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NATIONAL

History texts to get official spin

Abe's LDP wants 'self-condemning' views of contentious points revised

KYODO

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The education ministry plans to revise guidelines for textbooks for elementary, junior high and high schools, and introduce requirements reflecting the government's position on "historical facts," officials said.

The revision is in line with calls by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, to instill a sense of national pride in students and correct what some LDP members call a "self-condemning" view of historical events, including the Nanjing Massacre and wartime sex slaves.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology also wants the textbooks to include more material that would encourage children to be more patriotic and respectful of traditional culture, the officials said Wednesday.

Under the current guidelines for modern society and history, textbooks should not contain categorical statements about historical events that are open to different interpretations.

In the new provisions, the ministry will present "a balanced picture" of a historical event, showing both pro and con views, the officials said.

That particular move is in consideration of the ongoing tensions between Japan and China and South Korea over the number of victims in the 1937 Nanjing Massacre, the Japanese military's involvement in wartime sexual slavery and territorial rows, a senior education ministry official said.

The issue of how historical events are described in textbooks is a sensitive one for other parts of Asia that suffered during Japan's wartime aggression, particularly China and what is now South Korea.

Japan is also involved in a row over South Korea-controlled islets, and in a spat with China over Japan-controlled islets.

The LDP pledged during last December's general election campaign that it would revise the guidelines so students use textbooks that "allow them to be proud of traditional culture."

The LDP believes the texts on the Nanjing Massacre and wartime sex slaves — known euphemistically as “comfort women” — are biased. Some LDP lawmakers say the current guidelines lead to “self-condemning” views of history in textbooks.

Stricter vetting of social studies textbooks began in 1982 after China and South Korea objected strongly to Japanese high school history textbooks the previous year that began referring to Japan’s past “invasions” in Asia as “advancements.”

Even after the 1982 guidelines, China and South Korea repeatedly criticized the wording of some history textbooks in the screening process, claiming they were glorifying past aggression. In 2001, a junior high school text written by a group of nationalists invited strong criticism from the two countries.

The ministry hopes to revise the guidelines for social studies textbooks by January, after approval by the ministry’s textbook screening council, and use the revised guidelines when screening junior high school textbooks next spring, the officials said.

On Monday, a ministry panel recommended that moral education, widely taught as an extracurricular activity, be included in the official curriculum of public elementary and junior high schools.

In February, the government’s education task force, which was set up to respond to Abe’s call for education reform, suggested the inclusion of moral education in the curriculum as an anti-bullying measure.

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