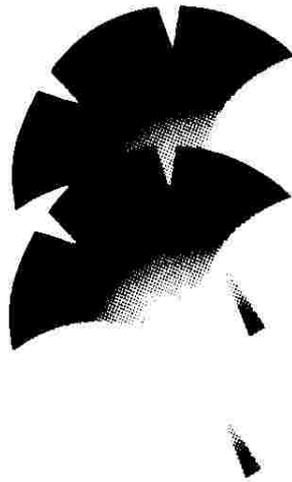


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**The History Textbook Issue 2001.**  
**A successful citizens' movement or foreign intervention?**

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## Introduction

In spring 2001, the Japanese education ministry Monbukagakushō<sup>1</sup> approved a so-called “New History Textbook” (新しい歴史教科書). Published by Fusōsha, the book (Nishio 2001) was written by the “Tsukurukai”,<sup>2</sup> a group of neo-nationalist activists, who had long announced that they wanted to challenge the “masochistic view of history prevalent in Japan”. The ministry’s decision led to a considerable diplomatic row between Japan and neighbouring countries, mainly South Korea and China, who protested vigorously against the approval and use of the book. The “textbook problem” dragged on over several months and the relationship between Japan and these countries turned sour.

It was not the first time this happened—a similar diplomatic row over history textbooks had occurred in 1982. Due to the war and colonial history, history textbooks are a sensitive issue in East Asia. South Korea and other countries take a particular interest in what is taught to Japanese students, while in Japan many people reject any “interference” in Japan’s textbook selection process. They regard the selection of school textbooks as an internal affair and argue that foreign governments merely utilise the issue for their own ends when they are in domestic trouble or need a scapegoat. Thus arises a dispute about the legitimacy of foreign comments and demands concerning textbooks, making the debate about school textbooks an international relations issue.

In this article, the issue will be regarded in the context of bilateral Japanese-South Korean relations. Several questions concerning the South Korean government’s involvement must be addressed.

First, we will consider whether the South Korean government did indeed utilise the issue for its own ends. Even if it did so, does that make the protests an illegitimate interference in Japanese domestic affairs? Apart from its formal or moral legitimacy, it is interesting to

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<sup>1</sup> 文部科学省 or MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology).

<sup>2</sup> The full name of the group is “Atarashii rekishi kyōkasho o tsukurukai” 「新しい歴史教科書をつくる会」, or “Association to produce a new history textbook”, but the abbreviation Tsukurukai is widely used.

see whether this interference was effective with respect to the textbook issue. Did the South Korean government achieve its aims regarding Japanese policy changes? Finally, the impact on overall bilateral relations is considered. At least in some aspects, the issue clearly was not a purely domestic issue, given the repercussions it had in the international arena.

Further points for discussion are general trends in textbooks as well as education in international comparison, particularly in Asia. Which domestic and international factors influence these trends, and how do they in turn affect international relations?

### **Domestic or international?**

One of the major factors in the textbook debate is the question whether it is a domestic or an international issue. Aspects of instrumentalisation and formal or moral legitimacy are essential to this question. The content of the textbook is disputed by Japanese critics as well, but apart from the content debate much of the discussion centres on the legitimacy of foreign protests. This legitimacy is contested with the argument that the Korean government instrumentalised the issue in order to divert attention from its economic problems and the slow progress in relations with North Korea, and therefore focussed on an originally domestic Japanese issue suited to catch South Korean media attention. If the South Korean government indeed utilised the textbook issue for its own ends, was this the only reason to take up the issue? Even if it was utilised for other purposes, it may well be that the government was also genuinely concerned about the development in Japan.

Even with respect to *formal* legitimacy it is quite difficult to determine whether the protests were legitimate or not, as international standards are vague on the issue of interference. Therefore, the question of *moral* legitimacy and of instrumentalisation should also be considered, along with previous patterns of such an instrumentalisation of history issues in East Asian international relations.

### Legitimacy of foreign interference

It is difficult to establish whether the Korean moves regarding Japanese history textbooks *legally* constitute an “illegitimate interference” in Japan’s domestic affairs. Although there is an

understanding that it is not “right” to interfere in another state’s domestic affairs, the actual legal foundations are vague. Trautner points out that usually no clear distinction is made between intervention and interference. While in diplomatic usage, the term “intervention” is used to describe legally acceptable acts; in legal terms, it denotes a clearly unlawful act (Trautner 1999: 85). The term “interference” apparently has a very broad meaning and is used here as a neutral term.

The principle of non-intervention is generally traced back to the concept of sovereignty in the post-1648 Westphalian state system in Europe. Different from earlier (European) state systems, where sovereignty was split between various levels inside and outside the state—local chiefs on the one hand, Pope and Emperor on the other hand all had a share of “state power”—in the Westphalian system the state itself became the single unit combining all legal authority and thus all state sovereignty. The term sovereignty was developed by Jean Bodin in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as a tool to claim such universal power concentrated in the hands of the ruler of a state. Thus developed a system of states that possessed not only internal sovereignty (where the final authority was bundled in one hand), but also external sovereignty, i.e. freedom from external influences (Bertele 1998: 9–17).

Today, Article II.7 of the UN Charta is quoted as a concrete legal source for the non-intervention principle. However, as it concerns the freedom of member states from interference by the UN, the same principle cannot easily be transferred to interstate relations. Interference in interstate relations is covered in a declaration of the UN General Assembly of 24 October 1970, but the definition of interference in this text is clear only with regards to a military intervention. Rather vaguely, “threats against the *domaine réservé*” of a state are also mentioned, i.e. its political, economic or cultural parts acknowledged as within the sole sovereignty of the state. In any case, notes Bertele, the declaration is not binding but only meant to describe the existing law of the nations (Bertele 1998: 176f.).

This leaves wide room for the interpretation of sovereignty, interference, and its legitimacy in non-military cases. Even the meaning of intervention is contested in spite of the more defined

military or coercive overtones. Different interpretations of sovereignty and even of the nation also shift the possible meanings of intervention—and more so, of interference (Weber 1995: 12, cf. Doty 1996: 123). Sovereignty itself has arguably many socially constructed aspects and depends much on “international public opinion”: the recognition or non-recognition of states by other states being a clear indication for this social construction of sovereignty. In some cases, as Inoguchi and Bacon point out, international recognition can be the only basis for sovereignty of some weak states who lack all other aspects of sovereignty (Inoguchi and Bacon 2001: 288, cf. Biersteker and Weber 1996: 12). The preconditions for international recognition can shift over time, and arguably they have increasingly incorporated moral values over the past decades (Katzenstein 1996, Fujiwara 2002).

Given the lack of concrete legal handholds on the meaning of intervention or interference, this meaning largely depends on international discourse, which can again be shaped by the contestants. Arguments in this controversy often refer to natural law or general notions of morality. In the case of the Japanese history textbooks this is particularly obvious. South Korea would be in no position to threaten Japan militarily or economically, even if it tried. The strongest measures taken by the South Korean government were arguably statements and appeals to international public opinion. While Trautner concedes that an interference even with non-military means, particularly economic ones, could still be illegitimate, he also argues that based on international law they cannot and should not in general be regarded as illegitimate. He notes that every state may have a legitimate interest even in domestic affairs of another state, as these can have repercussions in the own state. Embassies regularly inform their home state about such internal affairs, and it would be absurd to ban this practice on the grounds that it is a form of interference (Trautner 1999: 57, 83).

In fact, in the case of Japan there exists even a kind of formal framework for other countries’ interest in Japanese history textbooks: Since the 1982 textbook affair the Japanese government has repeatedly promised to consider the opinion of neighbouring countries. The “neighbouring countries clause” (近隣諸国条項) which was included in the screening guidelines for textbooks in response to the textbook row in 1982, states Japan’s intention to consult neighbouring

countries regarding the context of textbooks: “Concerning relations with the neighbouring Asian nations, necessary consideration should be given to the facts in modern history from the standpoint of international understanding and cooperation.” (MOFAT, 10.7.2001, Internet). In 2001, differences arose over the practical rules for this “consultation” on textbooks: South Korea and China were asked for comments on the screened textbooks. They demanded a number of changes regarding “distortions of history”, most of which Monbukagakusho rejected as “not factual errors”. This was widely seen as a violation—at least in spirit—of the “neighbouring countries clause” (Satō et al 2001: 212, Tawara 2001a, Internet).

Based on legal considerations it is nearly impossible to claim that Korean moves constitute a formally illegitimate interference in Japan’s *domaine réservé*. They were neither linked with military or other threats nor intended to change the Japanese authority structure or the Japanese political, economic, or cultural system.

### Instrumentalisation and Moral Legitimacy

The *moral* legitimacy of interference is somewhat more debatable. Yet, it can certainly be argued that the teaching of history affects foreign relations at least as far as history shared with other countries is concerned, and that those other countries therefore have a legitimate interest in influencing the contents of history textbooks. The argument that “there are also mistakes in Korean [and other countries’] textbooks” (e.g. 1982: Shūgiin Jimusho 20.8.1982: 6, cf. Zakaria 2001) does not hold—many such mistakes affect only domestic groups and therefore do not raise the question of international interference and its legitimacy. Where bilateral issues are touched, however, textbooks become effectively a part of international affairs. Interference is then generally considered morally legitimate: in Europe, bilateral textbook commissions have successfully operated since 1951, and the UN have advised countries to consider other countries’ positions in the textbook production or screening process (Markiewicz 1993: 183, cf. Hajari 2001: 10).

Japanese critics of the interference therefore argue in a somewhat roundabout way to deny moral legitimacy to foreign interference. The South Korean government, they say, is instrumentalising the issue for its own ends, for example in domestic conflicts. They employ vague

moral notions that this is “wrong,” but make their arguments appear as if they were based on standards in international law.

Indeed, South Korean reactions to the textbook issue show numerous shifts between a hard-line stance and a softer position, which seem more related to other interests than to the actual developments in the textbook affair. For example, the South Korean government’s initial reaction was to stop the opening process to cultural exchanges and cancelled bilateral events, but from mid-July, the statements suddenly became more reconciliatory. South Korea’s Kim Dae Jung administration certainly was in a difficult situation, and it is easily conceivable that it tried to use the textbook affair to divert attention from domestic problems (cf. Kitazawa 2001: 51, *Asahi Shinbun* 27.7.2001: 3, *Yomiuri Shinbun* 21.8.2001: 2, *Yomiuri shinbun* 3.8.2001: 1, *Asahi.com* 17.8.2001, Internet, cf. MOFA 7.8.2001, Internet).

Yet, this does not mean that Korean protests were motivated *only* by such strategic considerations, as some members of the Tsukurukai and other proponents of their book (including Monbukagakushō) like to argue (cf. Tawara 2001: 27, Kobayashi 2001, Tateno 2001: 88f.). The South Korean government obviously had a certain interest in this issue, considering that not only a large number of South Korean nationals live in Japan, but also that the textbook covers common Japanese-Korean history and thus shapes the Japanese view of this neighbouring country. Apart from cancellations of various official events, the Korean parliament passed a resolution criticising the Japanese government’s position on the textbooks (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 18.7.2001: 1, *Asahi.com* 20.07.2001, Internet), which may be a tactical move, but is a meaningful diplomatic act nonetheless. South Korean citizens also displayed concern with eye-catching protests (Tawara 2001: 29, Hajari 2001: 8). While the actual extent of outrage in the Korean population is debatable, the strong reaction discredits the argument that Korean protests were “not genuine,” although instrumentalisation strategies may also have played a role for the government.

### Debates over history as a recurring pattern

The row over history textbooks and their relevance to other countries is a recurring feature in East Asian relations, mostly with some reference to Japan’s war record.

Previous textbook debates had focussed on left-wing textbooks, such as those of Ienaga Saburō, and their failure to pass the official screening system because they included sensitive issues such as sexual slavery in wartime military. In 1982, reports about changes in a textbook demanded by the ministry led to a major diplomatic row, although it later turned out that the concrete incident that initiated the debate had not even taken place. Yet, misunderstandings and a lack of communication led to an escalation of the quarrel, which took months to cool down. Efforts were then made to improve the understanding regarding shared history.

South Korea used the textbook row of 1982 as one means of leverage in negotiations over a major loan from Japan (Ortmanns-Suzuki 1989: 166). In 1982 just as in 2001, the Korean parliament made a formal statement demanding a correction in the Japanese textbooks (Shūgiin Jimusho 9.8.1982: 12).

Similarly, in China, Deng Xiaoping picked up the issue to divert criticism from his own policies. He even propagated the issue of the Nanjing massacre, which had previously been ignored by the Chinese government because the massacre had affected the Kuomintang rather than the Communists. For Deng, the Japanese textbook issue made a convenient target to demonstrate toughness against Japan, after being attacked for his soft stance on the US and Taiwan (Buruma 1994: 126f.). In these issues, South Korea and China easily agree in their condemnation of the Japanese position (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 25.7.2001: 6, Chung 2001: 20), which is more obvious in 2001 as both countries have moved much closer.

The Japanese reaction to such foreign statements included the accusation of “interference” in both 1982 and 2001. In 1982, even the Japanese Education Minister Ogawa argued that Korean protests constituted an (illegitimate) interference in internal affairs. At that time, the remark itself stirred new protests because it was added to a long line of *bōgen* (bad remarks) by Japanese politicians (Nishioka 1992: 57). Still, the Japanese foreign minister Sakurachi maintained as late as 20 August 1982 that “even the South Korean and Chinese governments apparently understood that this is an internal affair”. (Shūgiin Jimusho 20.8.1982: 5, 12). The same argument was used in 2001, although not by government officials: members and supporters

of the Tsukurukai saw school textbooks as a purely domestic topic. They argued that interference is a violation of international diplomatic rules and disturbs bilateral problems relations. (Tsukurukai 25.7.2001 and 26.7.2001, Internet).

### South Korean actions against Japan

The actions South Korea took against Japan in the context of the 2001 textbook affair consisted of concrete bilateral steps—both public and private—as well as activities in the international arena. During the course of the affair, the South Korean government itself took concrete steps such as halting several exchange programmes and by its tough stance encouraged private organisations to cancel such events. Additionally, it tried to turn international public opinion<sup>3</sup> against Japan, a strategy which had worked in the 1982 textbook affair and even more so in the “comfort women” issue (Asahi Shinbunsha 1997: 46; cf. Shūgiin Jimusho 9.8.1982: 3). The Korean parliament even adopted a resolution to “denounce Japan in the international society” on the textbook issue (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 18.7.2001: 1), although this was in fact only attempted at the UN World Conference against Racism (WCAR) in Durban on 2 September 2001 (*Asahi.com* 3.9.2001, Internet) and in the UN Subcommission on Human Rights in August (Napsnet 17.8.2001, Internet). Further Korean plans for naming and shaming Japan were thwarted by world events. The special session on children by the UN General Assembly in New York, to be chaired by Korean President Kim Dae Jung, had to be postponed to May 2002, and eventually even a long-rejected Japanese-South Korean summit meeting took place. (*Asahi Shinbun* 9.9.2001: 21, cf. UN homepage 12.9.2001, 18.1.2001, Internet, Kim Ji-ho 11.8.2001, Internet).

Thus, South Korean actions in the international arena remained largely limited to threats. On a bilateral level, however, concrete steps were taken as well.

### **Effectiveness of South Korean protests**

Were the South Korean protests effective in preventing the use of the book? They did not achieve a reversal of the Japanese government's decision to approve the book. But among other factors, public and

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<sup>3</sup> For a reflection on the term “international public opinion,” see Nishitani 2001.

official foreign protests may have influenced the local selection process for the schools. Other major factors included domestic groups in Japan, and international media pressure.

### Domestic groups

Japanese domestic efforts certainly had a strong influence—at least on the local selection process. After the ministry’s approval of a total of eight history textbooks for use in schools, more than 500 local committees had to decide which of the books was to be used by the public schools in their area. Citizens’ groups and other groups such as teachers’ unions actively tried to influence that decision.

The opponents of the textbook successfully formed networks and linked up with Korean groups, as well as visiting the Korean National Assembly (Tawara 2001: 29, *Kodomo to kyōkasho* 21.8.2001, Internet, Kim Hyung-jin 30.8.2001, Internet). They concentrated their activities according to the support rates of left wing and conservative teachers’ unions in order to maximise their effect (Tateno 2001: 84).

Thus they were able to mobilise considerable protest activities that probably influenced decisions in some selection committees: be it because the committee members were convinced by the petitions flooding in, or afraid of further harassment, as Tsukurukai supporters argue (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2.8.2001: 3, *Asahi.com* 18.8.2001, Internet, Tsukurukai 22.8.2001, Internet). Eventually, none of the local committees selected the book. Only 11 private and special needs schools where this selection system did not apply decided in favour of the book, giving it a “market share” of 0.039% (Embassy of Japan in Korea, 12.9.2001).

### South Korean public reaction

For many committees, the South Korean public reaction must have been an additional incentive to decide against the controversial book, especially if schools in their area had partnerships with South Korean schools, or other bilateral events were scheduled. The Korean side cancelled many exchange activities, such as sports events or cultural exchanges between partner cities—76 cities in Japan reportedly have a partner city in South Korea. By mid-July 2001, at least 84 exchange events had been cancelled, many of them holiday visits between schools (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 21.7.2001: 31). Several Korean teams

cancelled their participation at sporting events in Japan, including 17 soccer events, as of 13 August (*Sankei Shinbun* 14.8.2001, Internet). Usually the organisation concerned directly contacted the partner organisation in Japan. The Japanese textbook committee members would have known about the concrete impact of the issue in their region, and may have made efforts to prevent further disappointments (cf. *Yomiuri Shinbun* 21.7.2001: 31)

Korean (and Chinese) government protests contributed to this atmosphere in Japan that caused local committees to abstain from selecting the book. In this, the Korean government and the Tsukurukai agreed—only that Kim Dae Jung called this “good common sense” (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 10.8.2001: 2), the Tsukurukai “intimidation” due to *gaiatsu* (foreign pressure) and “organised interference” (*Asahi.com* 18.8.2001, Internet, Takamori 24.8.2001, Internet).

### International media

In 2001 as in 1982, a media war was the major reason why the issue reached such a high profile (cf. Bridges 1993: 61). While in 1982 the dynamic resulted mostly from Japanese and Korean media quoting each other in turns (Ortmanns-Suzuki 1989: 135, JSP1983: 208, Nishioka 1992: 56), in 2001 the main antagonism was between *Asahi* and *Sankei Shinbun* (*Kodomo to kyōkasho* 9.8.200, Internet, *Asahi Shinbun* 4.9.2001: 33); Korean newspapers of course contributed to the critical atmosphere in South Korea (Fujisawa 2001: 128).

Even outside Asia the issue gained some critical media attention, particularly in the US: It was reported, for example, that US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Secretary of State Colin Powell had voiced concern about the impact of the issue on East Asian relations. Armitage was even reported to have called the Japanese refusal to revise the book again “unacceptable” (*Asahi Shinbun* 30.7.2001: 3, *Wall Street Journal Online* 25.7.2001, Internet, cf. *Korea Now* 28.7.2001: 10–11). Many Japanese would certainly take critical US statements more serious than critical statements from Koreans. Negative coverage in the US has also been mentioned as a factor in the 1982 textbook affair (Shūgiin Jimusho 9.8.1982: 16).

### Effectiveness on the bureaucratic level

On the bureaucratic side, effects of foreign protests were limited. Changes in Monbusho policies are sometimes traced back to intervention from MOFA and thus to international concerns (Leitenberg 1996: 32). Earlier changes in the Japanese textbook screening system are attributed to external pressure, mostly resulting from the 1982 textbook affair (Otake 1994: 23, JSP 1983: 208, Bosworth 1993: 188, cf. Harashoboh 1995: 620 f.), and the institution of the “neighbouring countries clause” in the textbook selection process is evidence of some form of submission to foreign criticism.

Before approving the book in 2001, Monbukagakusho applied the rule of asking neighbouring countries for comments, and while it did not comply with China’s and South Korea’s claims during the screening process, subsequent comments implied a certain concern within the ministry that it would be better if the Fusōsha book was not selected. An official statement mentioned “efforts to prevent such problems from arising again” (今回のようなことが 再び起こることのないように努めることといたしました。) and the will for more co-operation (MEXT, 13.7.2001, Internet).

The decisive factor in 2001, however, was the system used to adopt textbooks. Impact of the protests on the bureaucratic level was not strong, but it was not particularly relevant for the final outcome either. Through the involvement of local committees, the actual use of the book could be avoided without any need for decisive government action. Indeed, official statements during the textbook row often demonstrated satisfaction with the state of affairs without any acknowledgment that further action was considered or might be necessary (MOFA 10.7.2001, Internet, MOFA 17.8.2001, Internet). Before the outcome of the selection process was known, the tenor of Korean officials was also more that of frustration about being disregarded than of successful influence (MOFAT 9.7.2001, Internet, KCNA 16.7.2001, Internet).

### **The textbook issue and Japanese-Korean relations**

The textbook issue has often been linked with various bilateral friction, and has sometimes been cited as one or the only reason for such friction. Most of them concern not easily quantifiable “soft issues”

like cultural exchanges, World Cup preparations, fishery rights, or tourism. If the textbook issue did indeed affect other bilateral relations, this would mean that it is definitely an international issue.

When the Japanese Monbukagakusho decided to make only two of the changes demanded by South Korea, the Koreans responded furiously. The immediate measures the South Korean government took to demonstrate its protest were of a more symbolic nature, but had an economic or security side as well. Military exchange events were cancelled and the process to increase cultural exchange was stopped (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 18.7.2001: 1, *Korea Now* 28.7.2001: 10–11). The government also warned of other diplomatic measures, such as revoking the 1998 joint declaration, or changing the official reference to the Japanese emperor (*The Digital Chosun* 10.7.2001, Internet). In August 2001, South Korea issued an immigration ban on 25 Japanese thought to have committed atrocities in Korea during the war. Although Korean officials maintained that research for such steps had continued since 1997, when the immigration law was changed, and that the timing of this announcement was incidental, it does appear like a reaction on the textbook and Yasukuni issues (*Asahi Shinbun* 17.8.2001: 1). The South Korean government also finally joined private groups in demanding the removal of mortuary tablets from Yasukuni Shrine. The families of fallen Koreans enshrined there had demanded so before, but in July 2001, the government supported their claim for the first time (*Asahi.com*, 18.7.2001, Internet).

Cancellations of bilateral exchange events also affected a number of sports exchanges, as mentioned above. Some of them were directly linked to the World Cup. Accordingly, Korean observers in particular (including the South Korean foreign minister) expressed concern that the textbook issue would directly affect the bilateral preparations and co-operation for the World Cup (*Donga.com* 23.7.2001, Internet, *Napsnet* 24.7.2001, Internet, *Asahi Shinbun* 4.9.2001: 33). A South Korean company producing World Cup goods even replaced the logos of Japanese sponsors with Korean flags and vowed to use about one third of their sales to support the protest groups opposing the Fusōsha book (*Yomiuri On-Line* 15.8.2001, Internet). Although the antagonism toned down as the World Cup drew nearer, it can be argued that co-operation might have been better without the disturbances of 2001.

On an official level, the textbook issue in combination with Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni Shrine provided a backdrop which negatively affected other bilateral issues such as the fishery issue around the northern territories: Russia had sold fishing quotas in waters claimed by both Russia and Japan to several other countries, including South Korea. This led to South Korean boats entering waters that Japan regards as its national waters. For Japan, this issue is of no high economic importance, especially as the catch of Japanese fishers was not greatly affected. As relations were strained already, however, there was not much leeway to de-escalate the situation and solve the issue quietly. Eventually, in autumn 2001, Japan bought the Russian quotas (cf. Fujita and Teramitsu 2001: 3, MOFA 1.8.2001, Internet, Cha 2002, Internet).

Similarly, the 1982 textbook issue had contributed to the break-off of negotiations about a major loan South Korea had requested from Japan (JSP1983: 208, Shūgiin Jimusho 18.12.1982: 12).

Some observers do not see a relevant impact of the protests at all. They say that important activities like high-level talks on trade, environment or visa requirements, as well as business contacts, were not affected (Cha 2001, Internet, Nam 2001: 33), or that the majority of Koreans was not upset at all by Japanese policies, but wished to continue good relations (Han Su-san 2001: 11). In fact, a number of large-scale bilateral events took place over the summer, some according to schedule, others meant especially to improve the battered bilateral relationship, such as an exchange programme for some 4000 private-sector participants in September in Seoul (*Napsnet* 29.8.2001, Internet). However, other events could not take place in their normal form. Participants of the annual Korea-Japan Forum in August, for example, could not meet President Kim Dae Jung because he had cancelled most such events (Son 31.8.2001, Internet). Other cancelled activities like the Japan-South Korean joint maritime search and rescue drill took months before being resumed after the turmoil had subsided (*Napsnet*, 18.1.2002, Internet).

The direct economic or security impact of this bilateral friction was probably rather low, but the previous pace of improving relations has certainly been slowed, affecting issues that are more "substantial" as well. Most observers agree that the previous steady improvement of

Japanese-South Korean relations at least temporarily stalled due to the textbook issue. Compared to the progress made until 2000, the relationship “turned sour” in 2001, as the Korean ambassador to Japan termed it (Choi 2001: 9, cf. Han Seung-soo 2001: 10, Fujisawa 2001: 126, *Napsnet* 23.8.2001, Internet). One of the effects of the affair was the continued refusal of South Korean President Kim Dae Jung to arrange meetings with Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi or Foreign Minister Tanaka during international events, as would have been normal (Oh Young-jin 2001, Internet, cf. *Japan Today* 5.9.2001, Internet, *Asahi Shinbun* 9.9.2001: 21). In this context, Kim and other officials repeatedly stated that “Japan must take the first step” in improving relations (*Asahi.com* 4.9.2001, Internet, *Korea Now* 25.8.2001: 5–7). Thus, the long-term repercussions of the issue may well have an impact on “serious” issues like economy or security as well. Johnson points out that the lack of trust in the Japanese government (on the part of South Korea and other Asian countries) “has implications for Koizumi’s effectiveness in reforming the economy” (Johnson 5.9.2001, e-mail). In the aftermath of the terror attacks in the US in September 2001, a hasty summit meeting was scheduled on 15 October, with a one-day visit by Koizumi to Seoul. The textbook and Yasukuni issues were discussed, but relations remained strained; another meeting on 20 October during the APEC summit was slightly more successful (*Napsnet*, 22.10.2001, Internet). Later in October, the South Korean government gradually started to reverse the measures taken against Japan but still insisted that Japan should revise the textbook (*Napsnet*, 26.10.2001, Internet).

### **Further implications**

The textbook row has also triggered a debate about textbooks in other countries, but it remains to be seen how long this attention can be maintained. In the long term, the textbook debate may have implications for the Korean textbook production system, which is different from the Japanese one, but also under pressure to be revised for reasons of both structure and content (cf. Magnier 2.9.2001, Internet, Chung 2001: 19). Other Textbooks in other Asian countries could also become affected—shifts are already occurring, partly related to greater openness, but also to nationalistic trends (cf. Matsumoto 2001: 93f., Hajari 2001).

Differences in the various education systems plus cultural differences and misunderstandings will continue to impede bilateral or multilateral agreements on textbooks. Efforts to improve understanding between countries will therefore have to address the education system and cultural exchanges. One of the problems in bilateral Japanese-Korean disputes regarding textbooks appear to have been cultural differences and even language problems, combined with a lack of knowledge of the other country's system. This led to erroneous translations and reports in the Korean media, for example regarding the adoption of the new textbook by one special needs school overseen by Tokyo's conservative mayor Ishihara Shintarō (author of "The Japan that can say no"). The description of the school as "Yangho middle school" without any reference to the different selection system in this case<sup>4</sup> gave this news item a higher importance than appropriate. Even history scholars complain of insufficient mutual knowledge complicating bilateral exchanges and textbook committees (*Donga Ilbo* 1.8.2001, Internet, Fujisawa 2001: 131–133, cf. Satō et. al. 2001: 223f.).

It remains to be seen how the textbook affair will affect the textbook production and selection systems in Japan and in South Korea as well as in other Asian countries. Critics also object to the organisation of history education itself, for example with its distinction between "Japanese" and "World" history, which mutually exclude each other (Nakamura 1997: 162f.). Japan and other Asian countries might ultimately even follow the general shift in education to use textbooks as supporting material rather than as the backbone for lessons—but the textbook affair alone will not bring about the necessary change in the education system (Satō et. al. 2001: 211).

## **Conclusion**

The South Korean government's protests in the Japanese textbook affair have been criticised as an illegitimate interference in Japanese internal affairs, but this position would be almost impossible to argue from a legal point of view—especially as the bulk of South Korean

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<sup>4</sup> Different from the local selection committees for other public schools, the decision for special needs schools was made by the prefectural board of education, i.e. often by the governor or mayor. The decision in Tokyo only affected a very small number of students.

protests came not from the government but from individuals or private organisations. Arguably, Korean interference was even morally legitimate, although the issue may have been instrumentalised by the South Korean government to a certain extent. However, gains of such an instrumentalisation to divert attention from domestic problems, relations with North Korea, or in terms of international prestige, would not have weighed up the disadvantages of worsened relations with Japan. Japanese history textbooks do affect international relations, and the strong South Korean response was due to concern about developments in Japan which involve South Korea.

Compared to private protests, both from Korea and from Japanese citizens' groups, however, the impact of the South Korean government's protests on the issue itself was low. While the protests were successful in preventing a widespread use of the controversial textbook, this was only achieved on a local level, and the influence of formal government protests was more of a symbolic nature.

On a governmental level, the textbook affair only had negative implications. Relations between Japan and South Korea, which had been steadily improving for a while, suddenly worsened. Although efforts are being made to continue on the path of reconciliation, the process has been slowed by the affair. This is likely to affect bilateral cooperation at least in the short term. The preparations for the joint hosting of the soccer World Cup 2002, for example, could have certainly been smoother without the crisis.

It is at least conceivable that the much publicised affair will have some impact on the education system in Japan and other countries. Issues particularly of history education have been widely discussed in the context of the textbook issue. Changes in the education systems are slowly occurring, and the public debate may somewhat accelerate these developments. In order to promote regional identity in Asia, mutual understanding of shared history would certainly be helpful.

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