

Japanese government promotes militarism in media and schools

By John Watanabe
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In line with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's boosting of the military and aggressive stance toward China, his government is seeking to refashion both the media and school curriculum to promote Japanese nationalism and militarism.

Abe's agenda has become evident in the remarks of Katsuto Momii, who was appointed chairman of Japan's public broadcaster NHK in December. The government stacked the NHK's 12-member board of governors with four right-wing appointees to implement a shift in the company's political orientation and programming. Momii, who was regarded as Abe's preferred candidate for chairman, is a former vice president of the trading arm of Mitsui, a leading Japanese trust.

Momii immediately signaled his readiness to toe the government line. Speaking at a news conference held to mark the start of his chairmanship, he said NHK's programming "shouldn't be far removed from (the stance of) the Japanese government." Momii stated: "When the government is saying, 'Right,' we can't say, 'Left.' International broadcasting has such a (propagandist) nuance."

Momii triggered a public furor on January 25 with remarks justifying the systematic abuse of hundreds of thousands of mostly East and Southeast Asian women as sex slaves by the Imperial Army in the 1930s and 1940s. He dismissed such military brothels as "common in any country at war," adding: "Can we say there were none in Germany or France? It was everywhere in Europe... In the current moral climate, the use of comfort women would be wrong. But it was a reality of those times."

The comments provoked criticism not only from China and South Korea, but also the US. Called before a parliamentary committee, Momii apologised for what

he called misunderstandings, saying that "it is my intention to protect freedom of speech and be unbiased." He did not, however, withdraw his remarks on "comfort women," saying only that he apologised for expressing "personal views" when speaking in his capacity as NHK chairman. "It was my first time [speaking] at such an occasion and I did not know the rules," he said.

Momii's views are not the exception, but rather the rule, throughout broad sections of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the Japanese political establishment as a whole. The comments reflect the widespread attitude in ruling circles that Japan was unfairly singled out for criticism following its defeat in World War II. Abe himself has repeatedly played down the issue of "comfort women," as they are euphemistically called, and so has Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso.

Another of Abe's appointees to the NHK board, Naoki Hyatuka, is publicly campaigning for former Air Force Chief of Staff Toshio Tamogami, a candidate for Tokyo governor, who is backed by the ultra-right wing Japanese Restoration Party. Tamogami was dismissed in 2008 after writing an essay defending Japanese militarism. He claimed that Japan was not an aggressor in World War II, had been dragged into a war with China, and had brought prosperity to occupied Asian countries.

Campaigning for Tamogami on Monday, Hyatuka declared that the Nanking Massacre had been a fabrication manufactured by the US to justify its own war crimes. He pointed to the US fire-bombing of Tokyo and the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The argument is common in right-wing, militarist circles in Japan—seeking to use the crimes of US imperialism to justify those of Japanese

imperialism. After the Japanese army entered the city of Nanking in 1937 it killed up to 300,000 Chinese civilians and soldiers in an orgy of killing, rape and destruction lasting weeks.

Hyatuka defended his decision to campaign for Tamogami, saying that while NHK governors had to be “thoroughly neutral” in regard to broadcasting, the Broadcast Act did not restrict his “private activities.” His support for Tamogami, however, is a clear demonstration of how Hyatuka will seek to reorient NHK broadcasting.

The comments of the government’s NHK appointees are paralleled by its announcement last week of revised teaching guidelines for junior and senior high schools, demanding that textbooks and teachers explicitly back the government’s claims on disputed islands in the region.

The new guidelines require publishers to describe three groups of islands—in dispute with China, South Korea and Russia—as “integral parts of Japan’s territory.” These include the Russian-controlled South Kuriles, known as Northern Territories in Japan, and Takeshima Island, administered by South Korea, which calls it Dokdo. The new rules specify that these territories are to be referred to as “illegally occupied.”

For the first time, the guidelines mention the Senkakus, the islets in East China Sea also claimed by China under the name of Diaoyu. Backed and encouraged by Washington, the Abe administration has used the Senkakus to line up behind the US “pivot to Asia,” to raise military expenditure and make organizational and legal preparations for war.

Education Minister Hakubun Shimomura asserted: “It is extremely important that the children who will bear our future can properly understand our territory.”

The new textbooks—to come into use from 2016 and 2017 in history, geography and civics curricula—are encouraged to reflect the government’s official position that no dispute exists over the islets. The new manuals also require the Self-Defense Forces—Japanese armed forces—to be presented in a positive light, as “working to protect the lives and safety of the people.”

While the Japanese media stress that the teaching guidelines are not mandatory, the Abe government has been devising mechanisms to better implement its diktat. Last October, the education minister ordered the school board of Taketomi—a small Okinawan township

near Taiwan and the Senkakus—to use a right-wing history textbook that it had rejected. In November, a government-appointed committee suggested putting mayors in charge of local school districts—a move designed to strengthen political control over local educational issues, such as textbook selection.

During his first term of office, in late 2006 Abe changed the Fundamental Law of Education. The amendment, emphasizing patriotism, the nation and tradition, was the first since the law was enacted in 1947 under US occupation. This is part-and-parcel of Abe’s rejection of post-war legislation, including the Constitution, as foreign-imposed, to be amended and overthrown. Strong public opposition to the changed education law was one of the factors that eroded Abe’s support and led to his resignation in 2007, after less than a year in office.

The Abe government’s determination to assert control of the NHK and school curriculum is part of a campaign to whip up Japanese nationalism and militarism. The concerted efforts to whitewash the past war crimes of the Japanese military in the face of deep-seated opposition among Japanese workers and youth is an integral part of the government’s preparations for new wars of aggression to advance the interests of Japanese imperialism.

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