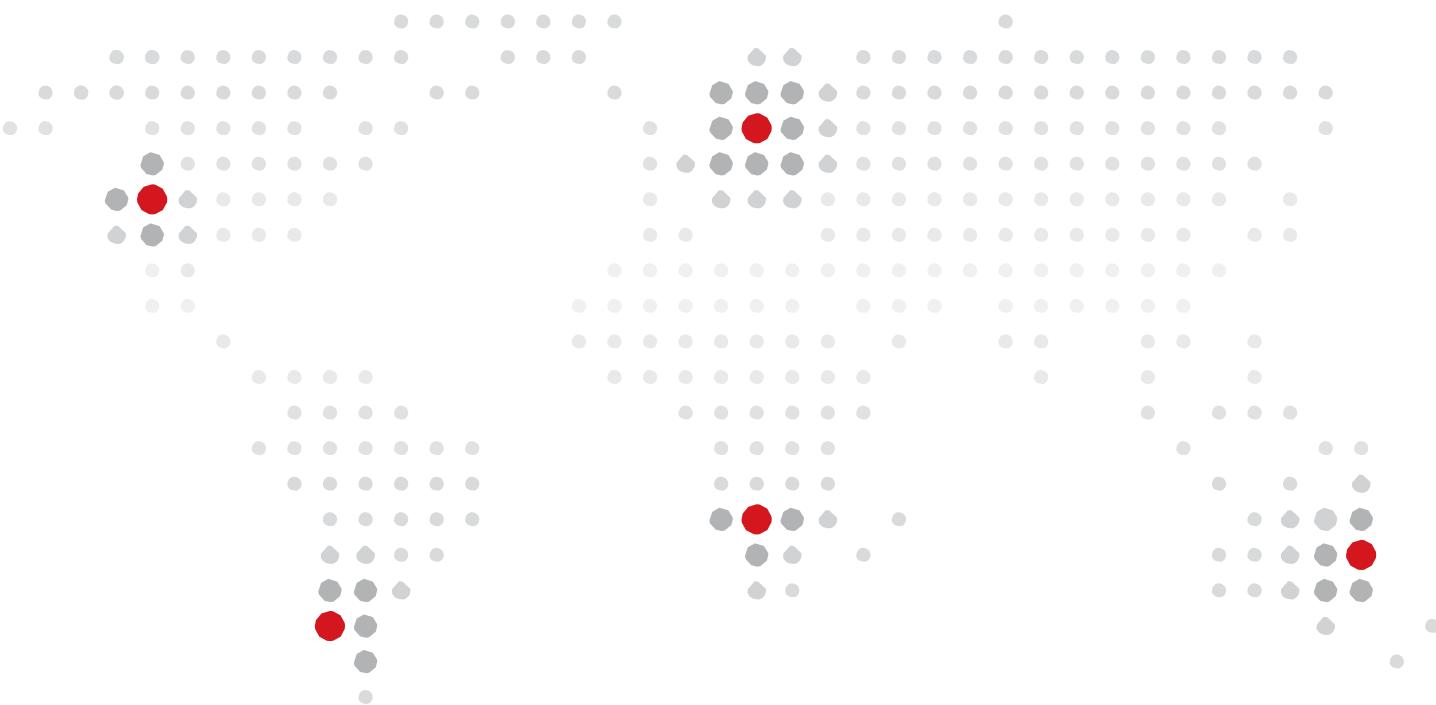


“Education and Patriotism”

A Documentary

Translated by Collin Rusneac

September 2018



“Education and Patriotism” (Kyōiku to aikoku)
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With an Introduction by Sven Saaler

[Video \(Japanese\)](#)
Mainichi Broadcasting System, 2017

Introduction

Collin Rusneac provides a full translation of the TV documentary “Education and Patriotism” (Kyōiku to aikoku) produced by Mainichi Broadcasting System for its series “MBS Eizō ‘17” and first aired in July 2017. It provides a critical look at recent debates surrounding the introduction of moral education in Japanese elementary and middle schools as a new subject and in particular focuses on the compilation, examination, approval and selection of textbooks for classes in moral education, while extending the analysis to the ongoing history textbook controversies.¹

Postwar Japanese society has seen intense debates in the field of education. In this context, attention often focuses on history, with lawsuits filed by historian Ienaga Saburō against the Japanese state and its system of textbook authorization—a process he criticized as censorship—at the center of attention, nationally and worldwide, from the 1960s to the 1990s. Since the second half of the 1990s, a political movement called “historical revisionism” (rekishi shūseishugi) took center stage in this context, and the Society to Produce New History Textbooks (Atarashii rekishi kyōkasho o tsukuru-kai), founded in 1997, emerged as the moving force. Notwithstanding its name, hardly any historians could be found in the ranks of the movement. One of the founders of Tsukuru-kai was Nishio Kanji. A scholar of German literature, in 1999 he published a massive volume titled “The Nation’s History” (Kokumin no rekishi), in which he laid out Tsukuru-kai’s master narrative of Japan’s trajectory. One year later, “The Nation’s Morals” (Kokumin no dōtoku), written by philosopher Nishibe Susumu, was published by the Tsukuru-kai, signaling the organization’s strong interest in moral education.

While much research has been undertaken since then on the Tsukuru-kai history textbook and the organization’s role in leading the movement of historical revisionism,² moral education has received only minimal scholarly (or journalistic) attention. This changed when Abe Shinzō became prime minister for the first time in 2006 and declared the strengthening of moral education in schools a major objective of his administration. At the initiative of the first Abe cabinet, teaching materials for moral lessons that had been circulated since 2002, the so-called “Notes of the Heart” (Kokoro no nōto), were actively promoted.³ After his return to power in late 2012, Abe referred to the revision of the Basic Law on Education undertaken during his first stint as prime minister, when he announced a further strengthening of moral education and the objective to eventually

¹ The original version can be seen here: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5vn15c>.

² For example, Sven Saaler (2005), *Politics, Memory and Public Opinion*. München: Iudicium; Sven Saaler (2016), “Nationalism and History in Contemporary Japan,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal/Japan Focus*, 15 October 2016

(Volume 14, Issue 20, Number 7), <https://apjjf.org/2016/20/Saaler.html>.

³ See Marie H. Roesgaard (2017), *Moral Education in Japan*. London: Routledge, chapter 4.

introduce morals as a proper subject. From 2014 on, new teaching materials titled “Our Morals” were distributed to Japanese schools—materials drafted by the Ministry of Education itself. These books constitute a state-prescribed set of morals to be inculcated in all children, without their being subjected to an examination process or outside control of any kind. While there are usually five to ten textbooks by different publishers from which local authorities (in case of elementary or middle schools) or schools (in case of high schools) can choose in such fields as language and history, “Our Morals” was a state-prescribed textbook (*kokutei kyōkasho*) distributed to every schoolchild in Japan, and is accessible online to anyone interested in moral education.⁴ Because of its character as a pilot project, textbooks produced by publishers for use in Japanese schools after the introduction of *dōtoku* as a proper subject (in April 2018 in Japanese elementary schools; April 2019 in middle schools) closely followed the contents of the ministerial books, not least because publishers feared problems during ministerial examination. The examination of the first postwar moral textbooks did lead to some awkward discussions about the desirable contents, as the MBS documentary reveals.⁵

It is against the background of these developments that moral education has become more widely debated in Japanese society. Questions were raised: since morals is not an academic subject, how would teachers acquire the necessary expertise to teach it? What morals—or whose morals—would the children be taught? What would the exams look like, and according to what standards would a teacher grade a child’s “performance” in *dōtoku*? Would new teachers be allocated to the schools, given that there was more teaching to do? Or would other subjects be cut down in order to make room for teaching hours in morals? (Or would the additional hours just be added to teachers’ working hours and the children’s study hours?) How would parents react to this interference in highly private and individual matters? Or would they appreciate their children being taught a lesson or two regarding respect towards others and manners? How would the reintroduction of a subject that was massively abused to mobilize the population during the Second World War and abolished in 1946 look to the outer world? If moral education was abolished after the war because of the role it had played during the war,⁶ then would a reintroduction not mean a return of Japan to prewar and wartime indoctrination practices? And how would non-Japanese children be graded in classes clearly designed to strengthen a Japan-centric version of nationality (though one that might include some references to an “internationalizing” Japan)?

⁴ The various editions of “Our Morals” for elementary and middle schools can be downloaded here: http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/26/02/1344132.htm.

⁵ See also Kei Nishiyama (2017), “From bakery to wagashiya: a textbook case of ‘moral education’ in Japan,” *the conversation*, 1 May 2017, <http://theconversation.com/from-bakery-to-wagashiya-a-textbook-case-of-moral-education-in-japan-75626>.

⁶ Though prewar moral education was called *shūshin* and the term chosen for postwar morals is *dōtoku*, the criticism against the reintroduction of morals emphasizes that the roles of the two are identical, and that this is exactly the core of the problem they see.

These questions strongly influenced the process of examination and approval of moral textbooks in the Ministry of Education, as well as the selection of textbooks at the local level. The documentary “Education and Patriotism” (*Kyōiku to aikoku*), whose narration is presented here in English translation, takes a highly critical look at some of these questions, though not answering all of them. It is a product of the growing debate about the meaning—and necessity—of state-sponsored values and value education. The overall picture is clearly one of strong political pressure—pressure that aimed at a strengthening of national consciousness among a youth allegedly devoid of national pride. Though nationalism (or patriotism) takes many forms in the textbooks and includes notions that could be considered universal, such as being nice to one’s friends or applauding the successes of athletes during the Olympics, the nation-centered if not statist rhetoric behind the advocacy of moral education under the Abe administration makes it difficult to criticize the policy without running the risk of being labeled an “asocial element” or an “anti-Japanese” (*hannichi*) traitor to the nation, a pattern increasingly observed in Japan (as elsewhere) since the 2000s.⁷ One of the interviewees in this documentary, historian Itō Takashi, explicitly uses the term “anti-Japanese” in describing critics of the current government and the moral education it advocates.

Beyond its academic value, the documentary is also highly recommended as a teaching resource for Japan-related classes. It reflects the intensity of debates regarding education in twenty-first century Japan and illustrates the diversity in Japanese society, which is far from being monolithically in line with the views of the government. This makes the introduction of a state-prescribed set of morals so problematic.⁸ The decision to open the country further to immigrants, the children of whom will be confronted with the state-centered *dōtoku* education, seems to be highly problematic in light of this background, and increasing frictions for teachers in international environments have to be expected.

Sven Saaler

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⁷ See Sven Saaler (2018), “21seiki no han-chiseishugi no shosō,” in Hasegawa Yūichi, Yoshitsugu Kōsuke, Sven Saaler (eds), *Kiki no jidai to “chi” no chōsen*. Ronsōsha, pp. 162-191; “Anti-Japan’ criticism hits film director, researchers who keep gov’t at arm’s length,” *The Mainichi*, 30 July 2018, <http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180730/p2a/00m/0na/008000c>.

⁸ Right before this contribution was completed, Terawaki Ken, a former bureaucrat in the Ministry of Education and currently a widely-known commentator of educational issues, published a highly critical book on the moral education introduced by the Abe administrations. Terawaki Ken (2018), *Abunai dōtoku kyōkasho* (The Dangerous Moral Textbooks). Takarajima-sha.

“Education and Patriotism” (Kyōiku to aikoku)

Translated by Collin Rusneac

*What is the polite way of greeting?
Saying “good morning” while bowing?
Bowing after saying “good morning”?
Saying “good morning” after bowing?
Correct answer: bowing after saying “good morning”.*

These are the new Moral Education textbooks for elementary school students. As a result of critical reflection regarding the prewar ideology of “Patriotism and Loyalty [to the Emperor]”, the hours of moral education in schools were highly limited. However, 72 years after the war, this ideology is making a comeback, and “moral education” will be re-introduced as a special subject starting from the next academic year.

Textbooks by eight publishing companies were released last month. Education officials browse eagerly and compare copies of draft textbooks that have not yet been approved. The revival of moral education is perceived as a major shift in postwar education.

(Former teacher) “We want to make a textbook that children will not tire of reading and that will leave a deep impression on them.”

(University professor) “The rules are tough for elementary school children. They are always told to do this, do that, be a good kid who knows how to behave...”

As long as they follow the ministry’s guidelines, the publishing companies can write freely about what to teach and how to think. However, the textbook examination system is a big hurdle [for publishers and authors]. There is a powerful influence behind the introduction of moral education: current Prime Minister Abe. During his time in opposition (2009-2012), he advocated political reformation of the education system.

(Prime Minister Abe) “The number one aim of education is to foster moral consciousness. Nineteen years ago, when I was a member of the Lower House, I introduced a bill to revive moral education and this proposal led to the implementation of changes in education. If you are saying that politicians should not interfere in education, I think that’s wrong.”

As a result of reflection regarding the war, in the postwar era the idea emerged that politics should not interfere in education. However, certain politicians have repeatedly voiced their opinions about the contents of textbooks and have advocated the adoption of certain textbooks.

This is the textbook of Ikuhōsha Publishing Company, which has been widely adopted, mostly in urban centers.

(Ikuhōsha representative) “(Through our textbooks) we are making proper Japanese people.”

(Reporter) “What do you mean by ‘proper’?”

(Ikuhōsha representative) “Not leftwing.”

There are publishers who have gone bankrupt because their [history] textbooks included passages about Japanese war crimes, such as the “comfort women” issue. According to academic historians’ research, “comfort women” were forcefully recruited and sent to the front. However, this has been criticized as untrue and “masochistic.”

A former editor of a publishing company that went bankrupt recalls:

(Former editor of Nihon Shoseki) “It was difficult to believe the extent of political meddling in textbook affairs. I’m still feeling exasperation from being forced into bankruptcy.”

The political move is to target certain textbooks and prevent them from being used in schools. Such actions which interfere directly in school affairs are increasing. Who is behind these acts of intimidation? What is really happening with our textbooks? Behind the scenes of the education system, an unprecedented transformation is taking place.

In March of this year, a new morals textbook was released which had an unexpected impact on the bakery industry. According to the ministerial examiners, scenes of bakeries had to be deleted from textbooks. In one segment, an old man and a boy visit a nearby bakery, highlighting their connection to the local community. Previously, this story was part of supplementary material for moral education lessons. In the scene, the bakery has since been replaced with a Japanese confectionary shop. Bakeries from all over the country communicated their concerns to the National Cooperative Association.

(Nishikawa Takao, head of the Japanese Association of Bakeries) “I thought, isn’t the process too simple, replacing bakeries with Japanese confectionary stores? I don’t know why they chose bakeries out of so many things. Are bakeries unpatriotic? Just because they check out four items from 200 disapproving points [in the ministry’s guidelines]?”

All textbook materials are examined according to government course guidelines. Mistakes and concerns are pointed out. After examining eight moral education textbooks,

more than 200 issues were raised by the examiners. The textbook with the bakery story was found to be inappropriate from the perspective of the category “respect for national tradition and culture and love for the country and hometown.”

(Aida Tetsuo, head of MEXT Curriculum Planning) “In order to be integrated into society, it is important to take an interest in your country and in the place you were born and raised. This is an important matter, which is why there needs to be guidance.”

What needs to be included in moral education lessons has been clearly stipulated in ministerial guidelines. More than twenty items are listed, including patriotism, moral judgment, self-restraint, manners, friendship and others. Creating moral education textbooks took close to four years and is said to have cost tens of millions of Yen.

Before the last stage, textbooks need to receive approval. For the verification process to be fair, the examination panel is composed of third-party members. However, the inspection panel always reaches the same decision as the ministry. Some people have indicated that the committee is just a formality.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, textbooks meet the requirements of the curriculum guidelines, and the publishers have the freedom to include their own learning methods and ideas in the materials.

A veteran textbook editor and member of the Publishers’ Union talks about the relationship between the examination system and the publisher:

(Yoshida Norihori, Secretary-general of the Textbook Policy Section of the Japan Federation of Publishing Workers’ Unions, Shuppan Rōren) “It’s a world of ambiguity right now. If, during the examination, editors receive a suggestion, they and the authors work on the necessary changes. This is where everything is decided. They will not tell us exactly what to put in the textbooks. But they will tell us that there is a problem with a certain part and they’ll ask us to revise. However, they won’t tell us how to change anything. There is a lot of external pressure, yet the responsibility of the editing lies with the publishing company. That’s how the system works.”

Depending on the textbook materials, this is generally how the process goes: the ministry examiner provides the editors with a list of points that have been highlighted by the approval committee, then leaves the room so they can discuss it; the editors discuss the points of inquiry, make their final decisions, then the inspector returns; the inspector asks the editors what and how they are going to change. The whole process takes less than two hours. It is difficult to grasp the true motive of the verification process.

The bakery industry thought it had built a relationship of mutual trust with the Ministry of Education through the school lunch system.

(Nishikawa Takao) “We worked very hard providing bread for school lunches. Our effort has not been recognized and this is extremely disappointing. Personally, I find this unforgivable. Claiming that we don’t love our country or our hometowns – are we really doing so many inappropriate things?”

There is a lot of debate over textbooks, in particular in the discipline of history. These days, however, political pressure and coercion have become a central part of this debate.

A man came to the ward office to read the new textbooks on display. His name is Ikeda Tsuyoshi and he is from Itabashi Ward, in Tokyo. He is the former editor of a large textbook company. Thirteen years ago, his company went bankrupt. He is interested in seeing how the textbooks have changed.

Ikeda-san used to work for Nihon Shoseki, a publisher that made state-designated textbooks before the war. Even after the war, it boasted a tremendous share of junior high school history books and their material was adopted by all 23 Tokyo wards. The turning point came with the textbook examination from 2001.

This was the approved Nihon Shoseki textbook at the time. For the first time, accounts of soldiers were included and the topic of “comfort women” came up.

(From Nihon Shoseki history textbook) *“Young women were forcibly recruited from Korea and other parts of Asia and were sent to war areas as ‘comfort women’ for Japanese soldiers.”*

Since then, some Korean women involved in this episode have filed lawsuits against the Japanese government. This historical awareness caused a diplomatic strain. It also stirred heated debate on the topic of “comfort women” within and outside of Japan. Conservative groups that do not believe that there was coerced recruitment involved started sending letters to textbook companies and increased pressure by demanding that publishers avoid the topic of “comfort women.” Because of this situation, the Nihon Shoseki textbook received public attention. One municipality after another stopped using the Nihon Shoseki textbook.

(Ikeda Tsuyoshi, former editor of Nihon Shoseki) “When the lid was opened, the outcome was drastic. My colleagues and I were all surprised by the effect. Just looking at Tokyo, 21 out of 23 wards stopped using our textbook. We did not expect that.”

Just before this, conservative researchers who criticize conventional history textbooks as anti-Japanese and “masochistic” launched a society called Tsukurukai (Japan Society for History Textbook Reform), which published a new history textbook. This society argued that descriptions of “comfort women” should be removed.

(Fujioka Nobukatsu, co-founder of Tsukurukai) “I can’t wait for this textbook to be read by everyone.”

In 2001, the Tsukurukai textbook was released. Most schools did not adopt the textbook and it ended up as a regular item in bookstores. The same year, however, the number of Nihon Shoseki sales dramatically decreased. Later, it was stated that the eventual bankruptcy of Nihon Shoseki was caused by the pressure exerted by Tsukurukai.

Prof. Yoshida Yutaka from Hitotsubashi University, a contributor to the Nihon Shoseki textbook recollects those events:

(Yoshida Yutaka, Hitotsubashi University, Department of Sociology) “They were clearly being targeted. Tsukurukai kept pushing this campaign about ‘masochistic’ textbooks from the start. They were targeting these textbooks and prevented them from being selected.”

Reflecting on the results of his research for the textbook, Prof. Yoshida said that he wanted to educate people about military mistakes and the tragedy of the war. However...

(Yoshida Yutaka) “Because of what I wrote, the sales of Nihon Shoseki textbooks plummeted, which ultimately led to the bankruptcy of the publisher. As a contributor, I felt responsible towards the editors and the company. Since then, I stopped writing textbooks. Even though I was asked numerous times, I never did it again. You could say it was traumatic for me.”

Ikeda-san rode the waves of this drama. Yet he still insists that it was not wrong for him to want children to learn an accurate account of history.

(Ikeda Tsuyoshi) “I think there are many dedicated writers. I personally feel that the destruction wars can inflict is a problem, and this should be properly conveyed to school children. If we don’t address wars properly, if we just talk about the [Japanese] victims of nuclear bombings and air raids, that is not a complete account of history. You should not avoid talking about the perpetrating side in textbooks.”

Currently, there are eight history textbooks for middle school. The strongly conservative Tsukurukai split into two groups, resulting in the publication of two new history

textbooks.

The Jiyūsha group is known for its stance on the mythological origins of Japan. In this mythology, the family tree of Emperor Jimmu includes the details of numerous gods that are considered his ancestors. On the other hand, of the eight textbooks, this is the only one that makes no mention at all of the Nanking Incident (1937) in which many [Chinese] civilians died.

Another history textbook was published by Ikuhōsha. This textbook also closes in on the mythological birth of the nation. In this Shinto version of history, there are detailed accounts of the Grand Ise Shrine and the Izumo Shrine. In addition, it distinguishes itself by mentioning the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890) as the foundation of people's morals, an idea from which other textbooks distanced themselves after the war.

Five years ago, after he resigned from government, Abe Shinzō participated in a symposium which advocated a “revitalization” of education in Osaka. The sponsors and the moderators of the symposium advocated the use of the Ikuhōsha textbook. Abe was able to express his opinions on textbooks in the presence of Matsui Ichiro, Governor of Osaka Prefecture and member of the Japan Innovation Party.

(Abe Shinzō) “When mayors and governors have strong convictions regarding education, they can change the Board of Education. For instance, I was surprised at the adoption of the Ikuhōsha textbook in Yokohama. One by one, the board members made their decisions as a result of their strong convictions.”

In order for Ikuhōsha textbooks to be adopted by other schools, Abe stated that all you have to do is replace the members of the local Boards of Education. Board of Education members are appointed by the mayor.

Two years ago, Osaka adopted the Ikuhōsha textbook in the midst of protests. Ikuhōsha history textbooks have 6% of the nation's textbook share now.

Ikuhōsha author Itō Takashi criticizes conventional history books. He started out at Tsukurukai and after the split he continued as a writer for Ikuhōsha.

(Itō Takashi, Tokyo University, Professor Emeritus) “I think all over Japan, there is this ‘masochistic view of history,’ which does not allow having pride as Japanese people. I’m not talking about teaching patriotism or anything like that. But instead of teaching the leftwing version of history, we should teach about the true Japan.”

He talks about the ongoing battles between Ikuhōsha and other textbook companies. Mr.

Itō's stance symbolizes the current conservative way of thinking.

(Reporter) "What is the number one requirement for history education?"

(Itō Takashi) "To promulgate a historical image of Japan without ideology. As a historian, I have to pass on this message. I think it's necessary to educate citizens about this."

(Reporter) "What should we learn from history?"

(Itō Takashi) "There is no need to learn anything."

(Reporter) "Could you explain that in more detail?"

(Itō Takashi) "Learning? What is there to learn? What do you mean...?"

(Reporter) "For example, why did Japan lose the war?"

(Itō Takashi) "Well that... Because it was weak."

(Reporter) "What are the education goals of Ikuhōsha textbooks?"

(Itō Takashi) "Well, basically, to make proper Japanese people."

(Reporter) "What do you mean by 'proper'?"

(Itō Takashi) "Not leftwing. Japanese who inherited the traditions and who will pass on the traditions. I think a considerable part of the current anti-government [camp] is left-wing. It's probably even correct to say that it is anti-Japanese."

Mr. Ikeda's company went bankrupt after publishing a textbook which included descriptions of "comfort women." He worries about the decline of the publishing industry:

(Ikeda Tsuyoshi) "After all, within this industry, even when the editors work hard, the company has to choose the direction in which to move forward. Management puts a lot of pressure on the editors. I think that as a person who is representative of how Japanese book companies are pressured into bankruptcy, this experience had a considerable impact on me."

After the textbook controversy stirred up by the "comfort women" issue, attention centered on the mass suicides during the Battle of Okinawa (1945). A fierce dispute followed in the Kerama Islands where the Japanese army was stationed. After the 2006

examination of high school textbooks, statements alleging that Okinawa residents were coerced into mass suicide using hand grenades following military orders were deleted.

Yoshikawa Yoshikatsu is a former middle school science teacher born and raised on Tokashiki Island. He was a chairperson of the Board of Education in his village. When he was six years old, he was at the site of the mass suicide. He continues to share that experience with young people.

Academic research about the Battle of Okinawa continues 72 years after the fact. Since the end of the war, there have been different textbook re-writes about the Battle of Okinawa.

(Yoshikawa Yoshikatsu, former high school teacher and Chairperson for Education)
“These young people have come here to learn more from this site and hope that this will never happen again. Please watch over us. Let’s observe a moment of silence.”

Ten years ago, one of the high school history textbooks mentioned the mass suicide incident as follows:

(From the history textbook) “*The Japanese army drove Okinawan residents out of their underground shelters and, accusing them of being spies, forced them to kill themselves and each other with hand grenades that were distributed. As a result, more than 800 people died (330 in Tokashiki village alone).*”

During the textbook examination, it was claimed that this description could invite misunderstandings regarding the actual situation in the Battle of Okinawa.

(Yoshikawa Yoshikatsu) “People kept silent because they believed such a situation couldn’t be avoided during the war. That’s why the mass suicide was seen as a myth. My heart is filled with anguish at this injustice.”

The textbook examiners noticed that five publishers toned down the contents that referred to military orders and military incitement of the suicides. In response to that, 110,000 Okinawan residents gathered to protest and debate the textbook examination. Ibuki Bunmei, the Minister of Education at that time, stated that if politics interferes in the content of textbooks, Japan would become a “scary country.” After that, the Ministry of Education ordered textbook companies to correct their descriptions about mass suicides. As a result, descriptions about the Japanese military’s involvement in the mass suicides were partially revived.

Yoshikawa-san joins a group of students in the forest where many residents lost their

lives. He recalls how he survived the ordeal:

(Yoshikawa Yoshikatsu) “The village headman said ‘Long live the Emperor!’ In a flash, hand grenades started going off and all hell broke loose.”

Before being captured by the US military, while the residents were killing one another or were being driven to suicide, Yoshikawa and his siblings held out by listening to their mother’s words.

(Yoshikawa Yoshikatsu) “I’m going to speak in Okinawan dialect to describe how it happened. I’m going to appear agitated. (Speaks in Okinawan dialect) ‘Yusuke, run! Take your brother and run! That’s right, humans should stay alive for as long as they can, you can die anytime later. Follow your brother,’ mother said. During those days, if you shouted in Okinawan dialect, you could be accused of being a spy.”

Regarding the toning down and the omitting of descriptions of mass-suicides, military orders and military incitement, “The History of Okinawa Prefecture” published this year in March includes the following statement:

(From “The History of Okinawa Prefecture”) “*Section III, The Battle of Okinawa and Textbooks. Beside the government’s perspective on Japanese national history, textbook descriptions are influenced by political aims and interpretations beyond the boundaries of academic research.*”

(Yoshikawa Yoshikatsu) “I would appreciate it if they stopped that interference from above. Whatever happened to whom, and whether history has changed, we should make a textbook that allows children to think about these things by themselves.”

As for mass suicides, the conclusion of the examination denies the involvement of the Japanese army. The government upholds its official position and rejects the claim that its demand [to delete references to coerced mass suicides] should be revoked.

A middle school teacher is making a fire by hand. He teaches about how humanity evolved by learning how to make fire. Teaching history through this effective method encourages students to formulate their own thoughts.

These teachers have gathered to create a new textbook that encourages students to think about history. This textbook is “The History of Humanity” published by Manabisha. The Manabisha textbook was adopted by some schools a year ago. Instead of making students memorize grand events chronologically, the textbook has been edited in such a way as to make one think carefully while raising questions about how history was generated by

human activity. It includes descriptions of “comfort women” that were missing from the textbooks published in the last ten years. However, the treatment of this problem is in line with the official stance of the government.

One of its co-authors speaks about his personal views:

(Honjō Yutaka, Manabisha author) “Insofar as the child’s point of view goes, the position of the nameless masses, the fact that it is not just powerful individuals who shape history, that people are the real heroes of history – these should all be part of the child’s perspective.”

Manabisha textbooks are mainly adopted by elite and private junior high schools throughout Japan. Their selling point is that they encourage critical thinking while following the guidelines of the Ministry of Education.

We tried to interview a few schools which used the Manabisha textbook. However, none of the schools replied to our requests. Why did this happen? The reason was that the schools had received a large number of postcards which claim that the textbooks are “anti-Japanese” and teachers should stop using them. All the postcards were sent anonymously, simply signed with “OB,” or “Old boy” as in “male alumnus.” On the back of the postcards are photographs of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45) depicting Japanese soldiers in beautiful settings or looking after children. Apart from this, the postcards refer to the description of “comfort women” in textbooks, stating that the position of the Japanese government [which acknowledges the existence of “comfort women”] is contrary to the facts, and insisting that this “anti-Japanese education” should be halted immediately. More than 200 such postcards were sent to each school.

(From a postcard) *“Your school has decided to use the Manabisha history textbook, which is the only textbook that contains false accounts about the comfort women and anti-Japanese information. What is your objective in teaching these anti-Japanese materials to our young generation? Stop this immediately.”*

Who are the people sending these postcards? Among the senders who used real names are the former director of Moritomo Gakuen in Osaka and one-time Abe follower, Kagoike Yasunori. There is also the mayor of a city who has been actively involved in revising the education system in accord with conservative ideals.

This is the mayor of Hōfu city in Yamaguchi Prefecture, Mr. Matsuura Masato. Mayor Matsuura was the chairman of the Council for the Revitalization of Education. Forty representatives from local governments participated in a meeting of this council. They have significant influence. This group shares the same secretariat with the Council for

the Revitalization of Education and they strongly promote the use of the Ikuhōsha textbook.

We decided to talk to Mayor Matsuura. Two years ago, there were changes in the legal system that allow mayors to participate directly in planning educational goals. This reduced the distance between education and politics.

(Matsuura Masato, mayor of Hōfu) “As for those in charge in a municipality, it’s been made possible for us to be involved in the field of education, and so our role has increased significantly. That is why the Council for the Revitalization of Education has over 150 members. Because history goes back to the beginnings of the nation, you have to teach it properly. When foreign states tell you nonsense and you say ‘Yes, that’s right’ and you put the topic aside and you move on with your future – you really shouldn’t do that.”

We asked him about the postcards complaining about the Manabisha textbook.

(Reporter) “Do you know about the Manabisha textbook?”

(Matsuura Masato) “Manabisha? I have no idea.”

(Reporter) “It’s a history textbook...”

(Matsuura Masato) “I don’t know.”

(Reporter) “It appears that there are some of these postcards...”

(Matsuura Masato) “Ah, yes, as I’m the head of the Council for the Revitalization of Education, I have to send the message to people that we need to use proper textbooks. Well, I guess that’s what this was. This is my hand-writing.”

(Reporter) “Has the message been sent out?”

(Matsuura Masato) “Yes, it’s being dispatched.”

(Reporter) “Have you read the Manabisha textbook?”

(Matsuura Masato) “Oh right, this Manabisha school, ahem, company. Well, I heard that their writings are biased.”

(Reporter) “Have you read it?”

(Matsuura Masato) “It’s more like I’ve seen it, rather than read it.”

(Reporter) “You’ve seen the cover?”

(Matsuura Masato) “Uhh, well, ahem, yes...”

We asked him about 20 or 30 postcards that were sent.

(Matsuura Masato) “Well, to the parties that feel that receiving these postcards was pressure, if that’s the case, then all I can do is to say that I’m sorry. If they feel that they’ve been pressured...”

In response to this series of events, the principal of a private school that uses the Manabisha textbook wrote an essay addressed to the teaching staff and posted it on the internet:

(From the principal’s essay) *“At the end of last year, an LDP prefectoral councilor demanded to know why we adopted this textbook. At the start of this year, an alumnus who is also an LDP member called me on behalf of the government and asked the same question.”*

After being questioned by these politicians, the complaint postcards started to arrive. On top of that, a certain newspaper started to report negatively about the Manabisha textbook and the complaints increased.

(From the principal’s essay) *“Each time a postcard arrives, the image that comes to my mind is of different people in a crowd wearing the same mask and it sends a shiver down my spine.”*

The principal concludes that he cannot help but feel that all these events reflect the pressure that comes from political quarters.

The Ikuhōsha textbook has been vigorously promoted by conservative politicians. Local governments have influenced the adoption of this textbook. In 2011, Ōta Ward became the first ward in Tokyo to adopt the Ikuhōsha history textbook. Five out six members on the Board of Education voted in favor of this textbook. Mr. Sakurai Mitsumasa, a lawyer and former Board of Education member, cast the only vote for a different textbook. After retiring from the Board of Education, he started thinking more deeply about textbooks. He wants people to grasp the different ways in which historical accounts are interpreted. For example, the description of the ancient Yamato Imperial Court:

(Reporter) “What does the Ikuhōsha version say?”

(Sakurai Mitsumasa, lawyer) “In the Ikuhōsha textbook, it is written that ancient key-shaped imperial graves, massive *kofun* graves and others show the prowess of the Yamato Imperial Court. They tell us that kings and clans had remarkable power. It is written that the political power which used the Yamato region as a base was the Yamato Court. The Teikoku Shoin textbook describes the iron pan being brought into Japan from more developed countries like Korea, as Japan did not have advanced smelting technology back then. Because Yamato possessed iron, the other clans decided to strengthen themselves by forming an alliance with the Yamato and that’s how they became united.”

At the behest of the citizens of Ōta Ward, study-groups focusing on the textbooks were held frequently. They also considered the preparation for the high school exams. Four years later, four members of the Board of Education chose textbooks other than the one published by Ikuhōsha.

(Sakurai Mitsumasa) “Regardless of one’s thoughts and beliefs, when it comes to choosing the best teaching material, one should consider and compare multiple points of view. Among the few materials that I read, I was thinking that I want my textbook to have considerable impact. What I’m trying to imply by high-quality textbooks is this: when I was a member of the Board of Education and I had to deal with textbooks, I did not want a textbook that catered only to intelligent children, but one that all capable children could use and learn from. When they look over it they should feel that it’s taking them somewhere. I believe that the academic depth of the textbooks is important.”

As a result of the critical reflection regarding prewar and wartime Japan, politics was not allowed to interfere in postwar education and a system was put in place to maintain that distance. But laws are being revisited when new governments come to power, and so this system is being shaken right now. Starting next year (2018), moral education will be introduced as a formal subject in middle schools. Decisions will have to be made about the textbooks.

Needless to say, textbooks provide the framework for knowledge and for nurturing children. Can political maneuvers regarding textbooks really be called a discussion that improves education? Who controls the textbooks? This is now the central question.



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