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The Emperor Showa standing at ground zero: on the (re-)configuration of a national 'memory' of the Japanese people

by Takahashi Tetsuya

Introduction

A Japanese history textbook for junior high school students, created by the members of the 'Atarashii rekishi kyokasho o tsukuru kai' (hereafter referred to as 'Tsukurukai'; Society for History Textbook Reform)1 and approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in spring 2001 (we shall use the edition published for the general public), depicted the Showa Emperor over two pages at the end of its 'Personality Columns'. The first part of this column, entitled 'The Showa Emperor – a life lived with the Japanese people', reads:

'On the day of the demise of the Showa Emperor'

On the morning of 7 January 1989 (the 64th year of Showa), when the Showa Emperor (124th Emperor: 1901–1989) passed away, many people assembled in front of the Imperial Palace on hearing the news. An old lady of sixty-eight years old who had been exposed to the radiation in Hiroshima and was then living in Tokyo said, 'I have a feeling that I have always been sharing hardships with the Showa Emperor'. Just like this old lady, in front of the Palace as well as in all parts of the country, various kinds of people including youths, elderly people, housewives and salaried workers quietly pondered over the true meaning of the era of the Showa Emperor. (p. 306)

A photograph of the Imperial Palace Plaza with the caption 'The day of the Emperor's demise' is placed at the right-hand side of the text. After the above passage, the episode of the Emperor on his return from Kagoshima in a naval vessel is recounted. Standing alone, he gave a military salute to the bonfire that was lit by the people seeing him off. With the episode, the authors aimed to impress upon readers that the Emperor had 'a very sincere and truthful character'. It continues with a subtitle, 'The Showa Emperor's era', thereby continuing the myth of the Emperor that has been spun incessantly since the end of the Pacific War. The passage argues: 'When the Showa Emperor was enthroned, Japan was about to face a great crisis. He wished for friendship and goodwill with every country but history took a different course.' Soon after the words 'the Showa Emperor's era' were written, it seemed as if they suddenly lost their significance and the 'era' was not 'the Showa Emperor's' any longer; at the same time, the Emperor was portrayed as a mere victim of the 'era' and of the course of history. The authors continue: 'Understanding his position well that, as a constitutional monarch, government or military decisions should not be interfered with, the Emperor sometimes agreed to accept them against his will. However, there occurred two instances when he resolutely expressed his will and resolved the crisis.' The passage suggests that the Supreme Commander, the Showa Emperor, enjoyed only two exceptional instances of influence over the manoeuvres of his own military forces, i.e. the Imperial Japanese Army.

The two exceptional cases, according to the textbook, are, first, the 'February 26 Incident', when on that date in 1936, junior army officers led an attempted coup and called for a 'Showa Restoration' and, second, 'the Acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration' in 1945. His 'imperial decision' to 'end the war' is mythologized by quoting an 'imperial poem': 'I thought of my people dying in the air raids and decided to stop the war; I do not care whatever awaits my destiny'. This image of self-sacrifice in order to secure the happiness of his people is confirmed by quoting lines from a well-known passage from the Memoirs of General MacArthur.

The radiation-exposed (hibakusha) old lady and the Emperor

What image does this textbook aim to impose on the imagination of high-school students who innocently read the passage quoted at the beginning of this article? And what does it aim to achieve by gradually weaving the historical memory of a whole generation through repetition of these images? There are few examples that highlight so effectively the way the aim of the politics of historical memory and oblivion – ubiquitous 'politics' – is accomplished. The use of the word demise (hogyo) and the statement that he was the '124th' Emperor both stem from the Emperor-centred view of history (kokoku shikan) which is the backbone of the textbook. For the authors, who cannot avoid repeating the myth of the Eastern Conquest by the Emperor Jinmu by including a map in the textbook, the Showa Emperor must naturally be the 124th Imperial Ruler in an unbroken line of emperors since the Emperor Jinmu. The expressions are restrained: the passage emphasizes that the Emperor is not 'a power' but 'an authority', 'a symbol of the State and of the unity of the people'. Yet, precisely because of this, high-school students would read the text without a sense of incongruity, and the image of the Emperor as the centre of the existence called 'Japan' would 'naturally' be imprinted in their minds.

Here, I should like to draw special attention again to the comments of that particular 'old lady aged sixty-eight' who was 'exposed to the radiation in Hiroshima and was then living in Tokyo' on 'the day of the Emperor's demise' – because I observe a cunning artifice of formation and eradication of 'the memory of war'. At least three kinds of formation and eradication of 'the memory of war' are recognizable here.

First, let us touch upon the war accountability of the Showa Emperor. What exactly does it mean to have 'an old lady of sixty-eight' who was 'exposed to the radiation in Hiroshima' remark 'I have a feeling that I have always been sharing hardships with the Showa Emperor'?

The dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is generally thought to be representative of the war atrocities inflicted on Japan. This view is reiterated a number of times in this textbook. The 'Tsukurukai' devotees, who flatly ignore the views of international law concerning the atrocities committed by the former Japanese Imperial Army, suddenly turn back to the international law of humanity and portray the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as 'crimes against humanity'. For them, the hibakusha, the radiation-exposed victims, are equivalent to the dead of Auschwitz: both are victims of 'absolute evil'. Moreover, this particular victim is a female – 'an old lady of sixty-eight' – a clear attempt to amplify, even more, the image of 'innocent victim'.

By having the elderly female hibakusha from Hiroshima remark 'I have always been sharing hardships with the Showa Emperor', an image is created as if the Showa Emperor himself also endured the same ordeal. In the minds of highschool student readers, the female hibakusha and the Emperor will be identified as one. The female hibakusha is a war victim; the female hibakusha and the Showa Emperor are identified as the same being. In this way, the Showa Emperor also becomes a war victim. Thus, this one passage will have the effect of creating 'a war memory' in which the Showa Emperor was a war victim like the woman exposed to the radiation in Hiroshima. It is an act of creating historical memory and, moreover, it is a fabricated creation. The impact of identifying the

female hibakusha with the Showa Emperor is infinitely huge – and leads on to the second and third effects induced by this passage.

The second result is that, by identifying the female hibakusha with the Showa Emperor, all Japanese nationals become war victims after the war – because the war experience of any Japanese national can be imagined as positioned somewhere between that of the Emperor and of the hibakusha. The Showa Emperor was the most protected existence during the war, as he possessed a 'sacred body' (gyokutai) and his being was conceived to survive even after the 'honourable deaths of all Japanese nationals' (ichioku gyokusai). The hibakusha of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are victims of 'absolute evil' and this particular female hibakusha is conceived of as the gravest victim among Japanese nationals. The war experience of other Japanese nationals would be placed somewhere between these two extremes. Therefore, if the Showa Emperor and the female hibakusha are both war victims, then all Japanese nationals would also become war victims. In this way the well-known 'victim consciousness of Japanese nationals' is transmitted to a new generation. The war memory – the sense that 'everybody suffered' – is thus renewed.

Third, as a counter-effect of the first and second types of memory formation, war damage in other nations and areas, especially in Asia where enormous sacrifice of lives and property resulted from the Japanese invasion, is wiped away. More precisely, Asia's war damage is excluded from the authors' consideration from the outset. The war memory produced on the basis of a sense of shared identity between the female Japanese hibakusha and the Showa Emperor cannot accommodate the war memories of Asian war victims. If all Japanese nationals, including the Showa Emperor, become victims, there exists no assailant against the Asian people. Where there is no assailant, there is no victim. Consequently, the existence of Asian victims is completely concealed.

The Showa Emperor standing at ground zero

We have examined the implication raised by the 'Tsukurukai' article, that all Japanese nationals, including the Showa Emperor, became victims, as a result of which the national 'war memory' was re-formed and the concept of the Asian victim was eradicated. However, such skilful political manoeuvring of memory and oblivion by the 'Tsukurukai' cannot be dismissed merely as an extremist ideological manipulation by a faction of ultra-nationalists. Still less, doubting the authenticity of the comments by that 'old lady of sixty-eight' who had been exposed to the radiation in Hiroshima does nothing to ameliorate the situation: the fact remains that, regardless of its veracity, her statement was a comment that might well have been offered.

This reconfiguration of the national 'war memory' by the 'Tsukurukai' is not a fabrication or an arbitrary 'distortion' of the reality of the 'war memory' of the post-war Japanese. It is indeed a 'distortion'; however, it is a distortion in conformity with the actual 'war memory' of an overwhelming majority of post-war 'Japanese nationals'. Seen thus, the 'war memory' of the post-war Japanese nation itself already represented a 'distortion'. The 'Tsukurukai' authors adroitly exploit the distortion and weakness of the 'war memory' of post-war Japan.

The identification of the female hibakusha with the Showa Emperor, or rather the identification by the female hibakusha – it would have been the same for a male hibakusha – with the Showa Emperor was not an inconceivable event. Her comment calls to mind a flickering video image of Japan just after the war. After the so-called 'Declaration of Humanity', the Showa Emperor embarked upon an imperial tour. In the famous portrayal, he is surrounded by a crowd on a platform in a public square. As the Emperor salutes by lifting his hat, the crowd hails 'Banzai!'. If you look closely you can see clearly the Atomic Bomb Dome in the background. It is an image filmed in Hiroshima.

How should we interpret this image? In Hiroshima, where memory of the atomic bomb explosion still remained fresh, and, of all the places, right in front of the Atomic Bomb Dome, people who had recently been exposed to radiation are acclaiming the Emperor! What are they pleased about? Are they pleased that the 'national polity' (kokutai) has been 'retained'? Pleased, in spite of Japan's defeat, that they were able to survive the war together with the Showa Emperor? Whatever, this picture demonstrates precisely the identification of the radiation-exposed Hiroshima people with the Showa Emperor – or, rather, the identification by the radiation-exposed Hiroshima people with the Showa Emperor.

Of course, if the background of the Atomic Bomb Dome is removed, this would have been a scene repeated around the nation to the point of saturation. According to records, the Emperor was also greeted by hails of 'Banzai' and hinomaru flags in a public square in Nagasaki that overlooked the remains of Urakami Church, also destroyed by the atomic bomb.

In cities such as Tokyo that were bombarded by indiscriminate air raids, similar scenes were repeated. These bombings, including the Great Tokyo Air Raid, are depicted in the 'Tsukurukai' history textbook as 'Japanese war damage' along with Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As evidenced by a few negative slogans that did appear – including the one that read, 'The national polity is retained. I, the Emperor, am eating sumptuously. You subjects die of hunger. (Imperial sign and seal)' – there was a slim possibility that a critical movement against the Emperor system would be born from within the Japanese grassroots. However, apart from in Okinawa, whose residents suffered the unique experience of being assailed by the Japanese Imperial Army on Japanese territory, identification with the Emperor by an overwhelming majority of the Japanese populace apparently prevailed. In other words, a mutual conciliation between the Emperor and the people seems to have dominated. It was as if the people and the Emperor forgave each other: the people forgave the Supreme Commander who dragged them into all-out warfare and the Emperor forgave the incompetence of his 'beloved children' who allowed 'the glory of the Imperial State' to be ruined. Thus, the people and the Emperor were reconciled to each other – and formed a community of 'victim consciousness' while driving all others to complete oblivion. The 'Emperor column' in the 'Tsukurukai' textbook continues with a stereotypical quote from The Memoirs of General MacArthur that influenced the formation of the myth of the Showa Emperor, before closing with the following:

After defeat in the War, the Emperor made imperial tours throughout Japan to converse freely with the people and to provide encouragement and consolation to those who were busy restoring the nation. Frequently the Emperor replied with a simple 'ah, so'; but the people felt sincerity in his artlessness. He was sometimes greeted with inadvertent cries of 'Long live the Emperor!' This was how the Showa Emperor led his life with the people throughout the dramatic Showa era. (ibid.: 307)

The original last sentence in the so-called 'blank-cover textbook' edition prior to inspection and approval by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology read: 'the Showa Emperor lived as the veritable symbol of the Japanese State and of the unity of the Japanese people in the dramatic Showa era' (p. 313, pre-inspection edition). Responding to this sentence, the Inspection Committee commented that 'this expression could be misconstrued as suggesting that the Showa Emperor lived his entire life as the symbol of Japan as stated in the Constitution of Japan'. In consequence, such terms as 'symbol' were deleted. In any case, here again, it should be noted that this description is not an arbitrary, groundless 'distortion'. Quite apart from the repulsive beautification of the Showa Emperor, the description roughly coincides with what was happening in front of the Atomic Bomb (genbaku) Dome. Confronted with the cries of 'Banzai' in front of the Dome, the Showa Emperor went through a metamorphosis – from Supreme Commander to the 'symbol of the State and of the unity of the Japanese people'. It is as if he survived by 'living two lives with a single body'. Japan's post-war symbolic emperor system that continues to this day was created by a fraud identical in nature to that which inspired the 'Emperor column' of the 'Tsukurukai' history book. Therefore, Japan's symbolic emperor system is nothing but revisionism.

Identification with the Showa Emperor reconsidered

The memory of the Hiroshima bombardment, established by identification of the hibakusha with the Showa Emperor, the memory of the Nagasaki bombardment and the national 'war memory' of the Japanese stained by a 'victim consciousness' are all inherent 'fabrications' and 'distortions' that pre-empt the inclusion of the 'Emperor column' in the 'Tsukurukai' history textbook. Why? Because identification of the hibakusha with the Showa Emperor is itself an illusion, and the 'war memory' of the Japanese (devoid of others) is also an illusion.

Let us dwell on Hiroshima.

First, identification of the hibakusha with the Showa Emperor is possible only by negation of the Showa Emperor's accountability for the 'imperial decision that came too late'. Had the 'imperial decision' to end the war come immediately after the Potsdam Declaration of 26 July 1945, there would have been no atomic bomb on 6 August (nor the Nagasaki atrocity of 9 August). The ruling classes, especially the Showa Emperor, who continued to ignore the Potsdam Declaration by seeking a guarantee of the retention of the 'national polity', cannot escape grave responsibility for the atrocities occasioned by the atomic bombing. The atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima by US military forces. And yet the meaningless procrastination over acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration was caused by the group that sought to preserve the 'national polity' for their own protection. In view of the fact that, immediately after the end of the war, the hibakusha were unable to comprehend the background to the 'imperial decision that came too late', it follows that, if the hibakusha remained incapable of ending their identification with the Showa Emperor even after that background became known to the public, it must be because the hibakusha had negated the accountability of the Showa Emperor.

On 31 October 1975, the Showa Emperor was interviewed at the Japan Press Club upon his return from a trip to the US. Asked what he had thought of the atomic bombing, he replied, 'Although I think it is regrettable that the A-bomb was dropped, and even though I feel sorry for the citizens of Hiroshima, considering that it was an act during such a war, I think it was unavoidable.' This question and response could be interpreted as revealing a vague concern about the general response to the atomic bombing. However irrespective of the questioner's intent, this dialogue can be construed as pertaining to the war responsibility of the Showa Emperor himself. However 'regrettable' and however 'sorry' he might feel, nevertheless 'acts committed during such a war' were 'unavoidable'; in short, the Emperor was responding, 'I have sympathy, but my subjects must accept their ordeal'.

The decision to defer acceptance of Potsdam can be extremely valuable as a means of severing the Japanese identification with the Showa Emperor in the context of Japan's 'war damage' (including, but not limited to, Hiroshima and Nagasaki). It was not only the atomic bombings that could have been avoided had Japan acted swiftly to accept the Potsdam Declaration, but also personal losses and suffering, including the detentions of Japanese citizens in Siberia as a result of the last-minute Soviet participation in the war against Japan. 'The imperial decision that came too late' is highly pertinent, not merely with regard to the acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration, but also concerning the so-called 'Konoe Report to the Showa Emperor' (Konoe joso) of February 1945. At that time the Showa Emperor, fearful of a 'reform of our polity by the US', took his own initiative in rejecting Konoe's suggestion (born partly of the desire to secure the continued prosperity of the Imperial Family) that it was 'necessary to urgently arrange for the ending of the war' on the ground that 'negotiations will be rather difficult unless we achieve military gains once again'. The major Tokyo Air Raid took place in March, to be followed by the indiscriminate strategic bombing of other cities. The Battle of Okinawa began with US military forces landing on the Kerama Islands and Okinawa main island at the end of March and on 1 April 1945 respectively. The major Tokyo Air Raid, indiscriminate bombings of cities, the Battle of Okinawa, the nuclear obliteration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, personal injury suffered in the Manchuria region due to the Soviet participation in the war, detention in Siberia . . . all these have been cited and re-cited as representative instances of the 'misery of war' in 'the war memories' of the postwar Japanese, and remain at the core of the 'Japanese victim consciousness'. (Note, however, that there were exceptional circumstances about the Battle of Okinawa that cannot simply be paralleled with the other incidents.) All occurred after the Showa Emperor's personal rejection of the 'Konoe Report to the Showa Emperor' and were the consequence of the 'imperial decision that came too late'.

The fact that they all resulted from 'the imperial decision that came too late' means that those war 'victims' were sacrificed for 'the retention of the national polity' and preservation of the Imperial Family. The fact that the 'victim consciousness' of the Japanese in the post-war period was unable to exclude identification with the Showa Emperor signifies that such 'victim consciousness' was established purely on a rejection of the accountability of the Emperor and the emperor system. On the other hand, if the 'imperial decision that came too late' strategem became known to the public, there was a possibility that, even from within the 'victim consciousness' of the Japanese, a pursuit of responsibility of the Emperor and the emperor system could emerge. It would seem necessary to re-examine the similarities and differences between Hiroshima/Nagasaki and Okinawa from this viewpoint.

First, in this regard, it is important to note that the 'war memory' of Okinawans assumed a totally different direction, in that it cannot be assimilated with the 'war memory' of other Japanese who identify themselves with the Emperor. Okinawan war memories cannot be 'nationalized' nor can the sufferings of Okinawans be incorporated into 'the victim consciousness' of the Japanese.

Second, 'within' Hiroshima itself (as well as within Nagasaki), there exist others who resist such identification. In order for the myth of being 'the only nuclear victim' to be shattered, it is simply enough to remember that people from about twenty countries (based on post-war national configurations) were resident in Hiroshima and Nagasaki when the cities encountered the atomic bombings. The vast majority of these people came from the Korean Peninsula. According to the estimates of the Association of Korean Atomic Bomb Victims, of the approximately 420,000 Hiroshima hibakusha , Korean hibakusha numbered about 50,000, and of all the approximately 150,000 deceased hibakusha , 30,000 were Koreans. In Nagasaki, of the approximately 270,000 hibakusha , Korean hibakusha numbered about 20,000, and of all the approximately 70,000 deceased hibakusha , about 10,000 were Koreans (with 'Korean' referring to both South and North Koreans).

The vast majority of these people would not have been in Hiroshima and Nagasaki when the disasters occurred had they not been victims of forcible deportation from their homelands, itself a consequence of the Japanese colonization of Korea. These people had been removed from their home country as a direct consequence of the colonial rule of the imperial Japanese state and they became hibakusha as a result of the 'imperial decision that came too late' of the Showa Emperor. Their existence represents an invaluable counter to the Japanese consciousness represented in the words of the old lady who argued, 'I have a feeling that I have always been sharing hardship with the Showa Emperor'. Their experience as hibakusha militates again the self-identification of the Japanese as 'the only nuclear victim'. Conversely, in order for Japan to construct its consciousness as the only 'nuclear-irradiated country', such memories must be eliminated. Thus, the existence of such non-Japanese hibakusha has long been completely excluded from the memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and from the 'war memories' of the post-war Japanese.

In 1995, the so-called 'Atomic Bomb Exhibition' took place at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the Cultural Research Institute of the NHK Broadcasting Corporation conducted polls in Japan, the US and Korea. To the question 'Do you think the dropping of the atomic bombs was justifiable or not?', 8.2 per cent of Japanese, 62.3 per cent of American and 80.5 per cent of Korean subjects responded affirmatively, whereas 57.8 per cent, 25.7 per cent and 19.1 per cent respectively responded negatively.

From this it can be seen that Korean support of the atomic bombing in Japan was markedly higher even than that of the Americans. Such a high rate of affirmative response can be understood only in conjunction with the interpretation that the atomic bombings

caused Japan's defeat in the war and brought about the liberation of Korea from the yoke of colonialist rule (literally 'recovery of light' in Korean). Both Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bases for Japan's invasion of Asia, and there is no denying that the atomic bombings provided a fatal blow to the dying Japanese Empire. However, it is also clear that the Korean attitude concerning the 'justifiability' of the atomic bombings is incompatible with the presence of numerous 'Korean' hibakusha . Perhaps the old and new colonialism of Japan with its emperor system not only excluded 'Korean' hibakusha from the Japanese memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also made 'Korean' hibakusha invisible to the eyes of their fellow Koreans.

The Constitution, Banzai and Kimigayo

In the last paragraph of its column on the Emperor, the blank-cover edition of the 'Tsukurukai' history textbook linked the 'cries' of 'Banzai' heard during the imperial tours after Japan's defeat to 'the veritable symbol of the Japanese state and the unity of the Japanese people'. By the time of the imperial tours to Hiroshima in December 1947 and Nagasaki in May 1949, the Showa Emperor had already become 'the symbol of the State and the unity of people' through the Constitution of Japan. If the symbolic emperor system is inherently revisionist, what would become of the Constitution of Japan, which delineates the symbolic emperor system in Chapter 1, Article 1?

On 3 November 1946, about a year before the 'Banzai' cries in front of the Atomic Bomb Dome in Hiroshima, numerous festive events were held in Tokyo to commemorate the promulgation of the Constitution of Japan. On the following day, the Mainichi shinbun reported the scene of a 'Tokyo Citizens Celebration Meeting' hosted by the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly in the following terms:

In the capital city, to commemorate this significant day, various celebrations and festive events took place throughout the city, including one at the Palace Plaza. The 'Tokyo Citizens Celebration Meeting', hosted by the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly, was honoured by the presence of the Emperor and Empress and, under clear autumn skies, was a great success. Even before the gates were opened, the people formed long queues at all entrances to the Palace, including the Babasen, Sakashita and Hibiyaguchi gates. The total number of participants exceeded one hundred thousand . . . the Meeting was declared open at the scheduled hour of two o'clock in the afternoon. The Metropolitan Orchestra played 'Chiyoda no shiro o aogite' (Looking up at the Chiyoda Imperial Palace). An opening address was then delivered by Chairman Nakazato of the Executive Committee, followed by an address by Chairman Kuwabara of the Metropolitan Assembly and readings of congratulatory messages by Vice- Chairman Yata of the Metropolitan Assembly. These were followed by addresses on behalf of the distinguished guests, first by Prime Minister Yoshida, then by Chairman Tokugawa of the House of Peers, Chairman Yamazaki of the House of Representatives, followed lastly by Governor Yasui of Tokyo. As the Kimigayo national anthem played solemnly, the Emperor and the Empress arrived at the Meeting in the imperial carriage. The hour was two thirty-five and cries of Banzai filled the autumnal sky. The imperial couple was showered with the enthusiasm of the citizens and, with the second playing of the Kimigayo, retired in good spirits. The Meeting was solemnly closed at two forty. (emphasis added)

Another quote from the same source reads:

With the Kimigayo playing in the background, the Imperial couple arrived at the venue of the 'Tokyo Citizens Celebration Meeting'. The Emperor was dressed in morning suit with a trilby hat, while the Empress was in a light yellow-green imperial court dress. They stood side by side on the stage. The people, overcome by the sight of these figures at such proximity, ardently sang the 'Kimigayo'. Since the end of the war, who would have thought of singing the 'Kimigayo' so loudly?

Thus, the Constitution of Japan, symbol and fount of Japan's post-war democracy, was stained from its inception by the emperor system and the consequent politics of national symbolism. At the 145th session of the Diet in 1999, the hinomaru and Kimigayo were legislated, for the first time in history, as the national flag and national anthem. Such nationalistic politics of symbols, based on the national flag and national anthem, did not suddenly appear as a betrayal of postwar democracy at the end of the twentieth century. We must remember that, at the outset of post-war Japanese democracy, cries of Kimigayo and Banzai echoed in praise of the Emperor as symbol of the Japanese nation and of the unification of the Japanese people. In order to critique the 'Tsukurukai''s view of history and of the Emperor adequately these premises of Japanese post-war democracy must be confronted.

University of Tokyo

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Notes

1. In Japan, new nationalistic movements that advocate the recovery of national pride have intensified since the latter half of the 1990s. 'The Society for History Textbook Reform' is one such representative neo-nationalistic movement. It was established in December 1996 by activists including Nishio Kanji, a scholar of German literature, Fujioka Nobukatsu, a scholar of education, and Kobayashi Yoshinori, a cartoonist, and its formal inauguration took place in the following January. In its inaugural statement, the Society criticized existing history textbooks as being dominated by post-war 'masochistic views of history' and advocated the creation of a new textbook that could serve as 'the official national history'. The Society strongly demanded deletion of all descriptions of the so-called 'comfort women' from existing textbooks.

2. From 'The Path to the Tokyo Tribunal', broadcast in 1992 in Video Images of Twentieth Century Japan, NHK. The narration reports that '50,000' people gathered. It is probably a scene from the 'Hiroshima Citizens Welcoming Venue', built at the site of the former Gokoku Shrine to greet the Emperor on 7 December 1947.

3. On 29 May 1949, the 'Nagasaki Citizens Welcoming Venue' was built near ground zero to greet the Emperor, with 50,000 people reportedly gathering.

4. In this interview, the Emperor was also asked: 'What does Your Majesty think of so-called war accountability?' To this he answered: 'I did not study literature well enough and do not understand the exact connotation of such words. As I do not understand well these matters, I cannot answer such questions.' It is one of the wonders of world history that such an answer was made, coolly and in the eyes of the world, and that it remained largely unchallenged. However, in light of the arguments advanced in this paper, it is nothing to be astonished at in post-war Japanese society. In any case, the complexity of the Showa Emperor's interview is beyond the scope of this article and needs further close examination.

5. This does not mean that, in Hiroshima and in Nagasaki, there were no individuals who tried to detach themselves from identification with the Showa Emperor. For example, the case of Ms Amano Fumiko, also 'an old lady exposed to radiation in Hiroshima', is remarkable. One should also bear in mind the example of Hitoshi Motoshima, former Mayor of Nagasaki.

6. Hitoshi Sakurai (2001) 'How video images have been delineating hibakusha', Sekai September: 132.

Takahashi Tetsuya is Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Tokyo. His current research interests are problems of deconstruction, history and memory, and showa.

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