

Group says set masochistic history texts right

Nine people, including college professors, writers and a cartoonist, formed an organization to demand the Education Ministry revise historical descriptions in school textbooks.

During a news conference Monday at a Tokyo hotel, members of The Group to Make New History Textbooks maintained that current texts must be revised because they foster masochistic views of the nation's modern history.

"We want to underscore the need to change the 50-year concept (that Japan was all wrong), think back to what really is history and restore the correct history of our nation," said campaigner Kanji Nishio, reading the group's statement.

The group said its ultimate goal is to create a textbook that teaches children Japa-



CARTOONIST Yoshinori Kobayashi, member of a newly formed group demanding history textbook revisions, displays mail Monday from readers of his work at the group's news conference. SATOKO KAWASAKI PHOTO

nese history that presents a multitude of perspectives.

One of the group's priorities

is its plan to submit by the end of this month a formal demand to the education minister that the descriptions of "comfort women" in junior high school textbooks be scrapped.

Group members said those entries — which were ap-

proved last summer by the ministry — are especially problematic.

The members rebuffed the notion that these women were forced into sexual slavery, pointing to a lack of evidence to prove such an assertion.

They also said describing the practice in textbooks would be a harmful influence on children.

All of the new textbooks, which were written by seven publishing houses and are set to be distributed starting next spring, will contain a brief explanation on the practice.

Other campaigners present at the news conference included popular cartoonist Yoshinori Kobayashi and Tokyo University Professor Nobukatsu Fujioka. Essayist Sawako Agawa as well as author Mariko Hayashi also are listed as campaigners.

The group also announced a list of 78 supporters, which covers a variety of renowned authors and critics as well as businesspeople.

Cartoonist brings cold comfort

MEDIA MIX PHILIP BRASOR

Several groups are now trying to prevent junior high school students from learning about the women who were brought to the front lines to provide sex for Japanese soldiers during World War II. These groups object to the inclusion of such information in government-approved textbooks, though they don't deny that the system existed. Because the euphemism *ianfu* ("comfort women") is going

to be used in the books to describe the women — thus reinforcing the implication that they were providing a service — the only logical reason for opposing the inclusion is to keep sex out of classroom discussions.

On Dec. 2, the Group to Make New History Textbooks held a press conference at a hotel in Tokyo and claimed that merely mentioning "comfort women" in textbooks would have a harmful effect on impressionable adolescent minds, a naive assertion, to be sure. The media bombards junior high school students with sex — much of

it violent — and an innocent-sounding term like *ianfu* mentioned in passing in a dull history textbook will not likely cause a mass outbreak of guilt and self-recrimination.

The group, however, has a larger purpose, which is to revise what it feels is the "masochistic" reading of Japan's modern history that was foisted on the country by the West.

Cartoonist Yoshinori Kobayashi is a member of the group and participated in the press conference. In fact, he reported what went on there in the Jan. 15 issue of the semimonthly magazine *Sapio*, in installment #33 of his cartoon-essay "Shin-Gomanism Declaration." *Goman* means "arrogance," and the cartoon is pure, unabashed polemics.

Kobayashi's job is to be provocative and therefore he has a vital role to play in Japan. His cartoons have covered *burakumin* discrimination, the AIDS scandal (which he was instrumental in bringing to the attention of the media) and the Aum case.

Kobayashi's main stylistic trait is caricature. He draws himself as a handsome young man who has the mettle to stand firm on his convictions no matter what, while his enemies are depicted unflatteringly. The cartoon used to run in the magazine *Sapio*, but Kobayashi withdrew it because he objected to what he felt was the magazine's wishy-washy policy of simply printing both sides of an issue without taking one itself.

In the Oct. 9 installment, Kobayashi admitted that Japan's intentions in the Pacific War were imperialistic. He goes on to say, however, that no amount of apologizing will ever quell the justified anger of Korea and China, so it's pointless to do so. He prefers to honor the "old men" who sacrificed their lives to fight in what they believed was a war to rid Asia of European and American dominance. In

one box, he glares out at the reader, saying, "You can't judge these men by the values of the present age and those of foreign countries."

Kobayashi sees himself as courageously defending a "silent minority" that has no one to speak on its behalf and which is demonized whenever the media shows videotape of former comfort women weeping hysterically.

In a subsequent installment, Kobayashi sets forth his belief (shared by revisionists in general) that these comfort women were not coerced by the military, but, instead, were either professional prostitutes protected under Japanese law (prostitution was legal in Japan at the time) or women who weren't prostitutes but, nevertheless, knew what they were getting into.

Last Friday, Kobayashi appeared on Asahi TV's late-night discussion program "Igiari (Objection)." Two men and two women who support the comfort women's claims challenged Kobayashi on specific assertions he made in "Shin-Gomanism," namely that 1) the "comfort stations" were solely the work of private agencies; 2) the Japanese military observed the human rights of the comfort women; 3) the only point worth discussing is whether the military "forced" these women into prostitution; 4) there is no evidence that any were actually forced into prostitution by the military; and 5) soldiers who raped civilians were punished by their superiors.

The hourlong discussion touched on many details and points of contention without ever arriving at any conclusions. The two sides could never agree on the definitions of terms such as "force," "trafficking" and, especially, "rape" (a word that the Japanese media is uncomfortable with anyway). What mainly

prevented meaningful engagement, however, was Kobayashi's blanket assertion that no objective evidence exists to prove that these women were forced into prostitution.

Kobayashi's main weapon was GHQ testimony taken from comfort women who described fair treatment and favorable working conditions. His point was that the Allies who were looking for evidence to prosecute Japan further found this instead. Obviously, he didn't see the documentary about comfort women that NHK aired Dec. 28, and which showed actual U.S. Army documents of interviews with Korean comfort women left behind on the Philippines at the close of the war. Those documents told quite a different story.

Kobayashi's selective evidence is more problematic than the comfort women's lack of corroboration. As with the American war veterans' insistence that any discussion of Hiroshima must conclude that the dropping of the atomic bomb was necessary, the revisionists' demand for solid evidence obscures a more complex and disturbing set of truths. The revisionists say that the comfort women's testimony would never stand up in court, but it doesn't need to.

The world believes them because, knowing what the world knows about the behavior of men and governments during times of war (as well as, to borrow Kobayashi's logic, the "values" of an earlier age), there is no reason not to believe them. And regarding the question of who ran the prostitution operations, the military or private enterprise, it doesn't matter:

Japan was under martial law at the time.

The problem is that "gomanism" recognizes no middle ground. It is effective for fighting monoliths like the Health and Welfare Ministry or hypocrisy as practiced by Shoko Asahara. But it is inappropriate for dealing with a complicated issue like the Pacific War. It is especially inappropriate for emotion-charged issues like the sex slave controversy. In Kobayashi's mind, accepting the comfort women's accusations is automatically a betrayal of the "old men" who fought in the Pacific War. At one point he asked the panel in frustration, "Why do you insist on making your ancestors criminals?" It is impossible to honor both the "old men" and the comfort women, so one or the other must be discredited.

He also accused the panel of "going to a great deal of effort to find documents that make me look bad," meaning that the vehemence of the panel's position somehow makes their methods suspicious. Arrogance is born of pride, and Kobayashi has admitted that any opposition to his views will be taken personally and dealt with unsparingly. This kind of extremism comes off better in his cartoons, where it looks candid and gutsy, than it does in debate, where it seems petulant. By the end of the hour, he was accusing his opponents of "repression," as if they were censors.



CARICATURIZING HISTORY — Cartoonist Yoshinori Kobayashi appears on "Igiari (Objection)," attempting to defend his claim that "comfort women" were not forced into prostitution. PHILIP BRASOR PHOTO