

Official history of Hirohito dodges controversies

By Mari Yamaguchi and Ken Moritsugu
The Associated Press

TOKYO — A 12,000-page history of Emperor Hirohito released in Japan includes childhood letters to his parents, but steps gingerly around what many want to know: his thinking on issues such as his responsibility for World War II. The record took 24 years to create, but scholars and journalists say it is still incomplete.

The official annals released by the Imperial Household Agency, a tradition dating back 14 centuries, provide a detailed timeline of Hirohito's life, but don't appear to shed much new light on a 62-year reign that spanned Japan's brutal invasion of much of Asia and its reconstruction and emergence as a global economic power in the postwar years.

The 61-volume record "hardly contained anything new that reverses conventional wisdom and history," the liberal-leaning *Mainichi* newspaper said in an editorial. "We must keep asking ourselves why that catastrophic war could not be avoided. ... The question is hardly resolved."

The conservative *Yomiuri* newspaper noted that the annals left out Hirohito's own words on the Yasukuni Shrine, where war dead are deified, and criticized the palace for attempting to avoid trouble.

Instead, the official history cites a 2006 scoop by the *Nikkei* newspaper, which obtained a memo written by a former head of the Imperial Household Agency that quoted Hirohito as expressing displeasure over the shrine's decision to include Class A war criminals. The memo itself, which some researchers and journalists were hoping to see, was left out of the record, according to Japanese media reports.

Chris Winkler, a senior research fellow at the German Institute for Japanese Studies in Tokyo, said giving an official imprimatur to Hirohito's remarks would have risked enraging Japan's vocal right wing.

"They don't want any trouble," he said of the Imperial Household Agency. "They just want the emperor or the imperial institution to stay out of trouble. That's their primary concern."

The record conveys some of the frustrations Hirohito felt early in his reign, through some of the 10,000 *waka* poems he is believed to have written. Only about 900 of the poems are known, including three new ones discovered during the project.

In one, written a few years after ascending the throne in 1926, he lamented that his ideas were not being reflected in palace policies, according to Japanese media reports. Two other poems from 1929 refer to "a missing fruit," an allusion to the frugal life at the palace during the global economic slump.

The history says Hirohito was first notified of the U.S. atomic bombing of the city of Hiroshima nearly 12 hours after the blast on August 6, 1945, according to Japanese media reports.

It says Hirohito judged on the evening of August 8 that it had "become impossible to



HISTORY WITH HOLES. Japanese Emperor Hirohito waves during an imperial garden party at the Akasaka Imperial Gardens in Tokyo, Japan, in this May 19, 1988 file photo. The Imperial Household Agency has released a 12,000-page history of the former emperor. It includes childhood letters to his parents, but steps gingerly around what many want to know: his thinking on issues such as his responsibility for World War II. Hirohito died on January 7, 1989. (AP Photo/File)

continue the war" and expressed hope that the war would be concluded "as swiftly as possible," according to the reports. The United States dropped another atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki the next day, and Hirohito announced Japan's surrender on August 15.

The practice of documenting an emperor's reign follows a Chinese tradition, though in earlier times the records were intended mainly for the imperial household.

The annals of Hirohito's grandfather, the Meiji emperor, didn't start coming out until 1968, more than 50 years after his death. The record of Hirohito's father, the Taisho emperor, was only released in 2002 after the *Asahi* newspaper filed a public records request, and parts were blacked out, triggering criticism.

Hirohito's official history was completed this year and presented to his son, current emperor Akihito, in August. The 24-year project cost 200 million yen (\$1.9 million), not including personnel costs for a staff that averaged about 26 people.

The release of the history was the lead story in Japan's major newspapers, playing bigger than tennis star Kei Nishikori's bid for the U.S. Open championship.

The relatively quick release of Hirohito's record, 25 years after his death in 1989, was welcomed as progress by the media and scholars. It's also the first time the annals were written in modern Japanese, instead of a less-accessible archaic form of the language. None of the annals was blacked out, though that left many wondering what was left out.

Hirohito "is a first-rate witness of his era, which is an extremely turbulent part of Japanese history, and historical studies of that era are moving forward beyond views that tend to see the royals as taboo," the *Nikkei* newspaper said. "But we should remember that the record is not a complete documentation of his accounts and try to read the Imperial Household Agency's intentions."



HARE-RAISING ART. Landscapers trim grass in front of an art installation of a giant white rabbit leaning against an old aircraft hangar in Taoyuan, Taiwan. The rabbit was created by Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman, whose popular yellow duck art installation has been displayed in Amsterdam, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, and other cities. The white rabbit was part of the Taoyuan Land Art Festival. (AP Photo/Wally Santana)

Before papal visit, Manila can take papal selfies

MANILA, The Philippines (AP) — In Asia's bastion of Roman Catholic faith, images of Pope Francis are getting the pop star treatment.

Life-size cardboard cutouts are being distributed by a church-run radio station to churches, schools, and malls in the Philippine capital to generate "papal fever" before the pope's visit in January.

At one of the country's largest shopping centers, the SM Mall of Asia, students, families, and other shoppers snapped pictures of themselves beside the papal standee.

Rev. Anton Pascual, president of Radio Veritas, said the promotion allows camera-loving Filipinos "to take a selfie with the pontiff."

Pope Francis is set to visit the Philippines from January 15 to 19 and is expected to meet survivors of Typhoon Haiyan (also known as Typhoon Yolanda), which devastated central provinces, killing 6,300 people and leaving 1,061 missing.

"The Pope Francis standee of Radio Veritas is the first stage of papal fever we are launching to spread the mercy and



SAINTLY SELFIES. Filipinos have their photo taken with a cutout of Pope Francis at SM Mall of Asia, one of the country's largest shopping malls, in suburban Pasay city, south of Manila, the Philippines. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez)

compassion message of the Holy Father," Pascual said in a text message.

Pascual also said Radio Veritas will be the papal radio for the visit.

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