



## CHINA SAYS JAPANESE TEXTBOOKS DISTORT HISTORY

April 13, 2005

*How history is written in textbooks and taught in schools is causing a major rift between two of Asia's most powerful countries.*

Over the weekend, an estimated 20,000 demonstrators hit the streets of China's capital city Beijing and other smaller cities around the country to protest the approval of new Japanese junior high school textbooks that critics in both countries say gloss over Japan's atrocities against the Chinese during World War II, which ended 60 years ago in 1945.

Specifically, the new textbooks play down Japan's brutal occupation of China from 1931 to 1945, including the 1937-38 Nanking massacre -- sometimes referred to as the Rape of Nanking -- that resulted in the deaths of between 250,000 and 300,000 Chinese. Many civilians were hacked to death, and thousands of women were raped.

One textbook refers to the murders as an "incident" rather than a massacre. The books also underplay the use of sex slaves, women brought from all over Asia to service the Japanese military.

### **Retelling history**

On Monday, a survey of over 1,000 Chinese citizens by the Social Survey Institute of China reported that most people found Japan's approval of the textbooks insulting.

About 93 percent of the respondents said the Japanese government had "distorted history gravely", and 96 percent of them said "such action had severely hurt the Chinese people's feelings and constituted an insult to the Chinese people," Xinhua news agency quoted the survey results as saying.

Such painful wartime memories led to the violent protests in China with demonstrators throwing stones at the Japanese embassy and breaking the windows of some Japanese restaurants -- a rare occurrence in the tightly controlled Communist regime. There were also demonstrations in South Korea, a country also invaded by Japan during the war.

"Last century the aggression war waged by Japan inflicted huge and tremendous suffering and hardships on people in China, Asia and the world at large," Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao said Tuesday.

He urged Japan to take responsibility for its actions and said the protests should encourage "deep and profound reflections" by the Japanese.

### **China's spotted past**

But, in criticizing Japan's textbooks, China-- a country infamous for smoothing over its often harsh human rights policies-- should look at its own retelling of history, according to scholars.

School books in Beijing leave out significant historical events including the 1989 Tiananmen Square democracy demonstrations in which Chinese troops killed thousands of unarmed protestors, and the three-year famine between 1958 and 1961 when communist policies led to the starvation of an estimated 30 million Chinese.

"With rising Chinese nationalism, the efforts to rewrite history, to reinterpret history according to the demands of nationalism have become a major national pastime," Maochun Yu, a history professor at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md. told the Associated Press.

### **A bid for superpower status**

Japanese officials accuse China of capitalizing on the textbook controversy to discourage Japan's quest for a more dominant global role and a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

If Japan gains a seat on the Security Council, it could threaten China's status as Asia's leading political power.

The U.N. Security Council is made up of five permanent members including Russia, Britain, the United States, France and China -- the victors in World War II -- and has the power to veto policies made by the United Nations as a whole.

The Japanese government has been campaigning for a permanent seat on the influential council, arguing that as the world's second largest economy after the United States, it should have a say in United Nations decisions.

In order for Japan to become a permanent member, all five members of the current Security Council would have to vote to amend the U.N. charter.

On Tuesday the Chinese premier hinted that China may use its veto power to prevent Japan from joining the council.

"Only a country that respects history, takes responsibility for history and wins over the trust of peoples in Asia and the world at large can take greater responsibilities in the international community," he said.

-- Compiled by Kristina Nwazota for NewsHour Extra

© MacNeil/Lehrer Productions