

Topics of Historical Memory in Japan*The History Textbook Controversy***“Japanese Textbook Controversies, Nationalism, and Historical Memory: Intra- and Inter-national Conflicts”**

Yoshiko NOZAKI and Mark Selden

June 15, 2009

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Yoshiko-Nozaki/3173>**“The Tokyo Tribunal, Justice Pal and the Revisionist Distortion of History”**

Nakajima Takeshi

October 31, 2011

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Nakajima-Takeshi/3627>**“Myth and Fact in Northeast Asia’s History Textbook Controversies”**

Mikyong Kim

August 15, 2008

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Mikyong-Kim/2855>**“The Nanjing Massacre. Changing Contours of History and Memory in Japan, China, and the U.S.”**

Takashi YOSHIDA

December 19, 2006

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Takashi-YOSHIDA/2297>

Another widely discussed facet of historical memory and, in a broader sense, national identity in postwar Japan, has been the controversies over Japanese history textbooks. Since the 1980s, Japanese neonationalists’ attempts to erase accounts of Japanese war atrocities from history textbooks has sparked intense criticism from Asian neighbors. On the flip-side, such attempts to whitewash the war also have faced strong opposition from within Japanese society, including intellectuals who consider it of utmost importance that history education preserves the memory of Japan’s wartime past and acknowledges war responsibility and war crimes.

Yoshiko Nozaki and Mark Selden begin this section by describing a series of neonationalist attacks launched on school textbooks in postwar Japan. Prewar imperialistic and militaristic narratives were removed from Japanese history textbooks during the U.S. occupation (1945-52) and, since then, neonationalists have aimed at reintroducing a more affirmative interpretation of the war. Textbooks from the 1950s and 1960s that were more outspoken about war and war crimes, such as the ones co-authored by Ienaga Saburō, were later denied authorization by the Ministry of Education. The greater involvement of foreign critics in the 1980s textbook debate has kept Japan’s history textbook controversies in the spotlight.

As Nakajima Takeshi explains, Japanese neonationalists have developed a distorted version of the role of Radhabinod Pal, a judge in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (Tokyo Trials), to champion their views that the Tokyo Trials were nothing more than “victor’s justice.” Using this and other arguments, neonationalists have tried to

minimize Japanese war responsibility and beautify Japan's war as one of "Asian liberation." This neonationalist narrative is on full display in several controversial textbooks that have been approved by the Ministry of Education but are only used in a few schools.

Mikyoung Kim takes her investigation of history textbooks one step further by comparatively analyzing Japanese, Chinese, and Korean textbooks. History education in all three places, she concludes, still stands in the way of reconciliation and the creation of a transnational East Asian regional community. On a similar topic, Takashi Yoshida puts the historiography of the Nanjing massacre in the wider perspective of debates between progressive historians and conservative historical revisionists in Japan. Then, he introduces a number of museums that directly and indirectly deal with Nanjing, and traces the importance of the Nanjing Massacre in the history textbook debates.