

A Normal State Without Remorse: The Textbook Controversy and Korea-Japan Relations

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INTRODUCTION

The recent Japanese history textbook issue has triggered widespread debate. The book in questions, *The New History Textbook* compiled by the Japanese Textbook Reform Society (*Tsukurukai*), was approved by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) for use in Japanese middle schools beginning in 2002. While it had initially taken a cautious stance towards the textbook controversy, the Korean government undertook a series of tough measures toward Japan, recalling its ambassador and publicly reproaching Japan at the United Nations' Human Rights Commission in Geneva. The turnaround by the Korean government was partly in response to anti-Japanese sentiments of the Korean public and the grave political burden that the government would bear if it continued to drag its feet.

Based on a detailed examination of the controversial textbook, the Korean government requested revisions. However, after the Japanese government's rejection of the request, the issue entered a more serious phase. Seoul is adopting several incremental countermeasures, while

at the same time, applying diplomatic pressure. The hard-line policy includes discontinuing the next phase of the Korean market opening to Japanese popular cultural items, suspension of military exchanges between Korea and Japan, and drastically-reduced civilian and youth exchange programs between the two countries. Meanwhile, the National Assembly, taking into consideration the anti-Japanese sentiments of its constituents, has unanimously passed a resolution to annul the historic "Korea-Japan Joint Declaration of Partnership Towards the Twenty-first Century" signed at the 1998 summit meeting.

Clearly, the textbook controversy has cut short the honeymoon period of Korea-Japan relations, and has sullied the 1998 joint declaration of partnership as well as any other chance to improve Korea-Japan relations. And this will likely exacerbate with Japan's Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's official visit to Yasukuni Shrine. This paper will analyze the facts of the Japanese history textbook controversy and its significance within a historical context. After examining the current Japanese domestic socio-political climate, the paper will deal with the possible impact of the history textbook controversy on Korea-Japan relations and future tasks confronting the two countries.

THE DISTORTION OF HISTORY IN TEXTBOOKS

The kernel of the textbook controversy is the fact that the draft edition of a middle school history textbook by Fusosha, a publishing company founded by a right-wing group, the Textbook Reform Society (*Tsukurukai*), has passed the textbook screening of the MEXT.¹⁾

1) In 1948, since abolishing the national textbook system, the Japanese government has used the textbook screening system. According to the textbook screening system, private textbook publishing companies submit textbook drafts to the Ministry of Education for review by the Ministry's textbook editing staff, and the reviewed

Along with the controversial textbook, there are other draft editions of textbooks by seven other publishing companies submitted for the screening whose contents show a regression in historical awareness compared to the past. For instance, references to “comfort women” have been omitted, or whitewashed, and the word “aggression” has been replaced with the term “advance” in all the textbooks. Nevertheless, that which is considered regression in historical awareness is partly related to the move in Japan to reduce the content in history textbook leading to inevitable curtailment of some content on Korea-Japan relations. In this sense, it is difficult to perceive the regression as a change for the worse.²⁾

However, certification of the controversial textbook is a troubling implication. It is clearly the Japanese government’s official recognition of the ethnocentric historical view, based on the imperialist view of history that pervades the new textbook.³⁾

drafts are then passed on to the Screening Review Committee for Textbooks, an advisory organ of the Ministry. Based on the initial screening results, the Committee either recommends revisions or if it finds revisions unnecessary, gives approval. The publisher then makes revision, and the Committee re-evaluates the revised draft for certification. Once textbooks are certified by the Ministry of Education, they compete in the textbook market for adoption by various local boards of education for use in schools. Generally, competition for adoption in the textbook market is extremely fierce, and it is difficult for a new textbook to gain a large market share. Misato Tateno, “The History Textbook Squabble—Special Series: Analysis of History Textbooks Dispute,” *Chuokouron* (August 2001), pp. 113-132.

- 2) When the five-day school week goes into effect in middle schools in the 2002 school year, there will be reduction in class time. Accordingly, the textbook content will be reduced by about 30 percent. With the overall reduction in the length of history textbooks, it is understandable that the section about Korea has been also reduced in length.
- 3) Chung Jae-jung, “The History Textbook of the History Textbook Reform Society and the Problems of Content Related to Korea,” *The Japanese History Textbook Controversy and the Neo-nationalist Trend* (Material from the 2001 Joint Symposium For Establishment of Genuin Korea-Japan Relations hosted by various historians’ associations) pp. 41-74.

First, the new textbook lacks balance, because of overemphasis of the ethnocentric perspective, and lack of objectivity of historical research. Second, by stressing glorification and idealization of Japan, it shows contempt for neighboring countries, especially in descriptions of the relation between Japan and the neighboring countries. Third, regarding modern history, the textbook takes a racist view, describing Japan as the vanguard force fighting on behalf of the yellow race against the white race. Such a historical standpoint runs counter to the mutual understanding among nations and the spirit of peaceful coexistence demanded in the era globalization.

The book's treatment of Korea in particular, is even more problematic. It is replete with content that emphasizing the superiority of Japanese people over Koreans. For example, in the ancient history section, the new textbook states as a fact that Japan established and operated a military outpost, *Mimana*, on the southern Korean peninsula, and asserts that while Japan was an independent state, Korea was a protectorate of China. Moreover, the book either minimizes or whitewashes the atrocities Japan committed against Korea, placing responsibility with the victim, Korea. In fact, the section covering the colonization of Korea lacks any tone of reflection or regret; rather, it argues that the Japanese colonial rule benefited Korea by helping it modernize and develop. Another striking omission is the lack of any reference to "comfort women."⁴⁾

Nobutaka Machimura, Japan's Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, asserts, "the Japanese government does not support the view of history of any particular textbook, and the government's historiographical consciousness has no bearing on the certification of the new textbook." Regardless, the Japanese government cannot avoid bearing some responsibility for controversy. Now that it has the *imprimatur* of the Education Ministry, the book can openly compete with other textbooks in the middle school textbook

4) *Ibid*, pp. 41-74

market.

Although the new textbook has been revised extensively on instructions from MEXT, in spite of changes in 137 areas, its view of history remains fundamentally the same. The Textbook Reform Society seems satisfied that it has secured a bridgehead. Since it has adopted the strategy of “daring concessions” and “maintaining the core concept” in its struggle from the outset, the official approval by the institution of education seems to carry more importance for the society than the concessions it had to make in the content of the textbook. With the approval, the society has earned the right to publish high school textbooks and has also gained some latitude against attempts to revise the content in future textbooks.⁵⁾

THE CONTROVERSY IN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The present textbook controversy is the third case of history distortion to date. The first two, in 1982 and 1986, however, are different from the current case in that graver repercussions attend the present issue. The 1982 controversy arose when it was learned that the Ministry of Education, during the screening process, had ordered the publishers to change the word “aggression” to “advance.” At the time, China and South Korea lodged protests against Japan, and the issue was resolved when then-Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone reversed the Ministry of Education’s order. There has been relative improvement in the content of Japanese history textbooks since 1982, owing to extensive diplomatic pressures from China and South Korea as well as the fervent activism of progressive groups in Japan. The turnaround in the Nakasone administration’s position may be due to its recognition of the gravity of the issue and of the importance of maintaining amity with neighboring countries. The second

5) www.tsukurukai.com

controversy hit when a right-wing group named "National Council to Protect Japan" compiled *New Edition of Japanese History* fraught with right-wing historical views aiming to foster pride in Japanese history. Needless to say, China and South Korea protested vehemently, and the Japanese government took the unprecedented action of seeing that corrections were made, thus settling the matter temporarily.

Looking back, the Japanese historiographical consciousness seems to have made some progress. During his visit to Korea in January 1992, then-Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa declared that the Japanese government would do its utmost to inquire into the truth of the past, including the Japanese military "comfort women" issue, and take appropriate measures according to the findings. The following year, then-Minister of State Yohei Kono, on behalf of the Miyazawa administration, admitted the Japanese government's involvement in the military system to provide "comfort women," and expressed regret.

In 1993, Morihiro Hosokawa became the new prime minister, ending the 38-year-old domination by the Liberal Democratic Party. He called past wars instigated by Japan "wars of aggression," showing epochal progress in historiographical consciousness. In addition, during his visit to Gyeongju, Prime Minister Hosokawa expressed remorse for the harsh Japanese colonial rule in Korea, citing as examples, the policy to force Koreans to adopt Japanese names, the forced war mobilization, the annihilation of Korean culture, and other atrocities. Moreover, on August 15, 1995, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama, formerly a member of the Socialist Party of Japan, who had achieved some success in his push for the apology resolution of the war's end in the Parliament, acknowledged Japanese aggression during the Asia-Pacific war as "a mistaken national policy" and released a statement of heartfelt remorse for the harsh Japanese colonial rule, a statement that expressed the highest degree of remorse for war atrocities of any such document since the end of the war.

The current textbook controversy can be understood as the

manifestation of a systematic attack from the Japanese political and social right wing, in reaction to the trend toward reflection and remorse that emerged after the late-1980s and became more pronounced in the latter half of the 1990s. The members of a right-wing political faction within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), explicitly expressed their disapproval of the Japanese government's formal apologies, and formed an alliance of Diet members to fiercely protest the government's position. Especially when Prime Minister Hosokawa referred to Japanese involvement in the Asia-Pacific war as "a war of aggression," politicians launched an immediate protest. In a meeting, three factions within the LDP created the History Review Committee to rectify the tarnished historical view and to establish correct historical awareness. Among the Committee members were Ryutaro Hashimoto and Yoshiro Mori, who both later became prime ministers, as well as other prominent members of the LDP. The History Review Committee hired the expertise of right wing intellectuals in an attempt to establish a historical view that justified both invasion and colonial rule, and they conducted various activities to propagate that view.⁶⁾

To counter the resolution in the Diet that was spearheaded by Prime Minister Murayama, the right-wing Diet members of the LDP formed the "50th Anniversary of the End of War Alliance of Diet Members." The same members also worshipped at Yasukuni Shrine, a site symbolic of Japanese militarism. Moreover, the emergence of such groups as the Association for the Advancement of Liberalist View of History and the Textbook Reform Society (*Tsukurukai*), the two leading figures in the current textbook controversy, indicate that it is not

6) Created after Prime Minister Hosokawa's 1993 address, the History Review Committee has hosted some 20 academic conferences with rightist scholars presiding, in efforts to justify the Japanese imperialist past. The efforts of the Review Committee were compiled in the 1995 publication of *The Summary of the Greater East-Asian War*. This book became the manual for the revisionist history movement that emerged afterwards in Japan.

simply a historical or educational issue but a thoroughly political one.

The formation of the Textbook Reform Society is evaluated as a direct, right-wing reaction to the government's recognition of the "comfort women" issue. In August 1993, the Japanese government publicly acknowledged that the military had used "comfort women," and, later in June 1996, the Ministry of Education announced that the "comfort women" should be covered in all history textbooks. In response, right-wing powers that had resisted such moves formed the society in January 1997. Under the leadership of Nobukatsu Fujioka, professor of education at the University of Tokyo, and Professor Kanji Nishio of the University of Electro-Communications, the society has been very active in hosting public lectures and symposia that criticize existing textbooks, at the same time, promoting the publication and certification of the new textbook. When it distributed free of charge, its right-wing publications, *National History*, *National Morals*, and *The Birth of the New Textbook*, to the Board of Education of each region, it created major repercussions in Japan. Currently, the society has over 10,000 members in 49 branches nationwide. Notable is the fact that about 200 of the members are executives of large corporations or prominent figures in Japanese society.⁷⁾

At bottom, the current textbook controversy is an outcome of the nationalist campaign led by the right-wing political and social powers that organized in the late 1990s. Upon close examination, the revisionist movement seems more a vanguard of reactionary nationalists whose primary purpose is systematic propaganda and instigation, rather than a group of historians that adhere to a particular scholarly position. According to the group, the textbooks now in use are based on "a masochistic historical view" that emphasizes only Japan's mistakes and disgrace. They insist that in order to foster nationalism, "positive history" must be taught in schools. In short, the

7) Refer to <www.tsukurukai.com> for the organizational characteristics and activities of the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform.

group believes that there is no need to include in middle school textbooks any information that is a disgrace to Japanese history, such as the Nanjing massacre or the military use of “comfort women.”

Together with the society, the right-wing politicians of the LDP and the right-wing press are the leading powers promoting the movement for historical revisionism. First, by making public statements that falsely represent history, right-wing members of the LDP cancel out the government’s formal expression of remorse.⁸⁾ In addition, the group organized Diet-member groups within the LDP, such as the “Positive Alliance of Japanese Diet Members” and the “Meeting of Concerned Young Diet Members for Japan’s Future and History Education” in efforts to propagate revisionist of history. Meanwhile, right-wing newspapers and journals, such as *Sankei Shimbun*, *Shokun*, and *Seiron*, aided the cause by providing a platform for revisionist views. For example in 1996, *Sankei Shimbun* ran a series titled “The History Untold in Textbooks,” featuring articles written by champions of the “liberalist view” of history. It is no surprise that Fushosha, which published controversial new textbook, is an affiliate of *Sankei Shimbun*. Moreover, these right-wing newspapers attack the *Asahi Shimbun*, which has promoted pacifism and progressive ideas since the end of the war, calling it an unpatriotic newspaper.

FULL CONSERVATIVE SWING IN JAPANESE SOCIETY

In the background of the current textbook controversy lurks the rapid rise of conservatism in Japanese society, which makes the situation even more serious. Signs of the conservative swing in Japan

8) For more information on the statements of right-wing Japanese politicians and the political context, refer to: Lee Won-deog, “Historical View and Korea-Japan Relations: The Background and Political Process of Remorse and Backlash,” in *Korea and Japan: Historical View for Improved Encounter Relations*, ed. by Ha Young-sun (Seoul: Nanam, 1997), pp. 146-190.

have been seen in various areas in recent years; however, what is more worrisome is that the trend of conservatism is taking place without any resistance from political parties or the public opinion, and the trend seems to have gained a momentum that domestic powers cannot stop. Let us now take a closer look at some of the incidents and phenomena that indicate the growing conservatism in Japan.

First, is the full reinstatement of "*Hinomaru*" and "*Kimikayo*," symbols of Japanese militarism. On July 22, 1999, the House of Representatives passed the controversial bill reinstating, after 55 years, the *Hinomaru* (the sun flag) and *Kimikayo* (a hymn glorifying the emperor) as the official national flag and the national anthem. The House of Councilors followed the suit on August 9. The voice of opposition that *Hinomaru* and *Kimikayo* were still too militaristic, was discarded in favor of reinstatement. Supporters argued that *Hinomaru* and *Kimikayo* are established symbols in the hearts of Japanese people.

What is notable about the passage of the bill in the Diet is the vote distribution. With 403 votes in favor and 86 in opposition of the bill, it plainly shows that the overwhelming majority of Japanese people are in favor of the reinstatement of both the *Hinomaru* and *Kimikayo*." Until now, raising the *Hinomaru* and singing *Kimikayo* have been considered taboo in Japanese society, and Japanese schools and public institutions have been observed the unwritten law banning them in official events. That observance, which signified national remorse for Japan's war atrocities, has officially come to an end.

Second, at the plenary session in July 1999, the amendment creating the Research Commission on the Constitution was passed by the Japanese House of Representatives. With the ratification of the bill, the first official organ for discussing constitutional issues was created since the Peace Constitution went into effect 52 years ago. From the year 2000, The Research Commission on the Constitution is being instituted in both Houses, the two highest government organs with the power to amend the Constitution. This debate on the Constitutional amendment is fundamentally different from previous debates.⁹⁾ Needless to say, it will deal with Article 9 regarding

disarmament and the renunciation of war.

The establishment of the Research Commission on the Constitution reflects changes in public opinion that support a constitutional amendment. In 1997, when a great wave of constitutional debate swept Japanese society on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Peace Constitution, numerous polls were conducted and, according to one by the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 63 percent of the participants supported a constitutional amendment. Moreover, the percentage who supported an amendment was greater among younger age groups, with 76 percent of people in their twenties in favor.¹⁰⁾ In other words, at the end of the century, Japanese people had begun to perceive the Peace Constitution, which had once represented Japan as a pacifist nation, as cumbersome baggage.

Thirdly, the landslide victory of independent candidate Shintaro Ishihara in the Tokyo gubernatorial race is symbolic of changes in the socio-political atmosphere in Japan over the span of the last quarter

9) After the enactment of the Peace Constitution, issues about the constitutional amendment have arisen twice. The first debate occurred when Prime Minister-elect Ichiro Hatoyama introduced an amendment in 1954. Immediately following his inauguration, Prime Minister Hatoyama, who chose the revision of the occupation policy of the U.S. as his primary national agenda, pushed forward a multi-faced constitutional amendment that included amendment of Article 9 and the strengthening of the Emperor's role in Japan. Hatoyama's support for the constitutional amendment was also adopted by his successor Nobusuke Kishi, who took office as prime minister in 1957. Kishi pushed forward the constitutional amendment cause by establishing the Constitutional Review Board and Research Institute for Constitutional Issues. However, these efforts failed to attain two-thirds of the vote in the Diet needed for a motion on the amendment. The constitutional amendment debate was reintroduced in 1982 when Nakasone became Japan's new prime minister. Promising to end postwar politics, Nakasone asserted that if Japanese people could not freely express their opinions, it signaled the need to amend the Constitution enacted by U.S. occupation forces. Nakasone's assertion found support among conservative intellectuals and advocates of an independent national defense; however, the movement was thwarted by strong public criticism.

10) *Yomiuri Shimbun*, September 7, 1997.

century. Ishihara, who wrote *Japan Can Say No*, had run as an LDP candidate in the 1975 election and had lost to progressive governor, Ryokichi Minobe. The 1999 election for the Tokyo prefecture governorship is symbolic of changes in the socio-political atmosphere in Japan over the span of the last quarter century. Moreover, Ishihara's victory signified a complete dissolution of the progressive alliance against the LDP single party system (the system of 1955). Under the dominant 1955 system, the solidarity of the progressive alliance remained strong until the mid-1990s.

In evaluating Ishihara's victory, an appropriate and comprehensive approach would include the following factors: the contentious nature of the election characterized by numerous strong candidates running for the office, and the fact that it was a local election. On the other hand, it does not mean, that Ishihara's victory was unrelated to conservative trends in Japanese society. To say the least, the conservative swing is pervasive enough for voters in Tokyo to overlook Ishihara's nationalist ideology that justifies Japanese war aggression.¹¹⁾

A fourth indication is the deluge of right-wing publications in the latter half of 1990s, a clear indication of the conservative swing in Japan. Books and journals affiliated with historical revisionism, which justify and romanticize the Japanese history of aggression, have burgeoned in Japanese bookstores in recent years. Books, journals, and pamphlets are being published by historical revisionist groups, such as The Association for the Advancement of a Liberalist View of History as well as The History Textbook Reform Society, for the purpose of propagating an ethnocentric view of history.¹²⁾ It is

11) Takebatake Michitoshi, "Japanese Politics Under the System of 1996," *Sekai* (July 1999), pp.73-74.

12) For detailed information on the historical view and activities of the history revisionist groups, refer to Han Sang-il's article in Chapter 3 of *Study of Japanese Rightists* (Seoul: Joong-shim, 2000), co-authored by Kim Ho-sup, Lee Myeon-woo, Lee Won-deog, and Han Sang-il

noteworthy that the right-wing popular journals that sprung up around 1990, openly advocating both nationalism and a revisionist interpretation of history, such as *SAPIO*, *Views* and *This Is Yomiuri*, now have a circulation of over a hundred thousand copies. These popular journals, are furthering the Japanese nationalist cause in the 1990s by joining forces with the conservative mass communications media, such as *Bungeishunju*, *Shokun*, *Seiron*, and *Voice*, all of which all have deep roots in Japanese society.¹³⁾

The conservative swing after the mid-1990s can be seen as the result of a combination of factors on different levels: the rapid changes in global politics and in the security situation in East Asia, the shift in domestic politics, the recent financial crisis and economic stagnation, and the attendant social unrest and psychological anxiety. The Japanese people are perplexed by the political chaos and extended economic stagnation since the 1990s, and from the perspective of social psychology, they are experiencing unprecedented anxiety and restlessness in postwar Japan. Thus, the trend toward conservatism is taking place amidst these politico-economical and socio-psychological conditions.

First, let us look at the global political factor. The Japanese people feel their country has failed to actively deal with the rapid changes in the world order after the end of Cold War and the attendant changes in the East Asian security order. What happened in the Gulf War is a clear example. The Japanese were deeply and painfully affected by international criticism that Japan had “made a faceless international contribution without shedding a single drop of blood or sweat.” And they realized that despite their country’s 13 billion dollar contribution to that war, Japan was still vulnerable. In addition, in the face of the security threat in East Asia, including the North Korean nuclear issue

13) Sunya Yoshimi, “Dissemination of Nationalism in Magazines,” in *Beyond Nationalism*, Youichi Komori, and Tesuya Takahasi ed., tr. by Lee Kyu-soo (Seoul: Samin, 1998). The original text published by Tokyo University Press in 1998.

and the development and test launch of Daepodong rocket, coupled with Chinese nuclear testing and the Taiwan issue, Japan has assumed a passive stance. The voices of discontent regarding government passivity are growing.

Let us now turn to changes in Japanese party politics. The shift in Japanese party politics that catalyzed the move toward conservatism can be traced to the dissolution of the 1955 system, and the resulting collapse of progressive politics. When the splintered opposition groups triumphed in the 1993 election, creating an eight-party coalition and establishing the Hosokawa administration, it signaled the end of the 38-year rule of the Liberal Democratic Party. The rise and fall of the coalition government in the next three years caused chaos and upheaval in the Japanese political party system. New parties came and went in succession, and changing alignments of political parties and shifting alliances among politicians were common. The most notable result amidst the political unrest was the fall of the Socialist Party. The Socialist Party (renamed the Social Democratic Party of Japan), once the most powerful opposition party to the conservative LDP under the 1955 system, was reduced to a minor role after losing in two general elections, and this defeat of the progressive power bloc resulted in a total swing toward conservatism.

Amidst the all-out conservative swing in Japan, the Liberal Democratic Party once again rose as a powerhouse in Japanese politics after 1996, thus the so-called "1996 system." Michitoshi Takebatake refers to the return of LDP rule after a short period of a political vacuum following the collapse of the 1955 system as "the 1996 system." According to Takebatake, under that system, it has become difficult for the LDP to win an absolute majority either the House of Councilors or the House of Representatives. Thus, although the LDP is the axis in the 1996 system, it has the appearance of a coalition government. The minority parties that constitute the coalition act as active participants in the LDP-ruled government, demanding changes in policy as well as posts in the Cabinet and on the vice-ministerial level. In this way, the minority opposition parties, in coalition

partnership with the LDP, have a greater voice in the government than the LDP members of the Diet, exercising restraint on the LDP.¹⁴⁾

However, despite the restraints placed on the LDP by coalition parties, LDP power has fundamentally solidified under the 1996 system compared to its power under the 1955 system. This has to do with the absence of a powerful opposition such as the Socialist Party. After the mid-1990s, the Socialist Party underwent a shift in its party line on basic policy issues, such as its policy on the Constitution, self-defense forces, and U.S.-Japan Security relations, and that ultimately led to the dissolution of the party. Moreover, since the opposition party could not form an ideological or organizational power base to go against the LDP, it had to find a way into the coalition government by aligning itself with the LDP. Under the “1996 system,” all opposition parties, except for the Communist Party, stood in line to be courted by the LDP. In conclusion, the LDP, under the “1996 system,” has the ultimate policy decision-making power in the coalition government, and the LDP-led legislative bills and policies are being ratified without any resistance from opposition parties.

Thirdly, the general sense of crisis in the Japanese economy has accelerated the conservative swing in Japan. The economy has experienced extreme stagnancy for over ten years since the early 1990s, recording the highest unemployment rate in its history. The results have been insolvency and bad debts in many financial institutions. In the wake of deflation of the Japanese “bubble economy” in the early 1990s, Japan has suffered from an extended economic slump for over ten years, and the road to economic recovery seems remote. According to statistics, the reduced assets of 1,100 trillion yen due to deflation is twice the amount of the damage caused by the Second World War.

Many Japanese people consider the current economic crisis as the second greatest defeat of Japan since the Second World War. Amidst

14) Takebatake Michitoshi, *op.cit.*, pp.69-72.

the prolonged economic stagnation, they are voicing their discontent about the economy. Moreover, public mistrust of the Japanese bureaucracy is mounting. With the succession of reports and disclosures of bureaucratic corruption, scandal, and inefficiency since the 1990s, the opinion that the bureaucratic apparatus is the chief culprit is becoming rapidly pervasive. The myth promoting the bureaucratic system as the engine of the miraculous economic development in postwar Japan is losing its validity. Amidst this sense of crisis, there is a prevailing belief in the need for another national reform, the third since the Meiji Restoration and postwar reform.

THE TEXTBOOK TURMOIL AND KOREA-JAPAN RELATIONS

The certification of the *New History Textbook*, when seen in the context of Japan's current socio-political course, poses serious concern. It goes against not only the Japanese government's 1982 promise to take into account the views of neighboring countries in the government screening process,¹⁵⁾ but also flies in the face of Prime Minister Murayama's 1995 statement of remorse and apology for the atrocities of the past. Furthermore, it destroys any hope to provide an accurate history education for future generations,¹⁶⁾ an idea expressed in the Joint Declaration on the New Partnership for the 21st Century, signed in October 1998 at the summit between President Kim Dae-jung and Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi.

15) After the 1982 textbook controversy, the Ministry of Education adopted the "Neighboring Countries" Article in its screening standards. The "Neighboring Countries" Article stipulates that information on modern history related to what took place between Japan and its neighboring countries, should be approached from the perspective of mutual understanding and cooperation with due consideration for neighboring countries.

16) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Results of President Kim's Official Visit to Japan* (Seoul: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1998).

Due to the controversy, Korea-Japan relations, which had enjoyed a honeymoon period since 1998, now face a serious challenge. The 1998 Korea-Japan declaration signified a complete shift in the Korea-Japan relations from the one of conflict in the postwar era to forward-looking cooperation. And since that positive turn in Korea-Japan relations was made possible by President Kim's daring and magnanimous policy, it is no surprise that the reappearance of the textbook controversy is perceived as a betrayal by Japan.¹⁷⁾

The friction over the shared history of Korea and Japan has grown worse, in terms of depth and frequency, since the 1990s. There appear to be three contributing factors in worsening Korea-Japan relations.¹⁸⁾ The first one is the global factor brought on by the end of the Cold War. With the collapse of the Communist bloc, the anti-Communist alliance that acted as a centripetal force in Korea-Japan relations lost its binding power, bringing to the surface the sources of nationalist conflict that had hitherto been latent.

Secondly, the political dispute over historical consciousness in Japan can be cited as a domestic political factor. With the end of the LDP single-party system and the subsequent era of a coalition government in the late 1990s, disputes about the historical consciousness appeared in Japanese politics. The disputes became particularly more pronounced during the period between August 1993 and early 1995 when the Socialist Party abandoned its legacy as the perennial opposition party and occupied a section of the coalition government. Although a minor power in the coalition government, the Socialist Party, nevertheless, turned the issue of historical consciousness into an important political issue. In the process, fierce

17) Kim Young-jak, "Japan's Betrayal in the Honeymoon Period," *Chosun Ilbo*, April 30, 2001.

18) Lee Won-deog, "Historical View and Korea-Japan Relations: The Background and Political Process of Remorse and Backlash," in *Korea and Japan: Historical View for An Improved Encounter*, ed. By Ha Young-sun Ha (Seoul: Nanam, 1997), pp. 146-190.

disputes between the progressive camp and the conservative camp have continued in the political arena. Arguments over the military "comfort women," retraction as well as insulting nationalist remarks about the past, worshipping at the *Yasukuni Shrine*, and the emergence of history revisionism—all the issues related to the Japanese imperialist past have been politicized, exacerbating the Korea-Japan history dispute in the process.

In Korea's domestic politics, the democratization of political circles played a key role in the Korean government's hard-line position in the history dispute. With its successful transition from a military-centered authoritarian political system to a social and political democracy in the 1990s, there was a violent outburst of anti-Japanese sentiment that had previously been suppressed under the military regime. With public sentiment towards Japan becoming an important variable in its Japan policy, a democratized Korean government could no longer ignore people's anti-Japanese sentiments. Accordingly, the Korean government's hard-line policy towards Japan can be understood in this context.

Insofar as these mechanisms are in place, intensified disputes about the history between Korea and Japan appear unavoidable. Given this fact, it can be said that the 1998 Declaration of Korea-Japan Partnership was built on a fragile foundation. What is desperately needed at this point is a practical perspective which understands that Korea-Japan relations cannot be caught up indefinitely in a vicious, endless dispute over history.

In approaching Korea-Japan relations, the overriding premise should be that Korea and Japan are the two powerful countries in Asia where both a capitalist market economy and a liberal democracy coexist. Needless to say, the two countries are also important to each other in terms of trade, investment, and tourism. Considering the inter-Korea peaceful unification process and what is to come after unification, close cooperation between Korea and Japan is indispensable. Moreover, as co-hosts of the 2002 World Cup, they have a joint duty to host the event successfully.

Considering these factors, the two countries must do their utmost to overcome the present conflict and work towards building the kind of forward-looking partnership described in the 1998 Joint Declaration. Continuing along the road of nationalistic confrontation because of the history dispute will be harmful for both Korea and Japan. Rather, the countries should quell the emotions that have sprung from exclusive national interests, and instead concentrate on bilateral cooperation grounded in universal values. In order to forge ahead with building forward-looking bilateral relations, the voices for international cooperation and universal human values should be louder than those of the ultra-nationalists.

It is important to note, however, that the government certification of *The New Textbook* does not mean that the majority of historians or intellectual circles in Japan sympathize with the historical view of the textbook. Nevertheless, the core of the problem is that there is no strong counter-balancing mechanism that checks the senseless actions of a relatively minor group such as the one supporting the book. The Japanese government still holds some responsibility for failing to foresee the volatile and dangerous consequences of approving the textbook. What is of greatest concern is that the voice of the right wing, which only seeks its own interests, is gaining increasing ground in Japanese society amidst the silence and apathy of the majority.

The textbook controversy is no longer a matter of discussion but of waiting for selection by schools. Contrary to initial concerns, the percentage of Japanese middle schools adopting the Fushosha textbook has not even reached 0.1 percent.¹⁹⁾ Despite the discouraging figures (The Textbook Reform Society had aimed for 10 percent), the society is committed to moving forward with the publication of a high

19) As of August 15, of 542 school districts in Japan, no district had adopted the new textbook. Accordingly, it can be assumed that the public middle schools that form the majority of Japanese middle schools have decided not to use it. As for national and private schools where the principal can select textbooks, only a few schools have adopted the controversial textbook.

school textbook, government certification, and its widespread dissemination in schools. In the wake of the controversy, Japanese progressive intellectuals, civic and parent groups who campaigned fervently for rejection of the book have achieved encouraging results. Particularly notable is the activism of a group of mothers in Tochigi Prefecture and in Suginami, a district of Tokyo. They actually reversed the initial decision of the local school board to adopt the controversial textbook.²⁰⁾

On one hand, the history distortion issue is one of diplomatic conflict caused by the disparity in the perception of the Japanese imperialist history. However, in the larger picture, the issue is one of conflict between the thinking of the civic community promoting universal human values, and the narrow thinking of a nationalist faction that seek to promote its own ideological interests. The issue can also be seen as the results of the clash between the universal principles of the international community, whose aim is to achieve mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence among nations, and the narrow, ethnocentric values of the few. Seen in this light, it is important not to commit the folly of approaching the textbook controversy as simply a conflict of national interest between Korea and Japan. In other words, the solution to the textbook controversy should be sought from a perspective that transcends national boundaries and aims for universal human and civic values.

20) Civic groups in Japan are continuing their protest efforts against certification of the right-wing textbook and fighting for its rejection by education boards. For more details of the purpose and activities of the civic movement, visit the homepage of "Children and Textbooks Japan Network 21," the representative civic group for the movement. <<http://www.ne.jp/asahi/kyokasho/net21> >