

Use of the Internet by political actors in the Japanese-Korean Textbook Controversy

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Does the Internet “level the playing field”?

The Internet generates changes in politics. But does it change politics? Opinions on the quality of those changes differ widely. While some believe that the Internet “levels the playing field” and makes it easier for NGOs and activists to take on large organisations or bureaucracies, others say that in spite of new forms of communication, the essence remains the same (See Norris 2001 and Coleman 2001 for accounts of hopes and expectations). Transnational activism offers itself for a study on the impact of new technologies on political success and equality, because transnational issues have always been the domain of states. Non-state actors used to lack the resources to engage in bilateral or multilateral issues. New communication technologies, most of all the Internet, could change that.

The Internet with its new, informal, and horizontal ways of communication provides a better platform for minority groups, researchers argue. Access costs are far lower than for traditional media, and networking across borders becomes much easier. The Internet sticks out as a potentially useful tool for transnational activism, exemplified by growing movements like those concerning human rights or women’s rights issues. On the other hand, the “digital divide” may

hamper the democratic benefits of the Internet if it benefits mostly those who are already interested and influential. It is debated whether the new technologies will close or even widen the gap between “information-rich” and “information-poor” groups and societies (cf. Norris 2001 for more on the “digital divide”). Practical concerns regarding the Internet include complaints that as a text-based medium it does not offer any radical, qualitative changes in communication, that information is still mostly screened or even censored, and that privacy issues are rarely addressed (Axford 2001: 15, Åström 2001: 19, Taylor, Kent, and White 2001: 266). In addition, the fragmented nature of the Internet may reinforce a split into mini-public spheres, where discussion only takes place between like-minded people, and users only look at those websites² whose opinions they agree with (Dahlgren 2001: 76, Åström 2001: 5).

Practical implementations of Internet projects in political contexts differ from country to country. While most research is probably done on the situation in the US, countries like Sweden, the UK, or Korea are also examined. Japan and Korea³ are interesting research objects because on the one hand, both are advanced countries with a high access rate to computers and high tech gadgets. About half of the 47 million Koreans and 120 million Japanese use mobile phones, and the number of Internet users in South Korea was 16.4 million in August 2000, in Japan about 23 million in February 2002. In addition, 50 million Japanese also had access to the Internet via their mobile phones, although some may not actually use this option, not least because it is comparatively expensive (MIC 2001, Sōmusho 13.12.2001 and 29.03.2002). On the other hand, both countries use a non-roman script, and the wide difference of language makes it difficult for most people to make use of the English-dominated Internet – familiarity of a society with the English language has been noted as one factor closely related to Internet usage (Norris 2000: 128). An interesting difference in the Japanese and Korean script is that Korean (Hangul) is basically an alphabetic script which can be input directly via the keyboard, while Japanese requires additional keystrokes to transform roman letters or the Japanese syllable alphabet into Sino-Japanese characters. Some people argue that this is one reason why Koreans use the Internet with greater ease than the Japanese do: Internet chatting is easier and faster in Korean, and that provides a major motivation for many to use the Internet in the first place (Kim Changsu 2001). Some figures suggest that a large majority of Japanese would prefer handwriting to typing because their typing speed is below 15 wpm (Sight and Sound 5 April 2002).

Not only the script and the availability of computers has led to the Korean Internet boom, however. The government promotes the use of the Internet vigorously, both with action plans to reduce the digital divide and to provide access for many, and by increasing the openness and

information output of official institutions. Most government agencies have at least one website with extensive information, services, and links, and more than half offer Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) or chat rooms. (National Computerization Agency 2001, cf. Park 2001). Uhm and Hague (2001) are confident that in Korea the “virtuous circle” (Norris 2000) works and the Internet does indeed increase political participation of people previously not interested in politics. By comparison, progress of Internet technologies into political life is slow in Japan. Many observers agree that in spite of some government IT projects (“e-Japan”), the Internet has not yet become a major factor, and established hierarchical patterns of interaction do not look set to change because of new technologies.

Quite a number of paradigms in Japan and Korea are not only different from each other, but from other countries as well. This makes it difficult to establish which factors are defining for the use of the Internet by actors in these countries. For an overview over possibly important factors and some initial hypotheses, however, the textbook issue in Japan and Korea provides a convenient field of study. It is a transnational issue involving countries where the technological infrastructure for wide Internet usage is available, but English is not a lingua franca. The issue involves a variety of state and non-state actors, and is similar to previous disputes about history and history textbooks that occurred before the Internet existed.

An analysis of the issue should show some general patterns of Internet usage by different actors—governmental and non-governmental, conservative and progressive, Japanese and Korean—and of the effectiveness of various Internet-related methods of activism. It also serves to shed more light on some of the differences between Japan and Korea, resulting e.g. from government policies or language features, which must be taken into account for comparing the situation in both countries. Of course, findings from this research can only offer preliminary results and perhaps give some input into the design of a proper comparative study.

The 2001 textbook affair in Japan

This part gives a brief overview over the facts of the so-called “textbook affair” which occurred in Japan during summer 2001. Private organisations in Japan and abroad protested against a new, nationalist history textbook, and were joined by some governments of neighbouring countries. The details of the Japanese textbook approval and selection system, and different views of history, complicated the issue.

In April 2001, the Japanese Ministry for Education ([MEXT](#)) approved 8 history textbooks for use in middle schools, among them one newly screened book, the “New History Textbook” (新しい歴史教科書: Nishio 2001), written by the neo-nationalist group “Japanese Society for

History Textbook Reform,” or [Tsukurukai](#).⁴ Only books that have passed the screening by MEXT can be selected for use in schools. This screening system has previously led to protests, mostly because leftist books had been censored. In a famous case, the history professor Ienaga Saburō sued the Japanese government for over 30 years (1965-1997) because portions of his textbook covering the so-called “comfort women” issue, the “Rape of Nanjing” or the human experiments of Unit 731⁵ were rejected in the screening process (Japan Times, 29 August 1997, Canada Association 1997). In another “textbook affair” in 1982, media reports that the ministry had rejected such passages led to a diplomatic row between both countries.⁶ This time, however, the protests went against the approval of the new book—although the ministry had demanded 137 revisions in the text of the book, quite a number of instances remained that opponents regard as “distortions of history” (MOFAT, 9 July 2001, Network21, 9 July 2001, YMCA 2001, Conachy, 7 June 2001).

History is a sensitive issue between Japan and Korea (and some other neighbouring countries). Previously an independent, sovereign state, Korea was annexed by Japan from 1910 to 1945. During that time, Koreans were forced to speak Japanese and use Japanese names. As “Japanese citizens,” they were drafted into the Japanese military or into forced labour. The majority of women who were forced or lured into sexual slavery for the Japanese military, the so-called “comfort women,” were Koreans (Hicks 1995, Tanaka 2002). After the war, the peninsula was divided between the influence spheres of the Cold War: two Korean states were formed and fought against each other in the Korean War. Numerous Koreans who had come to Japan during the colonial period remained there. They lost their Japanese citizenship, however (including benefits such as veterans’ pensions), and those who stayed now constitute a discriminated minority. Japan established diplomatic relations with South Korea in 1965 (none exist with the communist North). Since then, Japanese politicians, prime ministers, and even the Diet, have issued numerous statements expressing various degrees of regret for the past which nevertheless failed to satisfy the Korean demand for an “apology.” Statements denying wrongdoings are also frequent, although officials who make them are often forced to resign afterwards (cf. Ducke, forthcoming).

It is not surprising, therefore, that Koreans concern themselves with the contents of Japanese history textbooks. Because the textbook approval system gives the textbooks that passed the screening official legitimacy, protests against this textbook were directed against the Japanese government. In fact, a clause introduced after a previous row over history textbooks stipulates that the Japanese government should consult the neighbouring countries on the contents of textbooks. The South Korean and Chinese governments were accordingly asked for comments

in 2001, but few of them were integrated in the final decision (MEXT, 13 July 2001).

The ministry's approval of the textbook led to a storm of protests against the decision. The governments of China and South Korea complained "through diplomatic channels," (Napsnet, 3 July 2001) and citizens' groups staged protest demonstrations. At the same time, efforts were made to prevent the book from actually being used in schools: after the centralised approval of several textbooks, the Japanese system for middle school textbooks presents another hurdle to textbooks in form of local selection committees. In a rather complicated scheme, 544 regional committees each select one book for a number of local committees they advise. Usually, the local committees confirm this decision, and all schools in their area use the appointed book. In 2001, however, massive activist intervention caused one of the local committees to reject the decision of the regional committee (which had been in favour of the Tsukurukai book).

Eventually, this and all other regional committees decided against the controversial book; it was selected only in a handful of private or special needs schools not subject to this selection system (Saaler 2002).

Likely reasons for the widespread rejection of the book include local and national activism, partly using the Internet, as well as pressure from abroad. The protests from South Korea were most prominent. They included statements by the government, private activism, and cancellations of bilateral exchange activities, for example between sister cities or school sports teams.

Internet activities of some major actors:

This paper will examine the Internet activities of some of the major actors in the Japanese-Korean "textbook affair" of 2001. The focus of the study will be on activists and the problems and benefits arising for them from the Internet. Does the use of the Internet indeed facilitate their networking, and improve their effectiveness? I have examined a range of activist groups from both Japan and Korea. They differ in the influence they had on the affair and in the degree of Internet usage. All are activist publics in the sense that they "organize in order to influence another public or publics through action that may include education, compromise, persuasion, pressure tactics or force" (Taylor, Kent, and White 2001: 263). However, they do not necessarily unite in a common transnational campaign by forming "explicit, visible ties and mutually recognized roles in pursuit of a common goal" (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 6).

In addition, the Internet presence of some involved state actors, such as ministries, is also considered.

I have selected the groups and organisations mostly by their relevance to the textbook affair, and to some extent by their Internet presence. Groups most actively involved and most visible in the

protest movement and in the media coverage of the issue were naturally included, as well as concerned parties such as the Tsukurukai and the Ministry of Education. Other groups are included somewhat randomly; there were more groups similar to those considered here that had an Internet presence and were slightly involved in the issue. Some organisations have been left out because they did not mention the issue at all on their websites, like the [Japan-Korea Cultural Foundation](#).

Protest movements against the new textbook

[Network21](#)

Arguably one of the most influential actors in the textbook affair was a Japanese NGO called “Children and Textbooks Japan Network21” (子供と教科書全国ネット21). It had developed from the support network for Professor Ienaga Saburō, a Japanese history professor who had written textbooks that were controversial because of their left-wing leanings. His partial victories against the conservative screening practices of the education ministry had influenced the textbook landscape. While most textbooks in the 1990s started to mention issues of Japanese war atrocities, the liberalisation also generated a backlash by the neo-nationalists, including the writers of the “New History Textbook.” Ienaga’s support network, which had previously protested against the censorship of the screening system, continued to campaign, this time against the new textbook. During 2001, their focus soon shifted from the ministry and the screening system to the local selection committees.

Network21 is based in Tokyo and links activists all over Japan. The website maintained by the secretariat in Tokyo is a major part of the campaign activities linking local organisations. It is devoted entirely to the textbook issue and offers extensive background information as well as links to similar sites. The news articles posted on the website during the affair were generally more concerned with future protests than with descriptions of past activities: the site regularly posted urgent appeals ahead of committee meetings. Even though newspapers reported on official protests made by the Network, those were often not posted on the site as press releases, or only several days later (English Donga, 01.08.2001).

The reason for this is apparently a lack of resources, as secretary-general Tawara Yoshifumi explains: Urgent matters like upcoming events are given priority for input on the website. Interactive pages were largely limited to online membership application and the provision of an e-mail address and offline contact information. A proper Bulletin Board System is not even planned for fear of damage. The group had the page set up by a professional web designer in

1999, and decided against a BBS after discussions about safety. Planned additional measures include a comment form and Q&A pages to be maintained manually. Both were “under construction” during the whole period of the textbook affair. The organisers would feel more in control with such a solution than with a BBS—but of course, it also offers the opportunity to edit (or censor) unwanted comments e.g. by opponents of the group.

Network21 also maintains a mailing list which is limited to members. The secretariat occasionally forwards questions to this list which were sent to the main e-mail given on the homepage but which the secretariat could not immediately answer.

The group judges its use of the Internet as “very effective.” Campaigns became much faster and more manageable compared to earlier activities. In a similar campaign in 1996/97, for example, appeals were only sent out via fax and telephone. In 2001, the website offered not only the necessary background information but also all the necessary contact addresses of committees or committee members, including e-mail, fax, postal and Internet addresses, as well as dates of protest activities and information meetings. In some cases, the site offered direct links to the comment function of relevant Internet pages of the institutions where appeals should be addressed, such as the comment site of the [Tokyo Metropolitan Government](#) (Network21, 7 and 8 August, 2001, Internet). The number of hits per month rose to almost 10,000 in 2001, almost ten times as much as a year earlier. Network21 estimates that, like e-mails received, about 20 to 30 per cent of those visits were by opponents of the website’s contents. Tawara notes that the presence on the Internet is not only effective for the activists themselves. Their opponents, too, can use the information provided.

The group has also experienced a much-increased reaction from abroad: although “language is still a problem,” as Tawara concedes, an increasing number of foreign groups has got in touch with Network21, some of them via sub-groups based in Japan. Korean groups in particular often have outposts in Japan, according to Tawara, and communicate with the group in Japanese. Other responses, however, are in English, and this apparently poses a problem when people send lengthy letters and materials in English. Network21 itself only offers a very limited English-language website which is rarely updated.

Overall, the Internet homepage has certainly proven worthwhile for Network21’s campaigning and network building, although the group admits that its organisational structure has not changed much, and that new problems have arisen while others were being solved.

[Textbook Movement Headquarters](#)

The “Headquarters of the movement to correct Japan's textbooks” is an umbrella organisation of Korean civic groups protesting against the new textbook. It has worked together with

Network21 in campaigning against the book and its selection in schools. Both groups were subsequently active in forming new Japanese-Korean joint organisations for history research. The group's website offers full online and offline contact information, background materials, links to Japanese and Korean organisations, several bulletin boards, and a chat function. It also provided the text of a fax appeal sent by Network21. The group uses e-mail for most internal communication and circulation of materials.

For networking and the initial establishment of contacts, however, personal contact is generally more effective than Internet communication, according to a representative of the group.

Contacts with Japan are additionally hampered by language difficulties, he agrees with members of other activist groups—usually they have only very few bilingual members, and computer encoding also used to pose a considerable problem for transnational e-mails (Kimijima, 19 March 2002: interview).

[Antijapan](#)

One of the most influential Korean websites operating against the New Textbook was a site run by three high school students. Young people tend to be most media literate with regard to New Media (cf. Huggins 2001: 132), and unsurprisingly, they are the ones who actually use the technological potential of the Internet to promote their views. The site is called “Antijapan” and organises “cyber demos.” Antijapan uses a combination of manual means and software to attack websites in rather simple DOS (Denial of Service) attacks. Established in protest against the Japanese textbook (hence the name) in May 2001, Antijapan has since managed to crash the Warner Brothers website in protest against a programme on Korean dogmeat eating. Some of their members may also have been involved in a crash of the Olympic server in Salt Lake City in protest against the disqualification of a Korean speed skater. The site has some information, several links to similar groups, and a Korean Bulletin Board System (a BBS in English was only introduced later). Notices on the BBS explained the strategy of “virtual sit-ins,” which consisted of many Internet users continually reloading the pages that were to be attacked—especially the site of the Tsukurukai, but also of a supportive newspaper, the Education Ministry, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, and some other organisations. Additionally, protesters were asked to send a comment to the Japanese Prime Minister's office via the comment form on its homepage.

The “cyber demo” was briefly mentioned in Japanese media and received considerable attention in South Korea (Asahi.com, 13 August 2001, SBS, 15 August 2001, cf. Hangyore, 6 February 2002, Korea Herald, 21 January 2002). While the Tsukurukai, which was directly affected by the “cyber demo,” was (afterwards) aware of the group's activities, people at Network21 had

only heard vaguely of the “cyber demo” but did not know who was behind it. It was “one way of protesting,” the group’s secretary-general said, although Network21 would not endorse it. For the students who founded the site, cyber demos were a convenient and less time-consuming alternative to traditional offline protests, which have a strong tradition in Korea. They see their activities not as illegal hacking but as an extension of other citizens’ protest movements. Given the importance of the Internet in Korean society and education, it was not difficult for them to set up the site and find supporters. While the effect of the cyber demos in Japan may have been rather low, they certainly gained much attention in Korea.

International activist groups

Several international groups were active in campaigning against the new book via the Internet. One rather visible website was that of the Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's War Responsibility, [JWRC](#), which offered information on the New Textbook (10 July 2001), links, and an “International Scholars’ Appeal” against the ministry’s decision of approval. The letter could be signed online and by the end of 2001, boasted close to 400 signatories, many of them well-known scholars. More than half of them were based in the US, the remainder predominantly in Asian countries, including Japan.

As most of the activist sites considered here, JWRC does not offer a BBS or chat room, although it provides an e-mail address and offline contact information. The JWRC site had mutual Internet links with the Network21 homepage; a number of other websites offered links to the letter of appeal or directly posted it on their own page (e.g. Critical Asian Studies, 31 December 2001).

Another group is the [Takashima Kyōkasho Soshō o Shien suru Kai](#) (Group for Supporting the Takashima Textbook Lawsuit), which offers various information on their cause, offline contact information (also for membership application), as well as a number of links, including a link to Network21. The group is one of 12 signatories to the April 2001 appeal co-ordinated by Network21.

Other groups in Japan and abroad

[The Tsukurukai](#)

The opponent of the above groups is the “Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform” (Tsukurukai). At least in its own understanding it is a citizens’ protest movement, too, namely

against the “steady decline of national principles due to the loss of a national historical perception” (Tsukurukai 1998: 3). It was established in 1996 and used e-mail from the start, but set up its own website only in December 2000. No special funds were set aside for this. A regular employee designed the website with software and computers already available at the office. Updates were made frequently but not regularly during the summer of 2001; many pages remained “under construction”. For example, even links to regional chapters were limited to 2, although at least 5 groups have websites. Interactive features lack almost entirely—the homepage does not even offer an e-mail address. Only a telephone and fax number is given as a contact address.

A Tsukurukai member explained the lack of interactive features with security concerns. Not only was the homepage successfully attacked by the Korean group “Antijapan” (see above), but the Tsukurukai was also the target of an arson attack in early August. As of February 2002, they were negotiating with a professional IT company to establish a BBS and a mailing list with appropriate security measures.

While the group does not offer many opportunities for feedback on its own website, it did use the Internet for its own research and to communicate with other actors: the Tsukurukai regularly checked websites of involved institutions and groups. When a parliamentarian of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, Kan Naoto, posted critical views of the Tsukurukai on his website, the group protested and published the whole exchange on its own website (25 July 2001).

Mindan

The resident Koreans in Japan constitute a rather peculiar factor in Japanese-Korean affairs. They number about 700,000, and many of them have been born in Japan as descendants of Koreans who came to Japan during the colonial period, searching for work or forcibly brought in as forced labourers. The textbook affair clearly affected the Korean minority, a group particularly sensitive to Japan’s approach to history. The Korean community is still discriminated against in Japan, and two organisations continue lobbying for Koreans’ rights: one is in favour of communist North Korea, the other one, representing an increasing share of the resident Koreans, in favour of South Korea. While the pro-North Korean organisation, Chosoren, did not have an accessible website during the textbook affair, the pro-South Korean group, Mindan, set up a homepage in 2000. So far, the homepage does not offer interactive features but is largely limited to some background information and a reduced online version of the most recent newsletter.

In September 2001, the online newsletter mentioned protests of a local chapter of the group against the selection of the controversial textbook by a private school. Another article reported

on a meeting organised by Network21 where Mindan representatives had taken part. The print version of the newsletter included several more articles on the issue (Mindan Shinbun, 29.8.2001). The group remained low-key on the issue, though. A Mindan member explained that it would have been counterproductive if Mindan had too openly sided with the Japanese protest groups, because Japanese conservatives liked to complain about “illegitimate foreign intervention.”

Mindan’s limited use of the Internet regarding the textbook affair is probably not so much due to technical problems—only two staff members are in charge of the homepage and still struggling to set it up and use it effectively—as to an essential reluctance to raise the issue for strategic and lobbying reasons. The group does see the potential of the Internet, and it might have speeded up the Internet project had it aspired to a more activist presence.

Other groups

A number of groups that were not primarily concerned with the textbook affair or Japanese-Korean relations also mentioned the issue on their websites, or joined the protest movement with statements, appeals, or links to the activist organisations mentioned above. They include the YMCA homepage (September 2001) reporting a protest by the Seoul YMCA, Asian organisations in the US (Okinawa Peace Network, 17 April 2001), the Hong Kong based [AHRC](#) (8 August 2001), and [IMADR](#) (19 April 2001), an international network originating from another Japanese minority, the Burakumin. Japanese history associations like the [Historical Science Society of Japan](#) (10 July 2001) and left-wing organisations like [Weekly Zenshin](#) (16 April 2001) or the [World Socialist Web Site](#) (Conachy, 7 June 2001) also covered the issue.

State-actors’ homepages

[MEXT](#)

On official Japanese homepages, the textbook affair played only a minor role. The Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT)⁷ was directly involved in the controversy, but did not devote a separate area of its website to the issue. Only in July, when the Minister made an official statement regarding the textbook approval, was a direct link to this statement available on the homepage. Apart from this, however, the ministry’s website offered no comments, information, or links on the issue. The Minister’s statement of 9 July appeared on the website in Japanese, but not in English. The Embassy of Japan in South Korea later provided a Korean translation (Embassy of Japan in Korea, 2001). The statement asserted that only 2 of the objected items were factual errors and needed to be changed, but also included the intention that

the ministry would “make efforts to prevent such problems from happening again.”

Apart from providing a postal address and an e-mail address, the ministry invites comments on certain topics defined by the ministry. However, the textbook issue is never mentioned in the comment page; throughout 2001, MEXT issued no call for comments on this topic on the page.

MOFA

While the ministry in charge of the textbooks, MEXT, ignored the issue almost entirely, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), provided information occasionally on its website. Apparently it did not perceive the topic as an “issue”, however. Items related to the new textbook were not grouped together, but appeared in various sites, for example in press releases or in information on bilateral relations with South Korea; direct links from the ministry’s homepage were rare. Mostly, the new textbook was mentioned in the transcripts of Question and Answer sessions of press conferences with the Minister or Vice Minister, brought up by journalists. MOFA usually provided these texts only in Japanese; in the (smaller but still rather extensive) English version of the website, the issue was rarely mentioned.

Although MOFA’s Internet presence is extensive, the website includes mainly materials that would usually be made available in print or on press conferences: official statements, treaties, press releases, etc. The actual contents of the site differ depending on the department providing them, and generally few materials are offered in English. Other languages are not available, not even on bilateral relations. Instead, numerous links include those to Japan’s embassies and consulates abroad. The site of the [Embassy of Japan in Korea](#) was not always accessible during the summer of 2001, but offered some information in Korean on the textbook issue, such as Korean translations of important official statements.

The ministry’s website offers few interactive features, namely an e-mail address and a form for comments and questions. It states expressly that not all questions will be answered, nor posted on the site. E-mails addressed to the ministry are ideally either dealt with by one of the officials in charge of the website (one for the Japanese and one for the English version), or forwarded to the relevant division, but rarely answered in either case. In 2001, the ministry received a total of about 200 e-mails regarding the textbook issue. By comparison, total e-mails received numbered about 100 per week on average. Other topics, such as whaling or then Foreign Minister Tanaka Makiko, clearly received greater attention. On history issues, far more e-mails were addressed to the Prime Minister’s office than to MOFA (cf. MOFA, 30.11.2001, Yomiuri Shinbun, 17.8.2001).

A ministry official explained that many of the messages received were chain mails originating from NGOs; about 80% of the mails to the English version are usually related to such

campaigns. With another 10% being advertising, only 10% of messages received were actual questions.

Yet, MOFA has decided against a BBS, mostly for security reasons and fear of abuse, according to the official. Only the intranet, which encompasses MOFA and the embassies abroad, offers a BBS for internal use. The Internet presence itself is regarded as a “must,” however. With an access number of about 10 million hits in January 2001, and over 50 million in September, the website had become more than just a service provided, insiders say. The general pressure and the expectations of users and customers appear to produce a stronger motivation for MOFA’s Internet activities than official government requirements.

MOFAT

The South Korean foreign ministry, in contrast to the Japanese ministries involved, covered the issue extensively on its website. Throughout the summer, the homepage had a direct link to the page offering information on the textbook affair—with a clearly visible large button showing a map of Japan, a book and the words “history” in Chinese characters (thus recognisable also by Japanese readers). The button was only replaced in autumn, after the turmoil had subsided. The foreign ministry regularly updated its page on the textbook affair, at least the Korean version. The English language version usually followed several days later, while Japanese translations of the statements were only put on the homepage of the Korean embassy in Japan. The Korean site of the ministry also offers interactive tools like a cyber forum, a comment site and e-mail addresses.

The strong Internet presence of the Korean ministry in this issue, compared with the Japanese MOFA, is certainly related to the greater importance the issue had in Korea. A ministry official said it was “no question” when the Japan division demanded that direct button to the textbook page, that the button was provided. Usually the divisions would argue about who gets that extra attention, but in this case, nobody disagreed. In addition, the government policy in South Korea appears to emphasise the importance of the Internet far more than is done in Japan. Clear directives exist, for the Foreign Ministry as for all other government agencies, to put information on the Internet and to consult the public via a BBS or question & answer forms. The official emphasised that Koreans use the Internet a lot. He noted that during the summer, the ministry had received often more than 100 postings per day on the BBS concerning the textbook issue (compared to about 200 in a year at the Japanese counterpart).

Even here, however, the Internet is not utilised to its full potential. The ministry has no division in its own right dealing with the Internet, and the structure of individual departments has not changed at all. Decisions regarding Internet representation are made on an ad-hoc basis, and

interactivity is in fact limited. Most of the comments on the BBS were very emotional if not “rubbish,” according to the ministry official, and few would get an official response or even influence policies. He also complained of the additional workload generated by the advent of the Internet. In spite of the undisputed benefits, it made life “harder rather than easier.”

Conclusion

The websites studied show a few general patterns regarding the Internet use of various actors in the textbook issue. While a number of similarities shared among all actors could be detected, differences are more clear-cut between Japanese and Korean actors than between state and non-state actors.

An obvious trend is the increase of Internet usage. All actors report that their own and their customers’ use of the Internet has greatly increased over the past years. Those responsible for the website say that the Internet presence generates more workload. The effect on state and non-state actors is not widely different: while large organisations create a new position to deal with the extra workload, in smaller organisations the same people also benefit from Internet-related improvement (they would otherwise send faxes and letters). In the short run, until the timesaving effects hit in, this often puts extra pressure on small organisations, though.

Another common feature is that the networking with other groups and individuals continues to take place mainly offline. At least initial contacts are usually established in personal meetings; later, e-mail links become increasingly important. Although new technologies improve the means of communication for activist groups, the issue studied here does not suggest that the Internet generates any qualitative changes in activists’ campaigning and networking. In many ways, e-mail is similar to the telephone and fax exchanges it replaces, or often only complements. Different from accessing Internet pages or message boards, you still need the name and address of a person to send an e-mail, and at least in Japan, an introduction will ensure that the person does in fact answer. Ministries, too, use Internet and e-mail only in addition to their “usual channels.”

Common to all groups and organisations was also that their efforts to link with others abroad were limited, regardless of the extent to which they used the Internet. This was probably due to language problems: at least activists against the Tsukurukai textbook would have found a sympathetic audience in the other country, too.

As for the differences, a comparatively wide gap can be observed between the Korean and Japanese usage of the Internet.

Korean websites, both those of state actors and of NGOs, tend to appear more professional. They have more features and more interactive elements than the websites of Japanese actors.

In Japan, the scope of professionalism is rather broad, although state actors generally have somewhat more refined websites than small activist groups.

Both governmental and activist actors in Japan frequently mention concerns about security issues, although that does not necessarily mean that they make extra efforts to protect their site. Instead, they give these concerns as a reason—perhaps a welcome excuse—for not offering interactive features such as Bulletin Board Systems. For smaller, activist actors, this may be reasonable if they lack resources and knowledge regarding proper protection of their site. It is interesting, however, that Japanese ministries voice the same concern, while Korean organisations rarely care about security issues.

Most of the differences between Japan and Korea in this respect are unlikely to be inherent to the textbook issue; but it may have reinforced some of them. To some extent, the “security” argument is probably related to the reluctance of many Japanese organisations to invite a discussion with opponents on such a controversial issue (even within Japan). They address mostly their established audiences without making many additional efforts to attract new readers to their pages. Taylor, Kent, and White (2001: 278f.) found that activist organisations’ websites they studied often missed opportunities to serve their policy goals even if they had a technically satisfactory Internet presence. They apparently often failed to demonstrate responsiveness and create trust, and to provide the necessary information and incentive for their audience to act. Japanese activist organisations still seem to struggle with technical issues. The subtleties of interactivity and responsiveness may still be a step further ahead.

Korean websites, on the other hand, are usually rather well designed and include interactive features, too. As Korean opinion on a topic like the textbook issue is rather unanimous, it was not difficult for activists to gain support within the Korean Internet community. This may have enforced the Korean organisations’ willingness to invite discussion on the topic. At least from within Korea, they could expect mostly support. In addition, the average age of activists was probably somewhat lower in Korea than in Japan due to the different nature of the issue in both countries. In Japan, it is clearly an “education” issue. Most people become interested in textbook policies only when their children use these textbooks, and many of the active Japanese protesters were middle-aged or older. In Korea, the issue attracts similar types of activists, but also all kinds of people interested in politics and bilateral relations with Japan, including young people with patriotic feelings, like the students of Antijapan. Different age levels would serve to explain some of the differences in the use of new technologies, as computer and Internet literacy is far more widespread among younger generations.

In the textbook issue, transnational aspects even widened the gap between Japanese and Korean

Internet usage. Japanese activist groups could achieve much with simple one-way communication to their members: by offering contact information for committees and institutions which they should influence with letters, faxes, or telephone calls, or by staging street demonstrations. This would be less effective from Korea. What more effective way than a virtual attack would a small group like Antijapan have had to influence organisations in a different country? Even sending faxes or letters is more expensive. Many of their supporters participating in the cyber demos may not have made the effort to post a letter.

The study touches on a number of general differences between Internet usage in Japan and Korea. They cannot be considered in depth in this paper, but factors include government policy, language, (technological) infrastructure, and cultural aspects. The Internet policy promoted by the Korean government seems to be more pro-active than that in Japan. The Korean script is more convenient for keyboard input than Japanese. Some even argue that discursive culture in Korea is generally more confrontational and more immediate and fast-paced than in Japan and thus better suited for Internet debates (Hopfner 2000).

The textbook affair reveals only a very limited impact of the availability of the Internet on activists' campaigning. Activists can and do reach more people, who might not otherwise have joined the organisation or participated in a campaign, and the groups themselves judge the effort to be worthwhile. The Internet offers some benefits to them but no real breakthrough in the effectiveness of their activism, compared to previous, similar activities. They still do not use the Internet to its full potential.

Representatives of governmental websites tend to emphasise that their organisation could not afford to have no presence on the Internet, but that the increased information exchange does not alter their organisation's policies. Even if their websites explicitly invite comments, insiders remark that their organisations have not become more responsive to activists. Indeed, direct protests to official websites rarely generate a response or any discernible impact. In large numbers, they certainly serve as one more public opinion barometer for officials and governments to consider. On the other hand, activists' arguments do reach officials better than previously if they are well presented on the web.

Transnational exchanges between the actors involved also did not increase significantly due to the Internet, even between activists who could gain most from such exchanges. One of the major obstacles to the globalisation of activist networks may still be language (and encoding technologies), at least in regions where English does not easily serve as a lingua franca.

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Representatives of:

Mindan

MOFA

MOFAT

Network21

Textbook Movement Headquarters

Tsukurukai

Notes

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² I use the term “website” for any collection of files provided by an organisation or grouped around one topic, which are available on the Internet. They may be stored on different servers and have quite different addresses (as in the case of Antijapan), but all of them are accessible from one “homepage.” An alternative term for “website” would be “web presence.” In the bibliographic references, I list the address for the homepages of all the groups and organisations studied, plus additional addresses of some pages within their website when I specifically referred to them in the text.

³ Although I occasionally use the term “Korea” for convenience, only South Korea (Republic of Korea) is considered here. North Korea (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea) has only recently introduced limited e-mail access for some of its citizens. The communist state is very secluded, and pro-North Korean websites are (to my knowledge) generally based outside the country (mostly in Japan).

⁴ The full Japanese name is “Atarashii rekishi kyōkasho o Tsukurukai” (新しい歴史教科書をつくる会).

⁵ “Comfort Women” was the euphemistic term given to military sex slaves during the war, who were drafted by force or false promises into brothels operated by or on behalf of the Japanese army. Their number has been estimated at about 80,000 to 200,000, the majority of whom were Korean.

The term “Nanjing Massacre” refers to the invasion of Nanjing by Japanese troops in 1937, when allegedly up to 300,000 people were killed, most of them civilians (cf. Chang 1997).

Unit 731 of the Japanese army conducted germ warfare experiments on Chinese civilians.

⁶ Later, it turned out that the objected change of a critical passage had never occurred. For a detailed account of the affair, see Ortmanns-Suzuki 1989.

⁷ Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, or Monbu kagaku shō 文部科学省 (MEXT is the official abbreviation).