

# Japan asks US publisher to change 'sex slave' textbook

TOKYO, JAPAN: Japan has asked a major US publisher to "correct" a school textbook that references World War II sex slaves, the foreign ministry said Thursday, as Tokyo's bid to polish its history moves abroad.

Diplomats petitioned McGraw-Hill to change passages of a book used in American schools that refer to "comfort women", a euphemism for those forced to work in military brothels.



Comfort women (comfort girls) captured by the US Army, 14 August 1944. (Image: Public Domain)

"The Japanese government, through an overseas diplomatic office, in mid-December asked McGraw-Hill executives to make a correction in the content of their textbook titled 'Traditions & Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past'," a foreign ministry statement published by *The Wall Street Journal* said.

They did this "upon finding grave errors and descriptions that conflict with our nation's stance on the issue of 'comfort women'".

The Japanese government under nationalist Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has embarked on a global campaign to right what it sees as the wrongs of global perceptions of its WWII violence. Mainstream historians agree that around 200,000 women, mainly from Korea, but also from China, Taiwan and the Philippines, were forced to provide sex to Japanese soldiers in a formalised system of slavery.

Right-wingers in Japan dispute this, and insist the women were common prostitutes. They say neither the state nor the military was involved in any coercion.

McGraw-Hill Education confirmed they had been approached by "representatives from the Japanese government... asking the company to change the description of 'comfort women' in one of our publications," according to the *Journal*.

"Scholars are aligned behind the historical fact of 'comfort women' and we unequivocally stand behind the writing, research and presentation of our authors," they said.

The approach to a foreign publisher is unusual, but nationalists at home have pressed hard for a reinterpretation of history.

## About-face

Late last year, Japan's liberal *Asahi Shimbun* retracted a series of articles dating from the 1990s centring on the testimony of a former Japanese soldier who said he had been involved in rounding up Korean women to work in brothels.

His testimony had long-since been discredited, but the paper had for years resisted pressure to withdraw the articles.

Its about-face was greeted with glee by right-wingers, including the prime minister, who demanded the paper apologise for its part in the globally accepted view of Japan's wartime record. Tokyo has been angered in recent years over statues honouring "comfort women" erected by Korean communities in the US and elsewhere.

And in December the government lodged a complaint with Beijing over a reference to "300,000" people who were killed when imperial troops swept through the Chinese city of Nanjing, in a weeks-long orgy of rape and violence.

Chinese President Xi Jinping made the comment in a speech on 13 December, calling on Tokyo to acknowledge the gravity of its past crimes. Diplomats protested that the figure is "different from Japan's position" and that it is "difficult to

determine the concrete number of victims," sources told *Kyodo News*.

Since his election in 2012, Abe has pushed what supporters call a less "masochistic" view of Japan's history. While the approach is popular among core right-wing supporters in Japan, it does not have broad appeal among a Japanese public that largely feels disconnected from events more than seven decades ago.

It is also problematic for Tokyo's chief ally, the US, which would far rather Japan could get past the issue and build better relations with its other key regional ally South Korea.

Source: AFP, via I-Net Bridge

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