

## **Recent Developments in Japanese Higher Education: Politics and Policies in Japanese Universities**

Michiko Ito opened with an explanation of two events impacting academic freedom and freedom of the press in Japan. First, a letter of support from historians to promote an honest and open dialogue on Japanese history. It was written in response to revisionist attitudes. Second, Monbusho's declaration to abolish humanities programs in higher education. Monbusho claims it is not attacking the humanities or social sciences, but the ministry's activities suggest a negative attitude and that the humanities are 'worthless' to society. Understanding the nature of Japanese higher education today helps explain the current state of affairs.

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Dr. Nakano Koichi:

Historical Revisionism as Official Policy: Crisis of Academic and Press Freedom in Japan

Dr. Nakano Koichi opens with the premise of how politics and media affect academic and press freedoms in Japan. The extent of historical revisionism present is similar to Holocaust denial in the West. This revisionism movement started in the popular culture and broadened to contemporary politics. Before this, in the post war era up until the 80's, trends of liberalization and democratization had allowed for acknowledgement and apologies for WWII transgressions, though the sufficiency and gravity of those actions is another debate.

The revisionist backlash is tied to the opening of China and Korea, their own regimes liberalizing. Under dictatorship, South Korea had little interest in discussing comfort women. In the post dictatorship 90's this issue became far more prominent and Japan's right-wing reacted with the beginnings of revisionism, taking off in 1997. The Late 90's saw Japan's right-wing allying with media outlets, intellectuals, and some religious groups. Politicians started making isolated gaffes that nullify previous apologies to Korea for war atrocities.

The 1990's right-wing movement continues to grow with the emergence of the internet. Then Prime Minister Koizumi starts to make Yasukuni war shrine visits. At the same time, moderates within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) shrank and grew quieter. Japan lacked a clearly identifiable liberal contingent, further strengthening the shift to the right in Japanese society. With this shift comes the Abe administration's muzzling of media outlets and school curricula, the major sources of liberalism in Japanese society.

Press interference becomes more aggressive in 2013 with the State Secrets Law and continued Yasukuni visits. In 2014 Momii is appointed to the head of NHK - unqualified but towing the government's line and acting as a mouthpiece. In 2014, an attack on the Asahi Shinbun and Mr. Uemura, a reporter who wrote about comfort women in the newspaper, faced bullying even after leaving the Asahi. He eventually moved to Korea.

Translators of the press were formally discouraged from using phrases like 'sex slave and 'territorial disputes.' The Yomiuri Shinbun apologized for the use of these words in 2014. While at the same time revision became a campaign manifesto for the LDP.

Various examples of suppression from the right are given - including the movement toward constitutional revisionism, shutting down events like the book fair for freedom and democracy due to harassment. These intimidation techniques increase and come to include one page adverts claiming to fight anti government messages. The communications minister claims to be able to shut down TV networks for being "anti-Japanese" and several anti-right-wing newscasters were terminated from television.

Revisionism in education is most obvious in newly approved textbooks. While the voting age has been pushed down to 18, students are required to submit an application to their school in order to participate in political events, while left leaning educators become targets of ire in the right-wing press.

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Dr. Nagasaki Kiyonori:  
Crisis of the Humanities in Japan

In June 2015, MEXT mandated cutting humanities and social sciences (H&SS) programs in higher education. Which was immediately opposed by several Japanese education associations, including the Science Council of Japan. The incident gained coverage in foreign press and other outlets like 4 Humanities' *Starving the Humanities*. MEXT released a statement to clarify that it was just a misunderstanding, only to cut teacher training.

Despite MEXT claiming it is not hostile to the humanities and social sciences, there have been several factors making it difficult for these disciplines to grow. A shrinking population, and therefore fewer youth who can attend programs - an overemphasis on innovation instead of seeking truth. The humanities and social sciences have no central advocates in the JSPS.

National Universities must develop their own plans to obtain government subsidies for scholarly research - that funding is strongly influenced by MEXT. Currently only 8.4% of funding given supports the humanities and social sciences. Even though there is actually an increase in the number of majors in these fields.

However, some of the issues in H&SS are also due to these disciplines not effectively communicating their value to society. H&SS researchers need to do a better job of disseminating their research across the internet. Additionally, many government officials are themselves H&SS graduates, but this is rarely pointed out or promoted. Finally, many universities did not provide enough actual education during the late 20th century in these fields, and those graduates perceive their degrees as wasteful.

What should HSS researchers do? The first suggestion is to promote interdisciplinary research with STEM fields. Updating methodologies to include digital scholarship will be important, and greater engagement with the public - with a larger emphasis on openness, open access, and OA repositories.

Q&A

1. What is the current state of Mokasho's anti-HSS initiative?
  - a. Ministry of Communications – claimed even by looking at one program, then they can shut down the whole stations – even more extreme.
  - b. Government's record on freedom of press continues to deteriorate.
2. How are we librarians going to deal with revisionist materials?
  - a. Media outlets have become so much more conservative – Yomiuri used to protest Yasukuni visits. No more. Pro-constitutional revisionist attitude.
  - b. Transformation of digital media – easy to make populist, consumable hate mongering instead of difficult to read and intellectual left wing materials
  - c. Librarians and professors need to guide their students through this time of complicated production of biased materials

Notes Taken by Adam H. Lisbon