

FROM CHASTITY EDUCATION TO THE INCLUSION OF SEXUAL MINORITIES? TEXTBOOKS ON ETHICS (*DŌTOKU*) AND HYGIENE (*HOKEN*) IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

*¿De la educación para la castidad a la inclusión de las
minorías sexuales? Libros de texto sobre ética (dōtoku)
e higiene (hoken) en el Japón contemporáneo*

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Abstract. UNESCO recommends that textbooks should be used to help students dismiss stereotypes. By containing stories that give prominence to multiple gender categories (men, women, transgender, for example) and various sexual orientations, such as lesbian, gay, and bisexual, textbooks can show the prejudicial effect of the division of humankind into two sexes and the imposition of heterosexuality. However, even today, schoolbooks in many countries provide very little space for this topic. Japan is not an exception. Since the emergence of the modern school system in the nineteenth century, sexual education, especially topics related to sexual minorities, has been absent from schoolbooks. Due to the international and national gay rights movement and several legal changes regarding sex reassignment surgery, the situation started to change in the late 1990s. In this article we overview the changes in curriculum guidelines relating to sexualities from 1958 to 2017 and critically analyse the latest school textbooks (issued after 2017) on hygiene (grade 4) and on ethics (grade 7-8). We discuss whether sex education in Japan, which

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was called “chastity education” (junketsu kyōiku) until 1972 and has previously been dominated by heteronormative values, has indeed transformed into “progressive” education that embraces sexual diversities. Referencing official documents of the Ministry of Education, we will argue that the Ministry of Education is medicalizing sex change surgery and labelling transgender children as “children with special needs”, while still imposing existing heteronormative gender norms on other non-minority children.

Keywords: Japan; Sexual minority; School; Textbooks.

Resumen. *La UNESCO recomienda que los libros de texto se utilicen para ayudar a los alumnos a descartar los estereotipos. Al contener historias que dan protagonismo a múltiples categorías de género (hombres, mujeres, transexuales, por ejemplo) y a diversas orientaciones sexuales, como lesbiana, gay y bisexual, los libros de texto pueden mostrar el efecto perjudicial de la división de la humanidad en dos sexos y la imposición de la heterosexualidad. Sin embargo, aún hoy, los libros de texto de muchos países dedican muy poco espacio a este tema. Japón no es una excepción. Desde la aparición del sistema escolar moderno en el siglo XIX, la educación sexual, especialmente los temas relacionados con las minorías sexuales, ha estado ausente de los libros de texto. Debido al movimiento internacional y nacional por los derechos de los homosexuales y a varios cambios legales relacionados con la cirugía de reasignación de sexo, la situación empezó a cambiar a finales de la década de 1990. En este artículo hacemos un repaso de los cambios en las directrices curriculares relacionadas con las sexualidades desde 1958 hasta 2017 y analizamos críticamente los últimos libros de texto escolares (publicados después de 2017) sobre higiene (cuarto curso) y sobre ética (séptimo y octavo curso). Debatisimos si la educación sexual en Japón, que se denominó “educación para la castidad” (junketsu kyōiku) hasta 1972 y que anteriormente ha estado dominada por valores heteronormativos, se ha transformado realmente en una educación “progresista” que abarca las diversidades sexuales. Haciendo referencia a documentos oficiales del Ministerio de Educación, argumentaremos que este está medicalizando la cirugía de cambio de sexo y etiquetando a los niños transexuales como “niños con necesidades especiales”, mientras sigue imponiendo las normas de género heteronormativas existentes a otros niños no pertenecientes a minorías.*

Palabras clave: *Japón; Minoría sexual; Escuela; Libros de texto.*

INTRODUCTION

UNESCO regards school curricula and textbooks as a crucial means for promoting human rights and ending discrimination in all its forms.

This vision of education is at the very heart of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal. In order to prevent the reproduction of stereotypes and prejudices in all societies, UNESCO underlines the importance of learning to live together on the basis of respect for diversity. Along this line it suggests that the modes of representation within textbooks and curricula should appropriately reflect the diversity of different groups of individual students including, amongst others, sexual minorities.¹

Relating examples from past societies and telling stories that give prominence to other gender categories (besides men and women) and other sexual orientations (besides heterosexuality) can show the prejudicial effect of the division of humankind into two sexes and the imposition of heterosexuality.²

However, in many countries, topics related to sexual minorities have been absent from schoolbooks. For instance, even in the countries like France and Germany, where same-sex marriage has been legalized, schoolbooks give little attention to sexual minorities.³ A number of textbooks do not refer to sexual minorities at all or describe them as "special cases".⁴ In Japan, some of the latest textbooks reference sexual minorities, although neither same-sex marriage nor partnership laws for sexual minorities have been legalised. Japanese and international media reported this curricular change positively without detailed analysis of the relevant textbook contents. Although there are a number of publications on historical and contemporary textbooks, research focusing on gender issues, especially on sexual minorities, is very limited.⁵ Thus, the aim of

¹ UNESCO, "Making Textbook Content Inclusive". <https://www.unesco.de/sites/default/files/2018-09/Making%20textbook%20content%20inclusive.pdf> (accessed December 26, 2021)

² UNESCO, "International Teaching Guidance on Sexuality Education". <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/ITGSE.pdf> (accessed December 26, 2021).

³ Autonomes Lesben- und Schwulenreferat an der Universität zu Köln, "Und das ist Homostadt. Schwulesbische Lebensweisen in NRWs Schulbüchern: Eine Studie im Rahmen der Aktionswoche gegen Sexismus und Homophobie an der Universität zu Köln, 2011". <http://lusk.de/wp-content/uploads/studie-schulbuecher.pdf> (accessed December 26, 2021).

⁴ Melanie Bittner, *Geschlechterkonstruktionen und die Darstellung von Lesben, Schwulen, Bisexuellen, Trans* und Inter* (LSBTI) in Schulbüchern* (Frankfurt: Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft, 2011), 57; Fanny Gallot et Gaël Pasquier, "L'école à l'épreuve de la théorie du genre", *Cahiers du genre*, 65 (2) (2018): 5-16.

⁵ While previous historical research has focused on the nationalistic and militaristic contents of textbooks, few have focused on the issues of sexual minorities. As far as we are aware, only Fujikawa

this article is to critically examine these latest textbooks by applying qualitative content analysis and investigate whether these textbooks actually embrace “progressive” values and celebrate sexual diversities. In our analysis we follow the UNESCO guidelines in UNESCO guidebook on textbook research (2010).⁶ First, based on secondary literature, ministerial documents and curriculum guidelines issued from 1958 to 2017, we review social and historical changes related to sexualities in post-war Japan, so that we can examine how sexual minorities were labelled differently with the course of time. Then we analyse the latest school textbooks on Hygiene (third grade) and on Ethics (seventh and eighth grades) by contrasting their contents with the “sex education” in Japan prior to 1972, which had been called “chastity education” (*junketsu kyōiku*) and was dominated by heteronormative values. These two subjects are the first subjects to include topics regarding sexual minorities. Some of the latest high school textbooks for home economics, society, and history also contain sexual minority issues, but in this article we will focus on the textbooks for the compulsory education. Although the official teaching guidelines of these subjects do not refer to sexual minorities, the aforementioned textbooks were approved by the Ministry of Education. Considering that the school attendance rate has been 99.98% since 1996⁷, one should not underestimate the impact schoolbooks might have on nurturing positive notions regarding diversity and inclusion.⁸

has examined the topic within in the broader context of his research into minorities. Hironari Saga, *Kōkokushikan to Kokutei Kyōkasho* (Kyoto: Kamogawa, 1993); Shinobu Anzai, “Interpellating children as imperial subjects: a content analysis of government-produced moral education textbooks (1903-1942)”, *Paedagogica Historica* (2023), DOI: 10.1080/00309230.2022.2155978; Ami Kobayashi, “Helden ohne Erfolg: Kriegshelden und das Heldentum in japanischen Schulbüchern (1910-1945)”, in *Helden und Heldenmythen als soziale und kulturelle Konstruktion: Deutschland, Frankreich und Japan*, ed. Steffen Höhne, Gérard Siary and Philippe Wellnitz (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2017): 147-162; Daisuke Fujikawa, “Consideration on the Treatment of Minors in Junior High School Moral Textbook”, *Jugyo jissen Kaihatsu Kenkyu* 12 (2019): 1-6.

⁶ UNESCO, “Guidebook on textbook research and textbook revision”, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000117188> (accessed April 6, 2023).

⁷ National Statistics Database of Japan, “Evolution of attendance rate and school inscription-chart 8- (shūgakuritsu shingakuritsu no suii)”. <https://www.e-stat.go.jp/stat-search/files?page=1&layout=datalist&toukei=00400001&tstat=000001011528&cycle=0&tclass1=000001021812> (accessed December 26, 2021).

⁸ Jun Oba, “L’organisation du système éducatif japonais”, *Revue internationale d’éducation de Sèvres* 42 (2006): 145-154.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF JAPANESE SEX EDUCATION

From nineteenth century sexology to post-war sex education

According to the historian Gary P. Leupp, pre-modern Japanese society embraced a certain kind of homosexual relationships:

It is no secret to any careful student of Japanese society in the Tokugawa period (1603-1868) that during these two and a half centuries male homosexual behavior was extremely common, at least in towns and cities. Sex between males was not only widely tolerated among the articulate classes but positively celebrated in popular art and literature.⁹

This situation changed with the Meiji restoration (*Meiji Ishin*), the restoration of imperial rule to the Empire of Japan in 1868. The new Japanese government undertook a wide range of political and social reforms to strengthen Japan against the threat represented by the colonial powers of the day.¹⁰ The German civil code and the French model of a centralised state broadly fed the alteration of the new Japanese Constitution and Civil Code. In order to control the state population, the newly formed government introduced the household family system (*ie seido*). In this context, when married couples became the prescribed social norm, other sexualities and behaviours became marginalised. Homosexual behaviour was labelled with the modern term “homosexuality” (*dō-seiai*), translated from Richard von Krafft-Ebin’s 1894 publication, *Psychopathia sexualis*. In the process of importing the Western study of sexology, homosexuality and transgenderism gradually came to be considered deviant and abnormal.¹¹ Consequently, the modern school system which emerged in the late-nineteenth century considered married couples the sole parenting model.

In the early 1900s, the first domestic scientific discourses on sexuality emerged in Japan with specialists such as Sawada Junjirō (1863-1936)

⁹ Gary P. Leupp, *Male Colors, The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1.

¹⁰ Yoshiya Soeda, *Kyōiku-Chokugo no Shakaishi*. (Tokyo: Yusindo kōbunsha, 1997), 8.

¹¹ Aline Henninger, “Le dénigrement politique envers l’éducation gender free dans les années 2000”, *Japon Pluriel 11, Actes du colloque de la Société Française des Etudes Japonaises*, 2016.

and Yamamoto Senji (1889-1929) as well as reformist politicians like Abe Isō (1865-1949) promoting sex education.¹² The dominant perspective at the time, to which Abe and Sawada belonged, was based on eugenics. It viewed physical education and hygiene as a way to improve fertility rates, prevent infant mortality and pregnancy loss, and strengthen the national body. Unlike his contemporaries, Yamamoto underlined the importance of sexual intercourse not only as a means for reproduction but also as a form of pleasure.¹³ Inspired by the American birth control activist and sex educator, Margaret Higgins Sanger (1879-1966), Yamamoto held lectures on sexual education and also published the magazine “*Sexual Education*”. He acknowledged the right of homosexuals and those who had hereditary disease to enjoy sex as a form of pleasure. Yamamoto was, however, murdered by a right-wing nationalist in 1929. Besides sex education, Yamamoto was engaged in various social activities such as peace and labor movements and for that reason he was black-listed by the authorities.¹⁴ His assassination is generally associated with his harsh criticism against the Maintenance of the Public Order Act, but it can be also be seen as a symptom of the growing momentum for restricting social movements and ideas of any kind against the state ideology, including the ideology regarding sexual rights. From the 1930s onwards sexual education was offered only in limited contexts and for certain audiences; for instance, sexual education in the military was promoted for prevention of venereal diseases. Most girls had no access to secondary and tertiary education and received little formal information about sexuality, yet the importance of becoming “a good wife and wise mother” (*ryōsai kenbo*) was continuously underlined for girls in all social classes.¹⁵

¹² Mark Driscoll, “Seed and (nest) eggs of empire: sexology manuals/manual sexology”, in eds. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno *Gendering Modern Japanese History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 193-197; Sabine Frühstück, “Managing the truth of sex in Imperial Japan”, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 2 (2000): 333.

¹³ Emi Shibamoto, “The aim of human sexuality education theories during the 1920s in Japan: On the argument of Senji Yamamoto”, *Kyoto University Research Studies in Education* 51 (2005): 290-301.

¹⁴ Sookyung Yi, “Senji Yamamoto and Inosuke Nakanishi: two pacifists who were brought up in Uji: memory of the peace that Yoon Dongjoo left”, *Ritsumeikan-sangkyōsakai-ronshū* 46 (2010): 105-122.

¹⁵ Shizuko Koyama, “Ryōsai kenbo shisō to kōkyōikuseido (Good wife and wise mother idea and public school system)”, in ed. Ryōko Kimura *Jendā to Kyōiku (Gender and Education)* (Tokyo: Nihon Toshō Sentā, 2009), 262; Noriko Hashimoto, *Danjōkyōgakusei no rekishiteki kenkyū (Research on history of coeducation in school)* (Tokyo: Otsuki Shoten, 1995), 30.

Heterosexuality as a premise

After the Second World War the US occupation force, directed by General Douglas MacArthur, implemented educational reforms for the demilitarisation of Japanese education. The Division for Education and Public Information worked in consultation with Japanese officials in the Ministry of Education¹⁶ and the Japanese government issued the Basic Law on Education (*Kyōiku kihon hō*) in 1947. This Law underscored the importance of education for peace and democracy. It stipulated the 6-3-3-4¹⁷ education system and nine years of compulsory education, modelled on schooling in the United States.¹⁸ While teaching guidelines (*gakushū shidō yōryō*) issued in 1947 and 1951 under American tutelage were merely suggestive, the guidelines issued after 1958 strictly regulated the content of courses and textbooks.¹⁹

When the number of sex workers and those infected by venereal diseases increased in the aftermath of World War II, the Ministry of Education issued a notice in 1947 regarding “chastity education” (their term for sexual education) as a general guideline. More specific guidelines for chastity education were issued in 1949 to give teachers and local education boards detailed instructions for the teaching of chastity education. These documents regarded “chastity” as a prerequisite for sexual health, claimed that sexual intercourse should only be performed by married couples, and directed that one should avoid sexual intercourse before marriage.²⁰ The texts emphasized ethical aspects of sexual education while biological knowledge about sex and sexuality were given less

¹⁶ Until 2001 the official name of the Ministry was Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (*Monbushō*). The ministry was restructured and renamed as the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT, *Monbu Kagaku shō* in 2001. For this article we use “the Ministry of Education” for all time periods we investigate.

¹⁷ The 6-3-3-4 system stands for six years of primary school, three years of junior high school, three years of high school and four years of university.

¹⁸ Gary H. Tsuchimochi, *Education reform in postwar Japan. The 1946 U.S. education mission* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1993), 123-125.

¹⁹ The teaching guidelines were amended in 1968, 1977, 1989, 1998, and 2008 as well as in 2016.

²⁰ Nobuhiro Yamamoto et al., “Seikyōiku no rekishiteki henshen no bunkenteki kōsatsu” (Study on the historic change of the literature in sex education), *Memoirs of Osaka Kyoiku University. V, Curricula and Methods of Education and Allied Subjects* 39, no. 2 (1991): 203-215.

attention.²¹ Beginning in the 1960s, official education guidelines included more biological aspects like physiology, maturity and development of the body. However, ethical values including heteronormative gender norms continued to be stressed.²² While women were to be responsible for sexual hygiene, birth control, and children's sex education, the role of the father was not highlighted in the educational context. This "chastity education" encouraged youths to restrain their sexual desire until marriage and tied romantic relationships, marriage, and reproduction together.²³ In these documents neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality were explicitly mentioned. However, considering that sexual intercourse was strongly related to reproduction and marriage, and that marriage was only permitted for heterosexual couples at the time, it follows that the curriculum writers regarded heterosexuality as a fundamental premise.

Homosexuality as deviant behaviour

In the 1950s and 1960s discussions of LGBTQ+ issues and representations of LGBTQ+ people emerged in the popular press.²⁴ However, probably because the Ministry regarded heterosexuality as a basic premise, sexual minorities remained absent in official documents of the Ministry of Education. This changed in 1979 when the Ministry released a document that used the terms heterosexuality, homosexuality, and sexual abnormality. Tellingly, this was a document about deviant behaviour of pupils in junior high schools and high schools. Categorizing homosexuality as deviant behaviour, the Ministry provided statistical information and measures to be taken in order to prevent the various types of behaviours they regard as problematic, namely theft, violence, sexual misconduct, alcohol consumption, smoking, drugs, motorcycle gang membership, running away from home, and suicide. Homosexuality and behaviours

²¹ Mieko Tashiro, "Seikyōikukenkū jissen no seika to kadai, junketsukyōiku kara seikyōiku e" (Sex education research: from chastity education to sex education), *Minshu kyōikukenkūjō nenpō (Bulletin of Democratic Education Research Center)* 5 (2004): 106-126.

²² Haruo Asai, *Kodomo to sei (Children and sex)* (Tokyo: Nihon Tosho Sentā, 2007), 6.

²³ Hisao Ikeya, "Education for chastity (Junketstu Kyōiku) and sexuality-gender in the family", *The Japanese Journal of Educational Research* 68, no. 3 (2001): 274-285.

²⁴ Mark McLelland, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 59-100.

that may be understood as an expression of transsexuality were regarded as a form of “sexual perversion” or “sexual abnormality” and categorized under the sexual misconduct section.²⁵ Here, the Ministry of Education categorized the following acts as sexual perversion: stealing women’s underwear, playing Peeping Tom, committing incest, homosexuality, *fujogiri* (slashing women with a knife) and *fujoyogoshi* (dirtying women with semen, bodily fluids or excrement), exposing one’s genitals, wearing female clothes or female underwear.²⁶ The Ministry of Education explained that these acts were an abnormal expression of interest in females, even arguing that male youths sometimes tried to satisfy their sexual desire by hurting or dirtying females on the street. Interestingly enough, the section on sexual perversion only discussed “the case of youths” – a term limited to males; female students were absent. In the section on sexual misconduct and prostitution, however, only female students were addressed. In general, the Ministry of Education regarded “sexual perversion” of (male) youths as transitory behaviour in adolescence. While admitting that there were a very small number of “sexually perverse” or “sexually abnormal” youths, the Ministry added that those male behaviours were, in most cases, a kind of compensatory act. According to the Ministry of Education at the time, male youths might exhibit homosexual or transsexual behavior during adolescence if they had difficulties fitting into society or restraining their sexual desire.²⁷

In many cases those pupils become normal when they grow up, but some of them continue to be homosexual even if they become adults. Although one can observe a civil rights movement regarding homosexuality in the United States, generally speaking, it may disturb the healthy development of heterosexuality. At the same time, it is against healthy social morals and may destroy the sexual order. Therefore, it is unacceptable in this modern society.²⁸

In other words, the Ministry of Education claimed that youths who seemed to be homosexual or transsexual were actually heterosexuals

²⁵ Monbushō, *Seito no mondaikōdō ni kansuru kihon shiryō* (Basic data about problematic behaviours of pupils) (Tokyo: Monbushō, 1979), 58.

²⁶ Monbushō, *Basic data about problematic behaviours of pupils*, 63.

²⁷ Monbushō, *Basic data about problematic behaviours of pupils*, 63.

²⁸ Monbushō, *Basic data about problematic behaviours of pupils*, 62-63.

who expressed their heterosexuality in a deviant way. Moreover, the Ministry seems to have been aware of the existence of sexual minorities as well as the gay rights movements abroad.

From the 1980 to the 2000s: from the end of chastity education to the broadening contents of sex education

International and Japanese context from the 1980s

There were several changes regarding Japanese sex education in the late 1980s that corresponded to international changes regarding sexual rights and sexual health. In the United States and European countries, sexual health became highly politicized with the onset of the HIV epidemic. Japan officially recognised the first AIDs cases in the archipelago in 1985. During the last years of the 1980s Japan saw the rise of the so-called “HIV panic” (*eizu panikku*). Without providing clear information about HIV transmission, except that it was incurable, fear of HIV spread among the whole population. The Ministry of Health was, in fact, highly concerned by the transmission of the AIDS virus. At the beginning of the HIV panic, gays were targeted as being responsible for the spread of HIV.²⁹ However, in 1985 after admitting that transmission was not only linked to male homosexuality, the Japanese Ministry of Health set up information and prevention centres for all. In this context, the Ministry of Health was forced to rethink sex education courses, at least by explaining prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted infections.³⁰ However, the information published by the Ministry of Health was not immediately included within Ministry of Education-approved teaching materials. It was only in 1988 that the Ministry of Education started to provide information brochures for teachers, and it took until 1992 for them to provide a booklet about AIDS for high school students. However, prevention of infectious sexually transmitted diseases only became part of the official teaching plan in 1999.³¹

²⁹ Takashi Kazama and Kazuya Kawaguchi, *Dōseiai to iseiiai (Homosexuality and heterosexuality)* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 2010), 1-3.

³⁰ Hisashi Sekiguchi, “Seikyōiku basshingu sono nerai to haikai” (Context and scope of sex education bashing), *Minshu kyōikukenkkyūjo nenpō (Bulletin of Democratic Education Research Center)* 5 (2004): 60-61.

³¹ Japanese Ministry of Education, “Kōtōgakkō gakushu shidōyōryō, Heisei 11” (High school guidelines of 1999). https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/cs/1320221.htm. (accessed May 15, 2022).

This official consideration for an “efficient” sex education was reinforced by the emergence of concerns for children’s sexual rights (*kodomo no sekushuaru raitsu*). Beginning in the 1990s, growing international considerations for children’s rights led to an international legal framework that takes children’s sexual rights into account. Internationally, sexual rights are seen as a way to better protect children, especially in relation to issues of abuse, prostitution and pornography – issues that also concerned the Japanese government and media.³² UNESCO has been promoting “Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)”, defined as education about human rights, human sexuality, gender equality, puberty, relationships and sexual and reproductive health.³³ In reaction, the Japanese government started to take gender equality issues more seriously. In 1996 the Japanese government published an ambitious policy project aimed at reducing gender inequality. This document and its subsequent applications, which are embodied in the Basic Law for Gender Equality (1999) and the Basic Plan for Gender Equality (2000), seem to have gained consensus among political parties and elected officials. However, some politicians questioned the reforms undertaken in the field of education and, in the early 2000s, triggered a conservative media assault against all the initiatives promoting non-sexist education or gender-free education. Japanese feminists called this phenomenon “denigration of gender-free education” (*jendā furī kyōiku basshingu*).

In this context sex education was also targeted by conservative politicians and newspapers.³⁴ For example, an affiliated organization of the Ministry of Health published a booklet titled “Love and Body Book for Adolescence” (*shishunki no tameno labu ando bodi bukku*). The Ministry distributed 130,000 copies to ninth grade pupils in 2002. This booklet contained information about sexual health, birth control and homosexuality, among other topics. Conservative politicians claimed during one session at the national Parliament (Japanese Diet) that the booklet promoted “excessive sex education” (*kagekina seikyōiku*). Encouraged by the attitude of governing Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro, who officially

³² Asai, *Kodomo to sei*, 130.

³³ UNESCO, “HIV and Sexuality Education”. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/health-education/hiv-sexuality-education> (accessed December 26, 2021).

³⁴ Aline Henninger, “Le dénigrement politique envers l’éducation gender free dans les années 2000”, *Japon Pluriel 11, Actes du colloque de la Société Française des Etudes Japonaises*, 2016.

said during a Diet session that he did not see the point of publishing such detailed books, some deputies and local politicians asked local education boards to recall the booklet.³⁵ This is an example of how conservative politicians, primarily from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), tried to strengthen state control over sexuality and sex education for the purpose of revitalizing “traditional” values. Although the Koizumi government (2001-2006) and the following Abe government (2007 and 2012-2020) are known as neo-liberal governments, they also worked together with neo-conservative groups so to gain more support from conservative voters.³⁶ The recall of the booklet “Love and Body Book for Adolescence” ignited further attacks on sex education. In Summer 2003 conservative politicians and members of the education board of Tokyo accused the Nanao School, a special support school (1st to 12th grade), of offering “excessive sex education”. Even though school officials aligned their curriculum with ministerial guidelines, teaching materials for sex education were confiscated and several teachers were punished with salary cuts and forced school transfers. This so-called “Nanao school affair” left a long-lasting effect on sex education in schools. Still, some conservative politicians, especially those close to the former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo (PM 2012 to 2020), raised debates questioning the legitimacy of sexual education or gender equality at schools.

New guidelines dedicated to sex education

The Ministry of Education sex education program reflected changing societal conditions of the late-1980s as school guidelines were modified. Hygiene (*hoken*) textbooks added elements about sexuality.³⁷ For instance, one can find the explicit description of heterosexuality in the curriculum issued in 1989 for elementary schools. The official guidelines for hygiene in fifth class issued in 1977 aim to teach children the following point: “the body changes with age. In addition, during adolescence, the

³⁵ Satoshi Kodama, “Rinrigakuteki shiten kara mita seikyoiku no mondaiten (Problems of sexuality education from an ethical perspective)”, *FINE (Foundation of Information Ethics) Newsletter*, 13 (2002). <http://www.ethics.bun.kyoto-u.ac.jp/fine/newsletter/n13a2.html> (accessed December 26, 2021).

³⁶ For more on the political background please read the following: Christian Galan, Yves Cadot and Aline Henninger, *Loyauté et patriotisme (le retour) Education et néo-conservatisme dans le Japon du XXIe siècle* (Rennes: PUR, 2023), 297-322.

³⁷ Mikako Sawayama, “Rekishu no naka no sei to seishoku” (History of sexuality and reproduction), *Kyōikugaku kenkyū (The Japanese journal of Educational Research)* 72, no. 2 (2005): 193-196.

body's appearance changes, and the body becomes that of an adult, with phenomena such as the first menstruation or moulting". However, the guideline issued in 1989 aims to explain the growth of the body and psychological development through the following steps:

The body changes with age. In addition, during adolescence, the body's appearance changes, and the body becomes that of an adult, with phenomena such as the first menstruation or the first ejaculations.

The mind develops through several experiences in everyday life with each passing year. Also in adolescence, interest in **the opposite sex** is born.³⁸

From 1998 onwards, this content was taught in the fourth grade instead of fifth grade, but the content itself remained similar in guideline revisions in 1998, 2008 and 2017. The persistent emphasis on heterosexuality, "one becomes interested in the opposite sex", is striking. In the school curriculum issued after the Second World War (1947) there was no explicit narration about heterosexuality, though one can clearly see fixed gender roles. Researcher and primary school teacher Yutaka Mano assumes that it was not because the Ministry of Education at the time was tolerant towards sexual minorities but rather because they just took heterosexuality for granted. Thus, the increased use of expressions regarding "the opposite sex" from 1989 onwards probably reflects the social context at that time; namely, that the Ministry of Education was forced to reaffirm his normative vision (i.e., pupils are heterosexuals and should be heterosexuals). It was a way to oppose the discourse of Japanese feminism movements from the 1970s, which criticized the different treatment of pupils based on gender in school as reaffirming a patriarchal gender hierarchy. Feminist groups, such as the Federation of Women's Organisations (*Fudanren*) and the New Women group (*Shinfujin*), started to criticize gender discrimination in Japan.³⁹ On the occasion of the International Women's Year in 1975 and the Women's Decade, they

³⁸ Monbushō, "Shōgakkō shidōyōryō Heisei gannen sangatsu" (Directives of March 1989 for primary schools), www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/old-cs/1322235.htm, with hoken (hygiene) on www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/old-cs/1322451.htm (last access 13/04/2022).

³⁹ Takako Iida and Keiko Itani (eds.), *Supōtsu jendāgaku e no shōtai (Gender studies and sport)* (Tokyo: Akashi shoten, 2009), 175.

submitted reports to the UN that emphasised the need for gender equality in education, which led only to the gradual change tackling gender discriminations in Japan.⁴⁰

In the 1980s the gay right movements gained momentum in Japan and several organizations were established that provided information on such topics as sexual minorities and fighting against sexuality-based discrimination.⁴¹ For example JILGA, the Japanese branch of the International Lesbian and Gay association, was founded in 1984 and OCCUR, the first politically active Japanese gay organization, was founded in 1986. In 1994, soon after primary school hygiene textbooks began emphasizing heterosexuality, the Ministry of Education removed homosexuality from the list of deviant behaviours. But since the existence of sexual minorities was completely absent in official documents and school curriculum, this cannot be seen as a sign of normalization of homosexuality. As Watanabe and Komiya explained, Japanese school curricula have long been based on the assumption that all children are cisgender and heterosexual.⁴² The interest in the “opposite” sex is still mentioned without explicitly mentioning homosexuality or asexuality or any reference to sexual minorities.⁴³ In addition to changing guidelines in 1989, the Ministry of Education published a reference text about sex education in 1999. *Argumentation and Operating Procedures for Sex Education in Schools (Gakkō ni okeru seikyōiku no kangaekata susumekata)*⁴⁴ distances itself from the old ideology of chastity education, but it still contains the idea that sex education should be taught together with hygiene, morals, science, and domestic education for preventative and

⁴⁰ Hidenori Fujita (eds), *Jendā to kyōiku (Gender and Education)* (Yokohama: Seorishobo, 1999), 114.

⁴¹ Yutaka Mano, *Tayō na sei no shiten de tsukuru gakkō kyōiku sekushuariti ni yoru sabetsu o nakusu tameno manabi e (Towards knowledge for erasing gender discrimination using school education with an inclusive viewpoint of sexual diversity)* (Kyoto: Shoraisha, 2020), 176-182.

⁴² Akihiko Komiya, “kakureta karikyuramu to sekushuariti - kouzoteki boryoku/ sabetsu toshite no iseiaisyugiteki gakkobunka” (hidden curriculum and sexuality - structural violence/ heterosexual school culture as discrimination), *Annals of the Institute of Nutrition Sciences Kagawa Nutrition University* 15 (2008): 101-107. Also see Daisuke Watanabe, “Gakko ni okeru doseiai no <kesarekata> <arawarekata>” (How homosexuals are made <invisible> <visible> in schools), *Rekihaku- National Museum of Japanese History* 137 (2006): 11-14.

⁴³ Japanese Ministry of Education, “Shōgakkō gakushu shidōyōryō, Heisei 29” (Primary School Guidelines of 2008).

⁴⁴ Japanese Ministry of Education, *Gakkō ni okeru seikyōiku no kangaekata susumekata (Thinking and Developing sex education in school)* (Tokyo: Gyōsei, 1999), 105.

moralizing purposes. No amendments were made to this reference text when the guidelines were changed in 2008. This was likely due to the aforementioned political “denigration of gender-free education”.

From the 2010s: sex education changing along with social change

Introduction of Gender Identity Disorder diagnosis

The 2010s seems to have been a turning point for the Ministry of Education concerning sex education, since the Ministry started to recognise sexual minorities to a limited degree in some of their publications. This change occurred against the backdrop of legal recognition of sexual minorities increasing during the 2000s and 2010s, parallel to the rampant conservative backlash which peaked between 2003 and 2008. The first of these recognitions was the promulgation of a law allowing sex change in 2003, called the Gender Identity Disorder Special Cases Act (or Act 111), which increased public awareness of transsexuality.⁴⁵ With its adoption in 2004 the law enabled one to change their sex designation in the civil registry with certain preconditions, such as removing the gonads through medical surgery. In this sense, the law did not recognise gender identities outside binary boundaries, but regarded them rather as an “anomaly” to be corrected.⁴⁶ While the government had previously regarded transsexuality as a “temporary perversion of adolescence”, they now started to refer to transsexuality with the official term “gender identity handicap” (*seidōitsusei shōgai*).⁴⁷ Regarding lesbian and gay couples, in 2009 the Japanese Ministry of Justice recognized the marriages of Japanese citizens with foreign nationals whose countries legalized same-sex marriage. Since 2015 individual districts have issue a special type of attestation of living together (*pātonāshippu shōmeisho*) for

⁴⁵ Koichi Taniguchi, “Seidōitsuseishōgai no seibetsu no toriatsukai no tokurei ni kan suru hōritsu no hōritsu katei ni kan suru ikkōsatsu (Considering the new law about sex change for people with Gender Identity Disorder)”, *The Quarterly of Legal Philosophy*, 226 (2004): 212-220.

⁴⁶ Hiroyuki Taniguchi, “Japan’s 2003 Gender Identity Disorder Act: The sex reassignment surgery, no marriage and no child requirements as perpetuations of norms in Japan”, *Asian-Pacific Law and Policy Journal* 14 (2013): 108-117.

⁴⁷ In order to remove the stigma associated with the term disorder, the diagnostic label “Gender Identity Disorder (GID)” was renamed to Gender Dysphoria (GD) in 2013 with the release of the DSM-5. Official documents issued by the Japanese Ministries, however, still use the label “Gender Identity Disorder (GID)”. In this article, we use “trans” when we refer to transsexual persons but in quotes we use the term GID.

same-sex couples, though these attestations do not have legal effects. At the same time, the legalization of same-sex marriage has gradually become visible on the political level.

The Ministry of Education started to promote a dedicated status for transgender pupils from the 2010s onwards, but not by directly changing the contents of textbooks. In April 2010 the Japanese Ministry of Education published a note on measures to be taken to solve the various problems that “students with “gender identity disorders” (*seidōitsusei shōgai no aru jidō seitō*) “, i.e. transgender students, may encounter.⁴⁸ This cumulated in the *Survey to Assess Measures for Counselling Students with Gender Identity Disorders*, made public in June 2014.⁴⁹ This survey was followed by the publication of a series of measures to be implemented in elementary, middle, and high schools through instructions dedicated to teachers, issued in 2015⁵⁰ and 2016.⁵¹ At the same time, the international organisation, Human Rights Watch, published a critical report on Japanese schools that asserted the existence of a disparity between the official discourse of the Ministry of Education and the daily life of pupils.⁵² In 2017, when the guidelines on bullying prevention (*ijime*) were updated, specific mention of transsexuality (*seidōitusei shōgai*), sexual orientation (*seiteki shikō*), and gender identity (*sei jinin*) were

⁴⁸ Japanese Ministry of Education, “Jidōseito ga kakaeru mondai ni taishite no kyōikusōdan no tettei ni tsuite (*About consulting at school to solve problems that pupils can encounter*)”, 23 April 2010. http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/jinken/sankosiryō/1348938.htm (accessed December 26, 2021)

⁴⁹ Japanese Ministry of Education, “Gakkō ni okeru seidōitsusei shōgai ni kakaru taiō ni kan suru jōkyō chōsa ni tsuite” (A Survey about the situation related to implemented measures for people with Gender Identity Disorder at School), 13 June 2014. http://www.mext.go.jp/component/a_menu/education/micro_detail/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2016/06/02/1322368_01.pdf (accessed December 26, 2021)

⁵⁰ Japanese Ministry of Education, “Seidōitsusei shōgai ni kakaru jidōseito ni taisuru kimekomakana taiō no jisshitō ni tsuite” (Implementation of detailed measures relative to pupils with Gender Identity Disorder), 30 April 2015. http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/27/04/1357468.htm (accessed December 26, 2021)

⁵¹ Japanese Ministry of Education, “Seidōitsusei shōgai ya seiteki shikō seijinjin ni kakaru jidōseito ni taisuru kimekomakana taiō no jisshitō ni tsuite kyōshokuin muke (Guide for teachers teaching detailed measures relative to pupils with Gender Identity Disorder), 1 April. 2016. http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/28/04/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2016/04/01/1369211_01.pdf (accessed December 26, 2021)

⁵² Human Rights Watch, “The nail that sticks out gets hammered down, LGBT bullying and exclusion at Japanese school”. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/05/05/nail-sticks-out-gets-hammered-down/lgbt-bullying-and-exclusion-japanese-schools> (accessed December 26, 2021); Human Rights Watch, “Japan: anti-bullying policy to protect LGBT students”. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/24/japan-anti-bullying-policy-protect-lgbt-students> (accessed December 26, 2021)

added as elements to be taken into account to prevent bullying.⁵³ At first glance, one might think that the Japanese Ministry of Education was concerned with issues facing transsexual students; however, our detailed analysis of the documents shows that they do not question the binary of gender identities. Instead, they underline the importance of medical care and of creating an environment where students can “easily seek advice” without being discriminated against or taunted. Transgender children are portrayed as a sick population to be offered treatment, namely medical transition to the opposite sex. In a similar way “sexual minority” children are seen as potential victims of harassment. The documents do not refer to the relationship between bullying and non-binary genders, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. Thus, as LGBT activists such as Torai Masae and some academics argue, the Ministry of Education does not seem to challenge the sexist and homophobic reality of schools, but rather reinforces the existing gender dichotomy.

SCHOOL TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS

The approval system of school textbooks in Japan

State control over textbooks in Japan can be traced back to the late-1800s when the Ministry of Education introduced the schoolbook authorization system in order to ensure the quality of school textbooks as well as to prevent corruption relating to the choice of schoolbooks. In order to tighten control over compulsory school education and to promote political ideologies in schools, the Ministry of Education started to publish state textbooks (*Kokute Kyōkasho*), which were used in all schools from 1904 onward. Although American occupation officials gave schools discretion in choosing textbooks for a brief period, the Ministry of Education reintroduced the textbook authorization system in the 1950s. The Ministry of Education has continued to exert firm control over textbook content.

As mentioned previously, the official teaching guidelines issued by the Japanese Ministry of Education regulate the contents of the school

⁵³ Japanese Ministry of Education, “Ijime no bōshitō no tame no kihonteki na hōshin” (Principles to implement to prevent bullying), 14 March 2017. http://www.mext.go.jp/component/a_menu/education/detail/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2017/04/05/1304156_02_2.pdf (accessed December 26, 2021)

curriculum. All regions must follow the guidelines and all schools, including private schools, may only use Ministry of Education approved textbooks whose content has been verified.⁵⁴ Moreover, the publishing houses authorised to publish textbooks for compulsory education in grades 1-9 are required to create content in strict accordance with the teaching guidelines. As a result, the textbooks of major publishing houses have generally become very similar in content.⁵⁵

In Japanese schoolbooks, as far as we investigated, there are no explicit homophobic expressions. However, not mentioning homosexuality at all in official school curriculums can be regarded as a form of discrimination and exclusion.⁵⁶ Scholars have shown that since 2001 the Ministry of Education started to form a tactical alliance with hawkish LDP politicians to push its own political agenda and to maintain its central administrative control over education.⁵⁷ Therefore, it is presumable to think that any content delivered by the Ministry of Education has been basically in line with the demands of conservative politicians. For instance, since the 2000s conservative politicians, especially those of the LDP, have been trying to revitalize traditional family values – such as separate social roles for boys and girls – and this led to the revision of the Basic Law on Education in 2006.⁵⁸

Hygiene textbooks

Healthcare and Hygiene classes (referred to as *hoken*) were introduced to high schools and middle schools in 1949, and to primary schools in 1951.⁵⁹ Content about anatomy and sex related information can be

⁵⁴ Christian Galan, “Contrôle scolaire, censure d’Etat, le cas du Japon”, *Japon Pluriel* 11, *Actes du colloque de la Société Française des Etudes Japonaises*, 4 (2010): 235-236.

⁵⁵ Eric Seizelet, “Les manuels scolaires au Japon”, *Savoir éducation formation*, 4 (1991): 699-718.

⁵⁶ Mano, *Towards knowledge in order to erase gender discrimination*, 33.

⁵⁷ Keita Takayama, “Japan’s Ministry of Education ‘becoming the Right’: neo-liberal restructuring and the Ministry’s struggles for political legitimacy”, *Globalisation Societies and Education* 6, no. 2 (2008): 141-142, consulted on 25 March 2023, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767720802061439>.

⁵⁸ Yuki Tsuji, “Abe seiken to josei seisaku” (Abe government and measures concerning women), *Hōgaku ronsō (Kyoto Law Review)* 176, no. 5/6 (2015): 348-379.

⁵⁹ Eiko Kaneda, “Kyōka to shiteno ‘hokentaiku’ no shiteki kosatsu” (Historical study of health and physical education in school curriculums), *Toyohogaku* 56, no. 3 (2013): 326-309.

found in the hygiene classes for primary schools. As previously mentioned, the official 2017 guidelines of the Ministry of Education for the hygiene curriculum focus on objectives that address “growth of the body and body development” at the end of the fourth grade and “how pupils should deal with psychological changes, discomfort and anxiety” during the sixth grade.

In the following analysis we take a closer look at the hygiene textbooks that teachers are required to follow, focusing on the 2020 teacher’s manuals for hygiene released by textbook publishers after the 2017 general guidelines revision and the 2019 Ministry of Education manual for teaching hygiene in primary schools.⁶⁰ We chose the following publishing houses: Gakken, Tokyo shoseki and Kōbun sho.in, which are widely used by primary schools.⁶¹ The respective textbooks divide the lesson into three or four parts with similar titles. The titles are:

1. My body began to change, 2. A body becoming an adult one, 3. Changes occurring in my body, 4. Develop in a healthy way the body (Gakken).

1. My changing body, 2. Changes of body during adolescence, 3. How can I make my body healthy? (Kobun Sho.in).

1. My body began to change, 2.1. Changes that took place during adolescence, 2.2. Changes that took place during adolescence, 3. Daily life to make my body grow in a healthy way⁶². (Tokyo shoseki)

In all three textbooks, the first session is dedicated to growth: for this purpose, the textbooks present pupils with a reference picture of physical

⁶⁰ Japanese Ministry of Education, “Ikiru chikara o hagukumu shōgakkō hoken kyōiku no tebiki” (Guide on hygiene for primary schools: raise “the power of live”). https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/kenko/hoken/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2019/07/12/1334052_2.pdf (accessed December 26, 2021).

⁶¹ For instance, 52% of districts in Tokyo use the textbooks of Gakken, 24% Kōbun sho.in, 20% Tokyo shoseki. Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education, “Reiwa 2-5 nendo shiyo kyokasyo saitaku chikubetsu no saitaku kekka, koritsu shogakko (Choices of textbooks in districts 2020-2024, public elementary schools)”. https://www.kyoiku.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/school/textbook/adoption_policy_other/adoption_result/results_2020_public.html (accessed December 26, 2021).

⁶² Toshio Kunugi, “Sei no tayōsei to shōgakkō hoken kyōkasho genjō to tenbō” (Hygiene textbooks in primary school and diversity of sexuality: Actuality and perspective), *Kyōiku shisutemu kenkyū (Research on Education System)* 13 (2018): 194.

development expected in adolescence. The teacher should explain growth and emphasise that it can be irregular. The teacher then gives pupils their school health booklet and instructs them to record their height measurements on the sheet.

For the second session (point 2 for Kobun sho.in, point 2.1 and 2.2 for Tokyo Shoseki, and 2. and 3. for Gakken) the teacher should talk about the difference between adult and child bodies. To do this, the teacher can ask about the difference between him/her and the pupils. The teacher also emphasises the discomfort that puberty can cause. The teacher may do the following exercise: make the pupils write letters to themselves, which the teacher will then correct for the following session. During the second session, teachers should also name the female and male genitalia and point out how menstruation and ejaculation work, in parallel. To ensure that the children remember the names, the teacher can give them the anatomical section image to fill in as the teacher did on the blackboard, or as it is presented in the textbooks. At the end of the lesson, the teacher leads pupils to discuss male-female relationships, and the “interest in the other sex” that occurs during adolescence. The illustrations in the different textbooks show children (girls and boys) from the ages of six to twelve studying or playing together or arguing together. The texts alongside the illustrations focus on the fact that boys and girls begin to grow interested in each other, but also that they tend to quarrel. In this way, they depict difficulties in the relationships between girls and boys and the social separation of the sexes as natural, in a similar fashion to the stereotypes portrayed in John Gray’s best-selling 1992 book, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*. The 2015 Kobun sho.in textbook below with its five pictures and accompanying text serve as a typical example. The phases of sexual development, as characterized by the interaction of the sexes, are categorized into the three different age groups shown in red and are accompanied by descriptions of general tendencies. The images and their captions are intended as characteristic examples.

The first phase, “*Until about age six: interest towards the opposite sex is weak*”, is accompanied by an image of girls and boys playing in a sandbox with the caption, “Boys and girls play together”. The second phase, “*Approximately age 7-9: Interest towards the opposite sex is born*”, depicts two situations. The upper image of boys playing basketball and

girls reading a book is subtitled, “It becomes more common for boys and girls to play among themselves”. The lower image contains the caption, “Boys and girls often quarrel”. In the third phase, “*Approximately 10-12: Interest in the opposite sex grows*”, a girl is shown reading in the background, while two boys chat in the foreground. This image is entitled, “One gossips about the opposite sex, intentionally pretends not to have interest, and so on”. In the final image a girl is shown having passed by a boy and experiencing a reaction to him, the caption reads, “Your heart beats wildly”.

Figure 1. Girls and boys relations



Source: Kobun sho.in 2015.

In Ministry of Education guidelines concerning the growth and development of the body, as in the case above, there is little difference between the 2008 and 2017 guidelines. They both stipulate that the following content should be taught:

(1) *The body is gradually changing with age. In addition, concerning the growth and development of the body, there are individual differences.*

(2) *The body, from adolescence, is becoming close to an adult body, it changes, you have first menstruations or ejaculations for example. In addition, interest in the opposite sex is emerging.*⁶³

However, there are changes to a separate document entitled “Explanation of Guidelines”. The main differences between the two versions are that the 2008 guideline mentions individual differences (*kojinsa*) in regard to the **timing** with which people develop secondary sex characteristics and interest in the opposite sex; also the guideline emphasizes that it “**occurs for everyone**”, while the 2017 guidelines just mention individual differences in this regard without any reference to timing or “everyone”:

Make pupils understand that during puberty, first menstruations, ejaculation, voice change, hair growth are occurring and interest in the opposite sex is emerging. In addition, concerning these changes, **it occurs for everyone**, but it can be early or late, and it is the phenomenon of getting an adult body, **although there are individual differences in the primary and secondary growth characteristics** (2008 guidelines).

Make pupils understand that during puberty, first menstruations, ejaculation, voice change, hair growth are occurring, and secondary growth characteristics will occur and that, in addition, interest in the opposite sex is emerging. Concerning these changes, **there are individual differences**, and this the phenomenon of getting an adult body⁶⁴ (2017 guidelines).

The aim of the MEXT using the expression “individual differences” is not clear, but we would argue that this expression allows teachers and publishers to interpret it as respect for sexual minorities. On the other

⁶³ Japanese Ministry of Education, “2008 Gakushu shidōyōryō” (2008 Teaching Guidelines). www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/youryou/syo/tai.htm and “Shōgakkō gakushu shidōyōryō, Heisei 29” (Primary school teaching guidelines of 2017) https://www.mext.go.jp/content/1413522_001.pdf (accessed April 13, 2022).

⁶⁴ Japanese Ministry of Education, “Primary school guidelines of 2017”.

side, the Ministry can dodge complaints from conservatives since the expression can be also interpreted as there being individual differences in the development of secondary sexual characteristics. While the 2008 guidelines depict cisgender secondary growth characteristics and interest in the opposite sex as inevitable, the 2017 version leaves some, albeit small, room for interpretation. Thus, publishers can decide whether to mention that not everyone is interested in the opposite sex or only that the body changes differ from one person to another. In reality, the three textbooks we surveyed contain very little information in regard to sexual minorities: Gakken textbooks do not mention anything, except that changes can occur early or late (more in accordance with the 2008 guidelines). Tokyo shoseki mentions that “There are individual differences” without elucidating further, and Kobunsha mentions that “it depends on the person” (there are individual differences). In addition, Kobun sho.in publishing house’s textbook is the only textbook containing both texts and images for a heading entitled “Doubts About Your Sexuality” (*sei ni tsuite no nayami*). Two short paragraphs are dedicated to the topic. The speech bubble in the accompanying image reads, “This topic of femininity/being like a woman, masculinity/being like a man is somehow not my cup of tea”. Notably, the passage is followed by a section containing the number of Yorisoi telephone hotline with “Expert advice for people with worries regarding their sex or sexuality”.

Kobun sho.in has explained that the additional textbook page is to suit “contemporary topics”.⁶⁵ The Kobun sho.in textbook makes the 2008 guideline change about the non-heterosexual component most visible. In a 2019 article by Asahi Shinbun the above image was in fact used as evidence to show that the Ministry of Education was taking into account sexual minorities.⁶⁶ However, another article that appeared in a Japanese LGBT media outlet is more precise: it depicts changes in the visibility of non-heterosexuals as being far more a result of the Kobun sho.in fourth grade textbook and Bunkyoisha sixth grade textbooks than the Ministry’s

⁶⁵ Kobun, “Guide and reference materials to contribute to the important points of learning activities”. <https://www.kobun.co.jp/teaching-plan-2020/> (accessed December 26, 2021).

⁶⁶ Asahi Shinbun, “Kawaru shōgakkō no taiiku kyōkasho” (Physical education textbooks in changing primary school). https://www.asahi.com/articles/DA3S14058754.html?iref=pc_photo_gallery_breadcrumb (accessed December 26, 2021).

new guidelines.⁶⁷ This information about “inclusion of sexual minorities in primary school textbooks in Japan” was also reported in international media; however, the content is too vague, claiming that “LGBT inclusive information” has been added, which gives the impression that it is part of a general trend.⁶⁸ Other media focus on the publication of two books dedicated to children: *Living proud! growing up LGBTQ* (*Watashirashiku, LG-BTQ*), published in 2017 by Otsuki Shoten and the popular illustrated series *Different sex, different ways of living* (*Iro-iro na Sei, Iro-iro na Ikikata*) published by Poplar Publishing Co. in 2016.⁶⁹ Although media coverage in Japan and abroad was positive, noting that LGBT issues were included in primary school textbooks, the content of the guideline explanations and textbooks are ambiguous. In reality, new textbooks in 2020 still focus on “interest for opposite sex” and when they mention that some pupils will not follow this pattern, they never mention words such as “homosexuality”, “LGBT”, “transsexuality”, “normality”, “diversity”, or “sexual minorities”. Rather, they focus on disorders that occur in adolescence, including behaviour not fitting “interest for opposite sex”. Once again, the description gives an image of pathos, as expressed by the non-happy faces of the two kids in the image of Kobun sho.in textbook. The sole idea expressed about doubting one’s sexual identity or sexual orientation is to ask adults for advice, for instance at the Yoriso Hotline, a free hotline associated with the Ministry of Health and dedicated to advice regarding many of the worst problems one might encounter in life. It is uncertain whether this is helpful for queer pupils to think about themselves in a positive way.

In sum, after 2017 guideline revisions some of the new *hoken* textbooks in primary schools are mentioning the possibility of not feeling changes such as “interest for opposite sex”. However, the content remains

⁶⁷ Out Japan, “From next spring for the first time sexual minorities will be mentioned in primary school textbooks”. https://www.outjapan.co.jp/pride_japan/news/2019/3/21.html (accessed December 26, 2021).

⁶⁸ Gay Star News, “First LGBT-inclusive textbooks for elementary schools in Japan”. <https://www.gaystarnews.com/article/first-lgbt-inclusive-textbooks-for-elementary-schools-in-japan/> (accessed December 26, 2021) and Equal Eyes, “Japan: first LGBT-inclusive textbooks for elementary schools in Japan”. <https://equal-eyes.org/database/2019/3/31/japan-first-lgbt-inclusive-textbooks-for-elementary-schools-in-japan> (accessed December 26, 2021).

⁶⁹ Otras voces en educación, “Presentaron libros sobre transexuales para niños en Japón”. <https://otrasvoceseneducacion.org/archivos/235386> and Les Univers du Livre, actualitte, “Japon : prévenir les préjugés LGBT chez les élèves par les livres”. <https://actualitte.com/article/23820/international/japon-prevenir-les-prejuges-lgbt-chez-les-eleves-par-les-livres> (accessed December 26, 2021).

vague and official guidelines can be interpreted in a narrow way by teachers, who are often uneasy when dealing about sex education. As the 2008 and 2017 guidelines are almost the same concerning “adolescence”, 2008 and 2017 textbooks look similar, despite the wording around “individual difference” being a significant change for the Ministry of Education. In fact, when the Ministry of Education was asked at the House of Representatives in March 2017 why the guidelines didn’t cover sexual minorities, the Ministry’s response was simply that it was “difficult” to include elements about “sexual minorities”.⁷⁰

Ethics textbooks

Some ethics textbooks for the seventh to ninth grade started to include topics on sexual minorities for the first time in 2019.⁷¹ The ethics curriculum does not explicitly mention discrimination against sexual minorities; however, it is possible to integrate the topic of sexual minorities into ethics classes in connection with general themes like discrimination, prejudice, diversity and tolerance.⁷² Indeed, Yutaka Mano, who was an openly gay middle school teacher and is now giving lectures on sexual minorities in various institutions, reported that lectures on sexual diversities he offered have been mostly integrated into the ethics class.⁷³

The study of ethics (*shūshin*) was introduced to schools in 1872 for the first time, and in pre-war Japan it played a distinctive role for nationalistic moral education. The ethics class conveyed the image of the modern Japanese nation as a patriarchal family ruled by the emperor. The lives of Japanese people were protected by the emperor, the head of this family, and thus all his children should show filial piety to the emperor in order to return his kindness.⁷⁴ In this context, the virtue of chastity

⁷⁰ House of Representatives, “Public comment of the new guidelines”. https://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_shitsumon.nsf/html/shitsumon/a193235.htm or access via https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/1383995.htm (accessed April 13, 2022).

⁷¹ These textbooks were approved by the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) in 2018 and started to be used in schools from 2019 onwards.

⁷² Mano, *Towards knowledge in order to erase gender discrimination*, 211.

⁷³ Mano, *Towards knowledge in order to erase gender discrimination*, 206.

⁷⁴ Seikou Toyozumi, “A study of the history of moral education (1): From the establishment of Shushin to the times of government-designed textbooks”, *Annual Report of The Faculty of Education* 49 (2015): 27-38.

was regarded as one of the essential moral values taught in ethics class, especially for female pupils.

Under U.S. occupation after the Second World War the subject *shūshin* was abolished, together with other subjects and school ceremonies which contributed to the indoctrination of children towards ultra-nationalism. The National Diet officially abolished the Imperial Rescript on Education in 1948; however, its heteronormative gender norms remained unchanged after the reintroduction of ethic class (*Dōtoku*) in the 1950s.⁷⁵ Until recently there were no schoolbooks for ethics, and classroom teachers were charged with teaching this subject.⁷⁶ In 2002 the Ministry of Education started to distribute teaching material for ethics classes entitled *Note of my Heart* (*Kokoro no Nōto*). This teaching material mentions nothing about sexual minorities; instead, the material contains sentences like “It is natural to be attracted to the opposite sex”. This tendency of ignoring sexual minorities and underlining heterosexuality remain even after the publication of new teaching materials in 2014 entitled “Our Ethics” (*watashitachi no dōtoku*). In 2015 the Ministry stipulated that the ethics class was to be taught as a regular school subject on a weekly basis. Along this line, from 2019 onwards, junior high schools started to use the newly published ethics textbooks. Different from teaching materials published by the Ministry of Education in 2002 and 2014, these new textbooks were published by private companies after the Ministry of Education approved the content.

In 2019 eight new ethics textbooks were approved by the Ministry of Education. Among them, three textbooks refer to sexual minorities, although only about 28% of junior high schools used one of these three textbooks.⁷⁷ The publisher Nihon-Bunkyo claims 25.3% of the market share and its ethic textbooks for the eighth and ninth grade refer to sexual minorities briefly. For the eighth grade, the textbook discusses human rights problems which need to be solved in Japan. Among other

⁷⁵ The Ministry of Education stipulated 34 hours of ethics class per year for the first grade and at least 35 hours for the 2d-9th grades.

⁷⁶ Seikou Toyozumi, “A study of the history of moral education (2)”, *Annual Report of the Faculty of Education* 50 (2016): 243-254.

⁷⁷ Sankei Newspaper, “Chūgakkō dōtoku kyōkasho shea, Tokyo shoseki ga sanwari de toppu” (Tokyo Shoseki claims top share, 30%, of textbooks for ethics in junior high school). <https://www.sankei.com/article/20181109-AETIY2ZS4BP3JBDIJVAB7NUPLM/> (accessed December 26, 2021).

topics, discrimination due to sexual orientations and sexual identities are mentioned.⁷⁸ The textbooks for the ninth grade published by Nihonbunkyo spare one page to briefly describe concepts related to sexuality; these include biological sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, and gender expression.⁷⁹ At the bottom of the page the textbook denies the clear dichotomization of male and female. Instead, it underlines the complexity and variety of sexuality and suggests that it is important to be oneself.⁸⁰

The ethics textbooks of Gakkō Tosho claim 2.4% of the market share and the textbooks for the eighth grade allow six pages for sexual minorities.⁸¹ Tagged with keywords like fairness, social justice, coexistence and prevention of bullying, the chapter underlines the importance of diversity. In the first two pages related terms like sexuality, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender are explained and difficulties sexual minorities face are mentioned. The next four pages introduce personal experiences, namely those of a lesbian woman, a transgender man, and a school nurse who supported transgender pupils. At the end, the textbook suggests pupils reflect upon and discuss the following point: prejudices one has towards sexual minorities, how to tackle the discrimination against sexual minorities, and how different types of people can live together.⁸²

The ethics textbooks of Nihon Kyokasho claim only 0.3 % of the market share and the ethics textbook for the eighth grade includes a four-page story about a pupil with “gender identity disorder” who loves singing.⁸³ According to the publisher, the aim of this chapter is to think about diversity and how one can develop one’s individuality and ability.⁸⁴ In the story the protagonist, obviously a transgender girl, explains the difficulties of being bullied by classmates, her brother and sister, and the resulting

⁷⁸ *Ethics for Junior High School: Asu o ikiru 2.* (Tokyo: Nihon bunkyo, 2018), 47.

⁷⁹ *Ethics for Junior High School: Asu o ikiru 3* (Tokyo: Nihon bunkyo, 2018), 145.

⁸⁰ *Ethics for Junior High School: Asu o ikiru 3*, 145.

⁸¹ *Ethics for Junior High School: kagayake mirai* (Tokyo: Gakkō Tosho, 2018), 172-177.

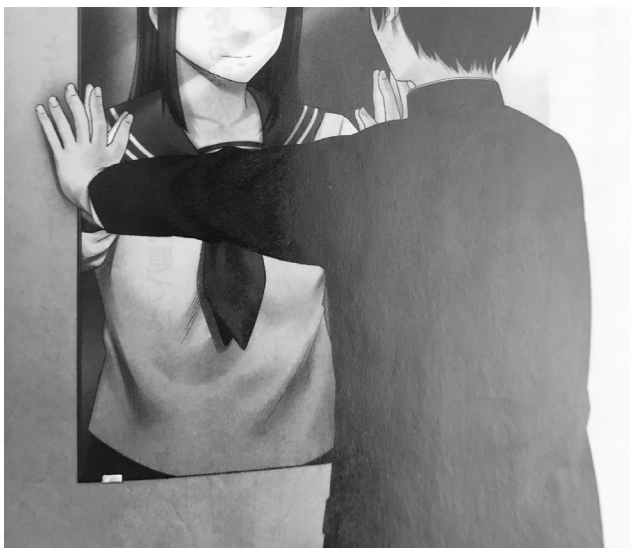
⁸² *Ethics for Junior High School: kagayake mirai*, 177.

⁸³ Sankei Newspaper, “Among textbooks for moral in junior high school”.

⁸⁴ *Ethics for Junior High School: ikikata wo mitsumeru* (Tokyo: Nihon Kyokasho, 2018), 64-67.

school phobia. For her, singing songs was the only way to escape from such a severe reality. However, during the eighth grade, her voice changed and she stopped singing. For her, singing with a deep voice was accepting that she is male and she could not stand it. She told her homeroom teacher about her problems and the teacher suggested that she keep playing music until she can sing again. Shortly before graduation, the student's homeroom teacher took her to town and showed her street musicians. The teacher told her that the street musicians are trying to express their feelings and thoughts and thus their songs are encouraging, although they are not necessarily skilled. After hearing this comment, the protagonist feels something is going to change. The story ends here and the textbook suggests pupils discuss the following points: the way the classroom teacher accepted the protagonist, the teacher's message to the protagonist, and the possible change of the protagonist in future.⁸⁵

Figure 2. Illustration of "So I keep singing"



Source: Eighth grade ethics textbook of Nihon Kyokasho, 2018 p. 64.

Different from the first two examples, which explain concepts related to sexuality or report personal experiences, it is not clear what kind of

⁸⁵ *Ethics for Junior High School: ikikata wo mitsumeru*, 67.

information or message the transgender story aimed to convey. The story is indicative of the current challenges transgender pupils face in school, which is reflected in the manner in which the protagonist describes her sexuality (transsexuality) as “Gender Identity Disorder” and “handicaps” (*shōgai*). This resonates with the discourse mentioned previously regarding transgender pupils, namely that transsexuality is still pathologized and transsexual pupils are regarded as “children with special needs”. Secondly, though the homeroom teacher shows understanding for the student, there is no evidence that the teacher or the student’s classmates changed something to make their school comfortable for her. Instead, the teacher took her to a station outside of the school to show street musicians playing in front of the station. The teacher admired the musicians for expressing their feeling honestly despite their lack of skills. The intention of the teacher here is not clear, but it is indicating that this how the student should think about herself, rather than suggesting that conditions in the school might change. This point aligns with the fact that the Ministry of Education recommends special care for transgender pupils but does not question heteronormativity.⁸⁶

CONCLUSION

Our study indicates that the Ministry of Education has been reluctant to acknowledge the need for comprehensive sexual education that departs from the abstinence-oriented sex education and that includes individual sexual rights. It even largely avoids using the proper word for sex education (*seikyōiku*) in official documents. However, content related to gender roles, anatomy and sexuality can be found in contemporary hygiene and morals texts for compulsory education. The Ministry of Education has imposed heteronormative gender norms on pupils through these subjects. After sexual minorities issues became more visible in the 1990s, LGBTQ+ pupils were no longer regarded as heterosexual pupils who express their heterosexual interest and love in a deviant way, and allusions to sexual minorities disappeared from school documents.

⁸⁶ Iwamoto Takeyoshi, “Gakkō kyōkasho de no seitēki mainoriti no toriatsukai o meguru genjō to kadai seibetsu iwa o motsukodomo no dō taiō suru ka” (Situation and questions about the inclusion of sexual minority in the textbooks (for third grade) which kind of measures for children having gender identity disorder), *GID gakkai zasshi* (*The Journal of the Japanese Society of Gender Identity Disorder*) 12, no. 1 (2019): 229-233.

Since the 2010s, sexual minorities have come to be regarded as vulnerable pupils who are targets of bullying and thus need special care and special attention, as indicated by the term “Gender Identity Disorder diagnosed”. Even today, notes issued by the Ministry of Education medicalize sex change surgery and label transgender children as “children with special needs” while still imposing existing heteronormative gender norms on other non-minority children.

Yet, as we showed with the example of hygiene and ethic textbooks edited after general guidelines reforms, some textbooks started to include sexual minority issues. Although the 2017 teaching guideline does not refer to minorities, we can see that over a long period of time textbooks began to include the question of non-heteronormative sexuality. Some primary school textbook publishers explicitly mention the case of children who do not fit their anatomical sex. The number of junior high school textbooks that refer to sexual minorities increased significantly in the two years from 2019 to 2021, from four to seventeen.⁸⁷ Most of those textbooks, however, do not directly refer to sexual minorities, while those that do include LGBTQ+ issues provide only a limited space for these topics. In some cases, there are misleading expressions (e.g., transsexuality as handicap).

This situation is mainly due to the approval system of school textbooks. As we mentioned previously, publishing houses are required to create textbook content in strict accordance with the teaching guidelines. If the teaching guidelines do not refer to sexual minorities, there is automatically little space left for this topic. As a result, a few publishing houses, whose editorial teams do believe topics related to sexual minorities is indispensable to avoid discrimination, took an initiative to include such information as “additional information”.⁸⁸ Another difficulty is that individual public schools are not permitted to choose such textbooks, even if the school staffs are interested in sexual minority issues.

⁸⁷ PRIDE JAPAN “Raishun kara no Chūgaku Kyōkasho de “Sē no Tayōse” ni tsuite no Kijutsu ga ōhaba ni fueru koto ga akirakani” (From next spring textbooks for junior high schools include more contents about “sexual diversity”). https://www.outjapan.co.jp/pride_japan/news/2020/3/31.html (accessed April 23, 2022).

⁸⁸ Asahi Shinbun, “Dōnaru? Kyōkasyo Sei no Tayōsei Sabetsu kaisyō he Manabu” (How textbooks will change? Sexual diversity and learning for tackling discriminations). https://www.asahi.com/articles/DA3S14563064.html?ref=mor_mail_newspaper (accessed April 30, 2022).

While each private school can choose its own textbooks, public schools must use textbooks chosen by their municipal or prefectural board of education.⁸⁹

On the political level, the difficulties in making changes to textbook content related to sex education are likely to continue, since the Ministry of Education only aligns itself with the conservative wing of the ruling party, the Liberal-Democratic Party (LDP). For the most conservative members of the LDP, education remains a means to achieve the ideal of the family where gendered social roles are fixed. This idea remains central to the rhetoric of LDP conservatives who continue, even after the denigration of gender free education and sex education, to propose different education for girls and boys. In this light, sex education is particularly targeted and is an easy target after the media coverage of the Nanao special school. In March 2018, Koga Toshiaki, a local elected official in the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly, attempted to cause a scandal by again criticizing a hygiene course containing sex education. He used exactly the same approximations as in the summer of 2003 with the Nanao special school case even though the Supreme Court had condemned him for defamation against the Nanao special school and sentenced him to compensate the Nanao teachers in 2013. This is probably because Koga is convinced of the importance of sexist education and chastity education, and found support for his position in the political context marked by the second Abe government (2012-2020).

However, we can see a positive tendency here. Namely, Koga's campaign was not as successful in 2013 as it was in 2003. The media coverage of Koga's criticism was brief, as the local education committee of the Adachi district simply pointed out that the sex education courses mentioned were perfectly in line with the official curriculum. The Japanese press stopped reporting on this topic within a month. Furthermore, the media coverage of the sex education contents was balanced: the press consistently illuminated political tensions between the officials of the Ministry of Education (who advocate the minimum of sex education), the officials of the Ministry of Health (who only note problems caused by

⁸⁹ Japanese Ministry of Education, "Kyōkasho Saitaku no Hōhō" (How to choose textbooks). https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/kyoukasho/gaiyou/04060901/1235091.htm (accessed April 30, 2022).

the lack of knowledge about contraception, gender equality and sexual minorities), teachers, and LPD conservative politicians (who claim boys and girls should have distinct social roles). Moreover, most of the debates in the press from April 2018 onwards have been about teaching contraception, and not whether there is a need for sex education. Except for the most conservative politicians, most actors in the educational field seem to agree on the need for sex education, though each actor has its own objectives.

We need to keep carefully observing current changes of textbooks as well as the implication or reaction of the Ministry of Education to this latest trend. Even with minor changes in some textbooks, we argue that both the Ministry of Education and textbook publisher in general still teach heteronormativity. Heterosexual behaviour is persistently presented as the central pattern, and explicit description of boys' and girls' relations are cast in terms of "the opposite sex". Moreover, terms such as "gay", "lesbian", "LGBTQ" or "sexual minorities" never appear. Instead, transgender pupils are presented as "children with special needs", and they are "diagnosed" and expected "to be cured" of "Gender Identity Disorder" (GID). Other ministries, such as Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Health, barely use the term "sexual minority" (*seiteki mainoriti*) and "transgender" (*toransujendā*) either. Instead they use the term "gender dysphoria syndrome" (*seidōitsusei shōgai*).⁹⁰ This shows that the Japanese authorities' general attitude on sexual minorities is to label them as medically challenged individuals who require special support. This attitude clearly fails to align with UNESCO's vision for Sustainable Development aiming to end discrimination in all its forms. If we consider UNESCO's objective to tackle all biased and inaccurate representations of people through schoolbooks, there are still many things to do in the field of Japanese textbooks.

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⁹⁰ See, for example, the Ministry of Justice website explanation about sexual orientation discrimination (https://www.moj.go.jp/JINKEN/jinken04_00126.html) or the Ministry of Health orientations for the prevention of suicide, with a sub-section related to sexual minorities discrimination (<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/h30h-s5-1.pdf>) accessed April 14, 2022.

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