results to the education board for the final decision. The Ikuhoshu textbook received only two votes in this poll (*Sankei Digital* 2011/08/24),²⁵ but led by superintendent Nishimura, the revisionist textbook was added to the recommendation list as a fourth candidate. The education board then chose the Ikuhoshu civics textbook, disregarding the teachers (*Shimbun Akahata* Sunday edition 2011/10/23; *Zenshin* 2011/08/11).²⁶ The rightwing newspaper *Sankei* gushed that the board “regained autonomy” and righteously defended itself from the influence of teachers (*Sankei Digital* 2011/08/24).

Revisionist ideologues writing and commenting across diverse media also propagated the new unilateral style and widespread disregard of the opinions of teachers, not to mention historians, as the way to select textbooks. Defending the Metropolitan Board’s stance that textbooks should be selected by education boards and not by teachers, board member Yonenaga Kunio asserted, “selection of textbooks requires highly elaborate judgment,” as if teachers were incapable of judging which textbooks are appropriate for their own classrooms (Sasaki 2001: 31-2).

In Okinawa Prefecture, Ishigaki City and two neighboring townships - Taketomi and Yonakuni - failed to agree on the selection. These three municipalities form one textbook adoption district to share the burden of textbook reviewing, for which the superintendent from the city served as chair. In 2011, when local teachers studied the authorized textbooks and compiled a recommendation list for this district committee, the Ikuhoshu textbooks received poor marks from the reviewers. However, the Ikuhoshu civics textbook became a candidate upon the chair’s unilateral proposition at the district committee meeting, and was adopted by the district committee, which had been recently reorganized. (From series of *Ryuku Shimpō*

articles)²⁷

The decision was soon challenged: one education board in this textbook adoption district unanimously voted to reject the district committee’s choice, becoming the first case in which textbooks from two different publishers were used for one subject in a textbook adoption district (Ibid.). MEXT labeled this town’s decision “illegal” and called for “correction.”

Thus supported by administrative and political interventions, the use of the revisionist textbooks increased six fold for history and 11 times for civics (*Sankei Digital* 2011/09/02),²⁸ Despite the increase after the 2011 adoption, the market share of Ikuhoshu textbooks was still less than 5%, but, due to the campaign against the “masochistic view,” sincere reflection on Japan’s colonialism and militarist violence has almost vanished from middle school history textbooks. The Ikuhoshu books, despite their relatively low market share, contributed to undermining critical consideration of Japan’s wars in the nation’s classrooms.

Importantly, revisionist forces are moving toward comprehensive legislation to assure unilateral, top-down textbook selection and more minute control over textbook contents.

The Next Battleground: High School Textbooks and Education Boards

High school history textbooks had been more or less immune to the “Textbook Reform” movement, not just because these “Textbook Reform” organizations do not publish high school textbooks but mainly because, unlike the elementary and middle schools which are compulsory and have been long ruled by the universal single-track system, high schools are diverse, and the legislation that defines the adoption process for the lower grades does not bind high school textbook adoption (MEXT 2013).²⁹ Education boards exercise oversight,

but the books actually used in classrooms are decided at the school level, and boards have customarily respected and approved the selected textbooks. This last stronghold of teacher autonomy is now under attack.

The first target was the textbook published by Jikkyo Shuppan (実教出版) which, in a footnote, questioned whether the imposition of the anthem and national flag at school ceremonies reneges on PM Obuchi's 1999 pledge that these icons would not be forced on schools.³⁰ In March 2012, soon after MEXT announced the authorized high school textbook drafts, *Sankei* published criticisms of the authorized history textbooks. It was particularly scornful of Jikkyo Shuppan. The Tokyo Metropolitan Board, long influenced by ultra-nationalist governor Ishihara Shintaro and the spearhead of anthem/flag imposition, soon followed with criticisms of its own. When 17 Tokyo high schools started to review new Japanese history textbooks to use the following year, the Board Bureau pressured them, citing the *Sankei* articles and contending that the Jikkyo Shuppan textbook was "incompatible with the principles of the Metropolitan Board" (*Tokyo Shimbun* 2013/04/19).³¹ At that point, six out of the 17 schools were using the Jikkyo Shuppan book (Japanese Society for Historical Studies 2012; Japan Federation of Publishing Workers' Unions 2012).³² Subsequently, all schools abandoned Jikkyo Shuppan. None of the 17 high schools selected Jikkyo Shuppan that year (Takashima 2012).³³

In Yokohama City in 2012, the education board put similar pressure on high school administrators, and when school administrators refused to revoke the original decision to select Jikkyo Shuppan, the board overruled the schools' decision (Japan Federation of Publishing Workers' Unions 2012). In 2013, when 194 high schools in Tokyo reviewed Japanese history textbooks (*Tokyo Web* 2013/06/28),³⁴ the Metropolitan Board Bureau issued a directive instructing them to shun

Jikkyo Shuppan history textbooks (*Mainichi Shimbun* 2013/06/27).³⁵ As a result, no school selected this publisher's textbooks (*Tokyo Shimbun* 2013/09/20).³⁶

These interventions were criticized as "an unprecedented violation and intrusion by authority" and "a blatant intervention in what's left of discretionary power at high schools regarding everyday teaching" (Japanese Society for Historical Studies 2012; Japan Federation of Publishing Workers' Unions 2012). Nevertheless, intervention from education boards spread to Kanagawa and Osaka Prefectures in 2013, both of which publicly criticized the Jikkyo Shuppan textbooks (*Kyodo Tsushin* 2013/07/16; *Asahi Shimbun* 2013/07/28).³⁷ The ordeal of history textbooks continues.

A Terrain of Conflict: Privatization of State Functions in the Era of LDP Rule

As teacher autonomy at the high school level was being undermined in major centers, LDP Diet members were preparing blanket reforms. After the first battle cry from the LDP's internal group "Considering Japan's Future and History Textbooks" at the meeting with MEXT officials in April 2012 described at the beginning of this article, Abe pressed the agenda. In October 2012, in anticipation of forming a cabinet after the election scheduled at the end of that year, he formed a task force within the LDP under his direct supervision. This Headquarters for the Revitalization of Education, a month later, announced an "Interim Proposal".³⁸ One of its five subcommittees reviewed the textbook authorization requirements and adoption procedures. In the opening section, this subcommittee outright stated its goal to replace "masochistic" historical perspectives in textbooks with the spirit of the recently revised new Fundamental Law of Education: "to foster [in students] an attitude to respect our traditions and culture, [and to] love the country and region that nurtured them" (Article 2-v).

The proposal stipulated that the Minister of Education mandates topics to be covered in textbooks; the “neighboring countries clause” in the current Textbook Examination Standards should be reconsidered; roles and responsibilities of the MEXT Textbook Approval and Research Council members as well as textbook experts/specialists should be reconsidered; and the character of the National Curriculum Standards should be redefined on the basis of more detailed specifications. The Proposal also called for revision of laws concerning textbook adoption.

MEXT currently publishes detailed specifications (学習指導要領解説), stipulating what should be taught for each subject. For example, the manual for high school Japanese history instructs: “Guide students to study that the territory of our country that was internationally established through early Meiji period diplomacy,” “Make students aware that our country adopted international approaches toward neighboring countries in Asia similar to those by of Europe and the US,” “Make students aware that Japanese colonial rule motivated Asian nations’ independence and modernization movements,” (MEXT 2009: 53).³⁹ At present, the instruction manuals are published outside the National Curriculum Standards; hence, they are not legally binding for teaching in class. But once the National Curriculum Standards are expanded as this LDP group suggests so the mandatory standards include detailed teaching instructions, state-designated history interpretations will be the only narratives permitted in classrooms.

Soon after the publication of this proposal, the LDP regained a majority in the general election at the end of 2012. The LDP now enjoys a majority in both houses of government, and Shimomura Hakubun, the chairman of the group which authored the education reform proposal - the Headquarters for the Revitalization of Education - is the Education

Minister. In June 2013, the “Headquarters” issued another report as a “request” to PM Abe who had personally created this LDP organ. This time, the “request” demanded provisions including: textbook publishers should be required to submit written statements of editorial revisions added in the draft in an effort to fulfill the objectives stated in the revised Fundamental Law of Education; the Textbook Examination Standards should require publishers to mention government views and Supreme Court rulings where applicable; a new law, provisionally called “the textbook law,” should be passed to legally re-define what textbooks should include, what the authorization requirements are, and who should decide what textbooks are to be adopted and how. Abe as prime minister has encouraged group members to keep working on this textbook law.⁴⁰

If these requirements are legislated, textbook publishers will have to describe the forced observance of the national flag and anthem at school ceremonies as “constitutional” in accordance with rulings of the Supreme Court.⁴¹ As for the systemic wartime sexual violence and exploitation called the “comfort women,” if the response Abe made in the Diet as a PM back in 2007 serves as an official benchmark, textbooks will not be able even to mention the issue.⁴² In a nutshell, this LDP group imagines a future in which the screening and authorization process becomes nothing more than an opportunity to ensure that publishers do as the ruling party dictates.



The Prime Minister receives a request from the Headquarters for the Revitalization of Education of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan

Tuesday, June 25, 2013

Source: [Website of Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet](#)

In November 2013, the textbook subcommittee of this LDP internal group presented its request to Education Minister Shimomura, the original chair of the group, and Shimomura, now the minister, promised to review the textbook drafting, screening, and adoption process as the subcommittee requested. Within a week, Education Minister Shimomura announced a “plan,” which mirrored the two reports the subcommittee of the “Headquarters” had compiled.⁴³ Shimomura’s plan requires that textbook content follow government statements and the Supreme Court’s judgments, conflating legal decisions with historical understandings. As in the original proposal, Shimomura’s plan requires textbook publishers to submit a record of revisions made to fulfill the objectives stated in the revised Fundamental Law of Education. Failure to satisfy the spirit of the revised Fundamental Law alone can be grounds for rejection of a textbook. The plan doesn’t immediately abolish the “neighboring countries clause,” but it calls for amendment of an existing law to mandate local education boards to comply with the textbook adoption districts’

decisions,⁴⁴ a move clearly designed to preclude cases like the aforementioned Okinawan district textbook division from happening in future. The publishers’ union federation describes this as privatization of education administration whereby the Ministry becomes a subcontractor of the LDP (Japan Federation of Publishing Workers’ Unions 2013).⁴⁵

The Textbook Approval and Research Council, a consultative body of MEXT, at its second session on December 20, endorsed Shimomura’s plan. Shimomura announced revisions of the Textbook Examination Standards on January 17, 2014, effective immediately,⁴⁶ despite the fact that the drafts that publishers are preparing for the screening during the new school year are already near completion.

In short, history textbook content, standards, and review have been taken completely out of the hands of historians and educators and placed directly under the control of politicians. The ruling party can directly determine appropriate topics to cover and “correct” understandings of textbook topics. As the cliché goes, those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. One can only hope that this selective and systemic forgetfulness won’t lead the nation to another round of contempt toward other nations, fundamentalism, essentialism, isolationism, and ultimately, to war.

Koide Reiko, a former journalist in Japan, earned a PhD from the Department of Sociology at the State University of New York at Binghamton.

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Notes

¹ From a blog entry “高校教科書検定：安倍元首相が文科省を叱責” by教科書改善の会 at <http://kyoukashokaizen.blog114.fc2.com/blog-entry-163.html>. The original Currently group name is 日本の前途と歴史教育を考える議員の会, translated by Matthew Penney (2013) in “the Abe Cabinet – An Ideological Breakdown,” available at <http://www.japanfocus.org/events/view/170>.

² Translation of “教科書検定の方法” (MEXT), provided by Ministry of Foreign Affairs titled “Textbook Examination Procedure.”

³ Concerning the screening procedure, see “Japanese Textbook Controversies, Nationalism, and Historical Memory: Intra- and Inter-national Conflicts” (2009), *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, vol. 24-5-09. Nozaki and Selden write:

The state publishes instruction guidelines (*shido-yoryo*) for grades one through twelve, according to which commercial publishers develop texts. Texts need to be authorized as “school textbooks” (*kyokasho*) by the state to be used by public and even private schools. Publishers submit draft texts to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Monbusho; hereafter MOE) for approval, that is, to the textbook screening system that was introduced in 1948.⁵ Textbook Screening Examiners examine the texts and the

Textbook Screening Council makes decisions.

For more detail, see Mitani (2011) and Fukuoka (2011). Mitani Hiroshi's "[Japan's History Textbook System: Creation, Screening, and Selection](#)" (2012) is readily available on line.

⁴ From Abe's article "民主党政権下で教科書が大変なことになっている[]" in his serialized column "安倍晋三の突破する政治" published in Sankei's online journal *zakzak*. The "official government statement" here refers to Abe's response to a question in 2007, a written version exists [here](#).

⁵ From a blog entry by Kyoiku Saisei Kiko (see the next note) titled "高校教科書検定: 日本教育再生機構が見解を発表 安倍元首相が文科省を叱責慰安婦強制連行説の教科書記述" at a website run by a Saisei Kiko-related group: [改正教育基本法に基づく教科書改善を進める有識者の会](#) or [教科書改善の会](#) for short, accessed 2013/02/21.

⁶ Yagi is a leader of an ideological institute called Nippon Kyoiku Saisei Kiko [Japan Education Rebirth Institute]. For Yagi's historical revisionism, see Liv Coleman (2008): *Building Parents of the Next Generation: Japan's Family Policy Response to the Declining Birthrate*. PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison.

⁷ Revisionist opinions and counterarguments formerly were communicated orally (Nagahara 1990: 214-5). The process of rebuttal was "simplified" in 1990, and the results solely depend upon the list of revisions the publishers submit in response to the revision requests (Sakamoto and Yamamoto ed. 1992: 163).

⁸ A great deal has been written in English on state censorship of textbooks, e.g. Nozaki and Inokuchi, "[Japanese Education, Nationalism, and Ienaga Saburo's Textbook Lawsuits](#)," See *Censoring History* (Hein and Selden ed. 2000). Nozaki and Selden (2009).

⁹ Kim, Mikyong (2008). "[Myth and Fact in](#)

[Northeast Asia's History Textbook Controversies](#)."

¹⁰ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides the [official translation of the statement](#).

¹¹ Also known as Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform or Tsukuru Kai.

¹² From Fujioka's [教科書採択の真相: かくして歴史は歪められる](#). Kyoto: PHP Institute.

¹³ From an article titled "自虐批判で一度は倒産信念貫き新社再出発."

¹⁴ See the chapter by Kamei in Nakanishi ed. (2005). Hiroshima Prefecture has a webpage about the instruction titled "[是正指導](#)": accessed 2013/01/25.

¹⁵ From serialized articles titled "是正指導10年 広島県教育は今" in *Chugoku Shimbun* 2008/05/20-24. For more detailed account of Hiroshima normalization campaign, see Noda 2002.

¹⁶ The first round of administrative intervention in Tokyo is well captured in an English report to the United Nations titled [Toward Respect for the Views of the Child: Violations of children's rights at Kunitachi Elementary and Middle Schools](#) (2004), submitted by the Kunitachi Steering Committee for the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, accessed 2013/04/09.

¹⁷ From a Japan Conference (日本会議) - affiliated blog [Pride of Japan](#), accessed on 2013/07/29.

¹⁸ [Children and Textbook Japan Network](#)

¹⁹ From "育鵬社採択、公立409校." As soon as he came to power for the second time, Abe revived his former special advisory council Education Rebuilding Council within the cabinet. He named the successor the Education Rebuilding Steering Committee and commissioned many

textbook revisionists, including Yagi Hidetsugu and former Ehime Governor Kato Moriyuki, to serve as committee members (*Shukan Kin'yobi* 2013/02/01: 24).

²⁰ Until the phased implementation of the legislation in the 1960's, textbook selection responsibility was in the hands of each school (Horio 1994: 244).

²¹ MEXT explains the duty of research and investigation as follows: “採択の対象となる教科書について、学校の設置者である都道府県や市町村の教育委員会（国立、私立にあっては学校長）が、どの教科書を使用するか調査研究を行い、その地域、学校に最もふさわしい教科書を採択します” (*MEXT: 教科書Q&A*).” The same passage is posted at the [Prime Minister's HP](#).

²² [Kyozaï Shinbun](#). Accessed on 2013/10/08

²³ From an article titled “強引採択の弱点 推進派が圧力教育長、教育委員入れ替え 教育現場の声無視.”

²⁴ A blog entry “[武蔵村山市における育鵬社教科書採択とその背景](#)” (2012/09/12) at *Power to the People 2* offers a detailed account, accessed 2014/03/19.

²⁵ From an article titled “育鵬社教科書を採択の東大阪市教委 「独立性」取り戻す.”

²⁶ From a blog entry by a school teacher in [週刊前進](#) 2011/08/11, accessed on 2013/02/20.

²⁷ *Ryuku Shimpo* articles include “[八重山教科書採択問題 竹富町教育長、絞り込みなしと説明](#)” (2011/08/28); “[八重山教委協会 公民教科書、「育鵬社」を不採択](#)” (2011/09/08); “[竹富教科書で文科省政務官が再び是正要求](#)” (2013/11/29); and “[教科書問題 文科省、月内に是正要求へ竹富町と県教委にも](#)” (2014/2/13). See also “[In Textbook Fight, Japan Leaders Seek to Recast History](#)”(New York Times 12/29/1913).

²⁸ The *Sankei* statistics don't include the 100 copies of civics textbooks that the Metropolitan Board adopted from the other off-shoot

revisionist publisher for Tokyo's special ed schools. A citizens' group Children and Textbooks Japan Network 21 offers [statistics for both publishers](#).

²⁹ From “6. [教科書採択の方法](#)” in [教科書制度の概要](#)

³⁰ The original footnote reads “国旗国歌法について「政府はこの法律によって国民に国旗掲揚、国歌斉唱などを強制するものではないことを国会審議で明らかにした。しかし、一部の自治体で公務員への強制の動きがある。”

³¹ From a *Tokyo Shimbun* article titled “特定教科書 締め出し 国旗・国歌記述「都教委、合わない」.”

³² From “[東京都教育委員会による高校日本史教科書採択への不当介入に抗議するアピール](#)” and “[[声明](#)] [東京都教育委員会および横浜市教育委員会による実教出版日本史教科書採択への不当な介入に抗議し、採択のやり直しを求める](#)”, accessed on 2013/12/15. Lately more organizations have publicized condemnations against the interventions.

³³ From an entry dated 2012/07/25 by Professor Takashima Nobuyoshi (the University of the Ryukyus) to a blog *Power to the People 2*, titled “[<第4報>都教委の『日本史』採択干渉問題](#)”, accessed on 2013/06/02.

³⁴ From a *Tokyo Shimbun* online article “[「二重検定おかしい」都立高教師ら反発 実教出版日本史](#)” signed by Nakayama Takashi.

³⁵ From a Tokyo evening paper article titled “都教委：「教科書使うな」 検定通過の実教出版日本史、国旗国歌「公務員へ強制の動き」記述”, accessed on 2013/07/29. There are many English newspaper articles about this case, including “[Facing education board pressure, no schools choose textbook depicting coercion of Hinomaru and Kimigayo](#)” (*Japan Press* 2013/08/23), “[Texts that say teachers told to obey axed](#)” (*Japan times* 2013/06/28) and “[EDITORIAL: Politics should not influence](#)

education boards' textbook decisions" (*Asahi Shimbun* 2013/08/24), all accessed on 2013/12/17.

³⁶ From “埼玉 県教育委員長が辞意 実教出版の教科書採択で.”

³⁷ From “歴史教科書「一面的」 大阪府教委、選定前に異例見解” and “神奈川県教委も教科書選び介入 実教出版使用、再考促す”, both accessed on 2013/07/29.

³⁸ From “中間取りまとめ”

³⁹ “第2章 各科目 第3節 日本史A” in 高等学校学習指導要領解説 地理歴史編 (MEXT 2009). See [MEXT's website](#).

⁴⁰ From the submitted Interim Report see [Jimin.jp](#); *Sankei Digital* 2013/06/25; and two entries at the website of the prime minister and the cabinet: “[The Prime Minister Receives a Proposal from the Headquarters for the Revitalization of Education of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan](#),” and “[The Prime Minister Receives a Request from the Headquarters for the Revitalization of Education of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan](#)”. The original explanation of the textbook law is “教科書の定義、検定、採択を包括する.”

⁴¹ For the Supreme Court’s ruling in 2007, see “[Tokyo High Court Rejects Teachers' Claims to Freedom of Thought](#)” (Repeta 2011). For the 2011 Supreme Court rulings that “it is constitutional to require teachers and staff to sing the national anthem at graduations and other school ceremonies,” see for example

“[Supreme Court of Japan Rejects National Anthem Claims](#)” (Ginsburg 2011) and “[Japan's Supreme Court: All teachers are required to sing the national anthem at school events](#)” (NHK 2011/05/30).

⁴² Pointed out in an article “安倍政権の「教育再生」で教科書はどうなるか” by Tawara Yoshifumi, the director of the Children and Textbook Japan Network 21, which came out in January 2013.

Abe maintained, in the response in the National Diet in 2007, “government investigations (between 2003 and 2005) discovered no documented indications regarding the forceful requisition of women against their will by the military force and/or the authorities.”

⁴³ Shimomura admitted that the plan was made in response to the subcommittee’s proposal. See the [transcripts of a press conference on 2013/11/15](#).

⁴⁴ Interestingly, the Central Council for Education fought back. The council subcommittee compiled a report on 2013/12/26, maintaining that the decision on which textbook to adopt belongs to each municipal education board. The subcommittee’s statement is [available here](#).

⁴⁵ “文部科学省は事実上の国定教科書づくりにつながる「教科書改革実行プラン」を撤回せよ” (2013/11/21), available [here](#) and [here](#).

⁴⁶ The announcement is available at [MEXT's website](#).