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# SOME THOUGHTS ON SCHOOL, EDUCATION, HISTORY AND IDEOLOGY

## INTRODUCTION

Ever since Cicero's quote on history being "life's teacher", we keep asking ourselves rhetorically whether we learn anything from history. At the same time, we take great pleasure in repeating *ad nauseam* how history keeps repeating itself. The two stipulations are in themselves contradictory, for if we had learned anything from history, we surely would not keep repeating all of our historical mistakes. After every war we keep declaring emphatically how we should *#neveragain* allow something like that to happen and how we certainly should *#neverforget* past traumatic events. Yet before long, we seem to completely forget and do all those things to each other all over again with the same vigor and

passion. Wars, oppression, racism, colonialism, poverty etc. are phenomena we witness being repeated, no matter how many times we seem to have taken their historical lessons.

In this sense history not only repeats itself, but as Marx bitterly observed, usually repeats itself in a farcical way. Not only did we learn nothing, but we also tend to repeat all the same mistakes with ever greater enthusiasm and resolve. How is that possible? Interestingly enough, we can find the answer to this question in our initial reference on history as “life’s teacher”, but we need to read that famous quote by Cicero in its entirety. What Cicero said in that quote from *De oratore*, was not that history is *magistra vitae* in itself, but that it becomes such *through the voice of the orator*.<sup>1</sup> History is not just there – an objective “truth” waiting to be discovered and systematically described by a scientist. It is through historical discourse that history is created.

Any attempt at struggling for (or at least thinking about) a conflict free society is usually ridiculed as utopian. It is widely believed that there is no perfect system, and that liberal democracy is simply the best from among all the bad systems devised so far by humankind. In this sense, the United States of America stand at the apex of history as the greatest system human society could ever have produced and indeed ever has produced; not a perfect system, but the best among all possible systems. This “no alternative” position naturally provides the viewpoint from which we can interpret any US action; namely, it provides moral legitimacy through a premise that the US essentially tries to do good even when it fails in the attempt. Dropping Atomic bombs on the civilian population of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Problematic, sure, but executed in the pursuit of the greater historical cause of stopping the evil Empire of Japan. The wars in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan or any other military intervention? Forced regime changes in other countries financed or carried out by US government agencies? Extrajudicial executions? Torture? All problematic no doubt, but at the same time necessary to achieve the goal of exporting freedom and democracy and stopping “bad hombres”<sup>2</sup> who try to undermine the liberty and spreading of the American dream.

Historical discourse is of course firmly rooted in political power. As long as the US is the world’s dominant power, history provides it with the moral high-ground, no matter how often the noble ideals of “the land of the free” are

1 “*Historia vero testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis, qua voce alia nisi oratoris immortalitati commendatur?*”.

2 “President Donald Trump threatened in a phone call with his Mexican counterpart to send U.S. troops to stop “bad hombres down there” unless the Mexican military does more to control them itself, according to an excerpt of a transcript of the conversation obtained by The Associated Press.” <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/02/trump-threatens-mexico-over-bad-hombres-234524> (accessed 2018/05/23).

trampled upon. It is remarkable how historical discourse managed to reinvent a country which was founded through the colonization of land and resources while carrying out genocide against the native population and turn it through its War of Independence from a colonist into a victim of a European colonial empire. The US renounced the King, introduced democracy and declared itself the land of opportunities. It is indeed noble, almost utopian, to establish a society based on the self-evident truths “*that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*” Later on, the same society even erected a statue dedicated to Liberty, and they put a sign on it, generously inviting: “*Give me your tired, your poor / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.*”

This is the historical narrative of the American Dream. The fact that America is the land of the free, the land of opportunity and of liberty, is a historical fact engraved in stone, not ever to be put to doubt, not even when in the 1750s Benjamin Franklin lamented how immigrants are stupid and they don't learn the language, by which he was referring to Germans, or when in considering New York's Constitution, for instance, John Jay – who was later to become the first chief justice of the Supreme Court – suggested erecting “a wall of brass around the country for the exclusion of Catholics.”<sup>3</sup> Neither were we to doubt the moral superiority of this society when by 1790 the first federal citizenship law restricted naturalization to “free white persons” who had been in the country for two years, nor when harsh “anti-coolie” laws later singled out the Chinese.

It may seem natural to a large percentage of US citizens that immigrants of the Muslim religion should be perceived as a possible threat to the safety of the country and that President Trump's Executive Order banning the immigration of citizens of several predominantly Muslim countries during his first week in the office is a reasonable political decision, but few would see any sense in trumpeting the dangers Germans or Catholics pose to the safety of the US today. Historically however, they had nevertheless been the target of similar fearmongering. The French also had warranted suspicion and there were other worrisome “aliens”, too. A wave of “wild Irish” refugees was thought to harbor dangerous radicals. And of course, the millions of “involuntary” immigrants from Africa and their offspring were regarded merely as persons “held to service”.<sup>4</sup> Yet all this racism and xenophobia have always been declared in the name of freedom and safety for the people.

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3 Davis, Kenneth C. *The Founding Immigrants*. The New York Times (July 3, 2007) <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/03/opinion/03davis.html>.

4 Ibid.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Yellow Peril racism against the Chinese became so intense that it led to physical attacks. Outbursts of violence, individual and collective, directed at the Chinese, had punctuated California's history from the beginnings of immigration to the state. Occasionally the violence had taken on the dimensions of full-scale riots. In 1871, for example, a major disturbance in Los Angeles had taken nineteen Chinese lives.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the "Chinese Exclusion Act" was signed into law on May 6, 1882, by President Chester A. Arthur.

The Immigration Act of 1924 limited the number of immigrants allowed entry into the United States through a national origins quota. It completely excluded immigrants from Asia.<sup>6</sup> The Immigration Act also included a provision excluding from entry any alien who by virtue of race or nationality was ineligible for citizenship. Existing nationality laws dating from 1790 and 1870 excluded people of Asian lineage from naturalizing. As a result, the 1924 Act meant that even Asians not previously prevented from immigrating – the Japanese in particular – would no longer be admitted to the United States.<sup>7</sup>

When Japan declared war to the US, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 in 1942, which allowed the incarceration of Japanese Americans in concentration camps built along the West coast. Between 110,000 and 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry living on the Pacific coast were incarcerated, 62 percent of whom were United States citizens. From a historical perspective, Trump's political decisions are neither unprecedented nor "un-American". They are simply a repetition of a long history of populism and fearmongering.

## THE HISTORICAL DISCOURSE IN JAPAN

Popular and institutional racism, the justified or unjustified wars that the United States have fought and still are fighting around the world, do not call for a revision or any kind of nation-wide contrition, because the history of the United States is a story of success. Japan, however, is an altogether different story. The Japanese historical discourse is much more complex in this respect. To put it simply, it is a narrative of a country with a long history stretching back to the Neolithic age, a country with the longest tradition of unbroken imperial lineage beginning in the mythological times of heavenly descent to Earth, and a country

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5 McLain, Charles J. *In Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle Against Discrimination in Nineteenth-Century America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, p. 173.

6 Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, United States Department of State <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act>.

7 Ibid.

with a unique and often incomprehensible culture. It is a story of a country that has isolated itself from the rest of the world from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, but when the rest of the world became too impatient with this isolation by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Japan decided to follow the Western course and transformed itself with almost miraculous speed from a traditional feudal society into a modern, industrial, capitalist and imperialist nation.

At first it inspired some awe in the West for its success at beating China and Russia and it even became an inspiration to the Asian colonies as an example of an Asian country standing up to the West while successfully modernizing itself. But then the Japanese imperialist and colonial appetites went too far, clashing with Western interests while at the same time alienating the country's Asian admirers. The friendship between Japan and the US turned sour and instead of conceding to Western interests, Japan decided to take its chances with a full-fledged confrontation. After years of fighting and two atomic bombs, democracy and liberty could finally prevail in Japan as well.

The historical discourse in Japan is structured as a success story during the time of the first modernization of the Meiji period up until the moment the country and its people were kidnapped by the fanatic nationalistic militarists with evil ambitions of conquering the world. They were eventually stopped by the Allied Powers, followed by what is generally understood as the country's second story of success: Japan's growing economic power and its reinvention as a nation of peace.

The Japanese historical narrative therefore contains a break in its success story; it is a narrative of two success stories, the one of the Meiji period and another one after the Pacific War, interrupted by the evil episode for which Japan must admit its guilt and express feelings of remorse. However, not everyone today subscribes to this narrative, and thus, contrary to US history, the Japanese historical narrative seems to be much more precarious. The official discourse is being challenged – both in political discourse and through the media dispute of alternative textbooks for school history.<sup>8</sup>

The reasons for this specific narrative structure can be explained in the following way: first, school history *per se* is generally understood to be *the story* of the certain nation in question. The narrative is therefore by definition structured

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8 Roger B. Jeans addressed what he terms as misperception in mainstream thinking about Japanese views of their World War II record. He challenged this misperception about monolithic views on Japanese war history by examining the exhibits and descriptive literature of Japanese “war” and “peace” museums as well as recent struggles over how to depict Japan's wartime record in school textbooks showing that rather than a unified “Japanese” view of the war, the reality is a struggle in which conservatives and right-wingers duel with moderates and leftists over the “correct history” of the war. Jeans, Roger. Victims or Victimizers? Museums, Textbooks, and the War Debate in Contemporary Japan. *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 69, No. 1, 2005, p. 149.

in a teleological way resulting in the only possible outcome: the present state of the nation. It can have its ups and downs, but it can never be negated in its essence; *the nation* can never be bad, evil or discredited in any other fundamental way. The story of a nation is always based on a certain amount of pride, be it in its glorious endurance in the face of enmity, be it in its cultural achievements and its unique tradition, or in its civilizational success of universal cultural hegemony. The nation itself is never a historical perpetrator; it is the regime taking its nation hostage that is to be blamed.

The accounts of war from the point of view of the defeated nation are therefore always imbued with traumatic experience. Japanese historical discourse oscillates within the triad of hero/victim/perpetrator, depending on the institution through which it is being reproduced, be it museum exhibits, textbooks, anime films or popular comics.<sup>9</sup> As a nation, Japan remembers itself at once as the perpetrator nation which was also victimized by the atomic bombings, yet capable also of fighting daring battles.<sup>10</sup> However, the balance between the triple structure of this war-time memory varies depending on the individual discourse and there are many for whom any narrative that emphasizes the atrocities perpetrated by the Imperial Army in East Asia comes to be perceived as “masochistic history”. Any historical discourse which is self-deprecating is considered an anomaly, a perversion, like a twisted enjoyment of self-torture and thus unhealthy and unsuitable for young generations who should grow up learning love and pride for their nation instead of being burdened by feelings of guilt and remorse.

In this sense, historical narrative has nothing to do with “truth”, but has everything to do with perception. It is a political question concerning the nature of knowledge and the purpose this knowledge should serve. As Shimazu Naoko points out, within the sphere of the “politics of knowledge” the question of how to interpret one’s national past is a jealously guarded and highly contested territory, namely one of who gets to write the “official” national history.<sup>11</sup> Hein and Selden wittily observe how textbook controversies reveal one important way that societies negotiate, institutionalize, and renegotiate nationalist narratives. History and civics textbooks in most societies present an “official” story highlighting narratives that shape contemporary patriotism.<sup>12</sup> History lessons not only model behavior for citizens within their own society but also chronicle

9 Hashimoto, Akiko. *The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan*, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 87.

10 Ibid.

11 Shimazu, Naoko (ed.). *Nationalisms in Japan*. London: Routledge, 2006, p. 186.

12 Hein, Laura, Selden, Mark. The Lessons of War, Global Power, and Social Change. In: Hein, L. E., Selden, M. (eds.). *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States (Asia and the Pacific)*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2000, p. 3.

relations with others. The stories chosen or invented about the national past are invariably prescriptive – instructing people how to think and act as national subjects and how to view relations with outsiders.<sup>13</sup>

As Nozaki and Inokuchi argue, a modern nation-state governs its people in part by creating and disseminating narratives.<sup>14</sup> They claim that one important site of such efforts are school textbooks, especially history and social studies textbooks. After all, education is one of the most effective ways to promote a national narrative which functions as “official history”, and to make and remake certain identities embedded into the national identity:<sup>15</sup>

The state, whether directly involved in textbook production and circulation or not, can readily reinforce dominant ideologies. In response, alternative and oppositional forces develop their own counternarratives and identities. For the meanings attached to a given identity—in this case the national identity—are “an unstable and ‘de-centered’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle.”<sup>16</sup>

It is this “official history” rather than some kind of “objectively existing past”, which is to become *magistra vitae*; for example, in Socialist Yugoslavia the historical narrative denounced the previous social formation as a capitalist bourgeois society oppressing the working class. The society of the new socialist state was, of course, a liberated society. The historical narrative in the independent Republic of Slovenia, on the other hand, vilifies the undemocratic or, depending on the discourse, even supposedly totalitarian nature of the socialist regime, from the clutches of which the Slovene people finally liberated themselves through the constitutional act of their Declaration of Independence. This “independence narrative” serves to construct the “liberation discourse” with much greater ease by changing the focus from the question of simple regime change to the “victim narrative”: it was not the Slovene people who were socialists, it was the totalitarian socialist state that made the Slovene people hostages of its regime.

Such narrative can easily circumvent the question of why Socialist Slovenia decided to discard the project of building a socialist society in exchange for a peripheral role within the European capitalist system, and focus on the narrative of how Slovenia liberated itself from the clutches of her totalitarian communist oppressor instead. There never is an objective past; there is only an ideological sphere of historical discourse and the question of who holds power over its

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13 Ibid., p. 4.

14 Nozaki, Yoshiko, Inokuchi, Hiromitsu. Japanese Education, Nationalism, and Ienaga Saburō's Textbook Lawsuits. In: Hein, Selden (eds.). *Censoring History*, p. 97.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

productive mechanisms (schools, publishers, historical institutes, museums etc.) and for whose benefit.

## THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN MODERN JAPAN

Schools and textbooks are important vehicles through which contemporary societies transmit ideas of citizenship and both the idealized past and the promised future of the community. They provide authoritative narratives of the nation, delimit the proper behavior of citizens, and sketch the parameters of the national imagination. Narratives of nationhood, like textbooks themselves, are always unfinished projects, requiring revision and reinterpretation to remain relevant in ever-changing times.<sup>17</sup>

With the transformation of Japanese society into a nation state following the Meiji Restoration (1868), the compulsory education system was one of the foremost new institutions of the modern state. The Meiji government issued the School System Law in August 1872. Under Mori Arinori (1847–1889) as the Education Minister, state control of teaching materials was tightened, and the government adopted a certification system requiring the approval of the Ministry of Education for all textbooks used in elementary, middle, and normal schools.<sup>18</sup>

By 1890 the purpose and content of the school system became crystalized in the Imperial Rescript on Education which emphasized three themes: Confucian values as the ethical foundation of the nation, the role of education in perfecting “moral power”, and the duty of the nation’s subjects to respect the national polity headed by the Emperor.<sup>19</sup> Eventually, in 1903, the government established the national textbook system (*kokutei kyōkasho*), which lasted until 1945 and under which the Textbook Bureau of the Ministry of Education compiled all pre-collegiate textbooks.<sup>20</sup>

Thakur describes the prewar history textbooks and education between 1903 and 1940 as ultra-nationalistic in that they described the imperial family as descendants of gods and Japan as the divine nation, while the wartime textbooks, published between 1941 and 1945, showed the escalation of militaristic and ultra-nationalistic tendencies which were already apparent in the 1930s.<sup>21</sup>

17 Hein, Selden. The Lessons of War, Global Power, and Social Change. In: Hein, Selden (eds.). *Censoring History*, p. 3.

18 Thakur, Yoko H. History Textbook Reform in Allied Occupied Japan, 1945–52. *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 1995, p. 262.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., p. 262, 263.

21 Ibid., p. 263.

Without doubt, the People's Education Order passed in 1941 was an attempt at clarifying and making more explicit a nationalist and militarist goal for elementary education and for consolidating the formal curriculum.<sup>22</sup> In order to teach the Imperial Way, the curriculum of *kokumin gakkō* – war time elementary schools – was revised to emphasize five principles: 1) To understand the national spirit, maintain strong faith in the national polity, and foster awareness of the Imperial Mission; 2) To develop intellectual skills to contribute to the Imperial Fortune; 3) To practice physical and mental training to keep oneself fit and ready to offer one's services to the nation; 4) To develop the ability to express oneself artistically to enrich national life; 5) To respect labor and to devote one's work to the cause of the Empire.<sup>23</sup>

But these were war times and the regime's intensified pressure to push for such kind of an "official history" is understandable. However, the story about the history of Japanese education is rather more complex. It is not uncommon in the literature on nationalism to paint a rather simplistic picture portraying past historic discourses as monolithic and homogenous, thus creating an additional perception of the essentially un-free and propagandistic nature of such discourses, in contrast to the pluralistic nature of liberal historical discourses.

Such a monolithic perception leads to a static and deterministic understanding of the relationship between nationalism, state and education, whereas in reality the ideological response to social conditions is always pluralistic and is actually being maintained through continuous renegotiation and class struggle. However, all these pluralistic ideological responses are held together by a hegemonic ideology provided by an apparently ideologically neutral overreaching institution like the ethnic nation. *Nationalism* in this sense is just an empty institutional shell – it is the contents of this shell that are being contested, rather than nationalism itself. The hegemony of a state dictated version of nationalism is actually never so complete as to preclude challenges from disenfranchised or dissenting groups harboring different priorities and different conceptions of the nation.<sup>24</sup>

Lincicome explored the so-called "international education movement" (*kokusai kyōiku undō*) during the Taishō Period (1912–1926), which, in his opinion, was trying to invert the traditionally conceived relationship between education and nationalism.<sup>25</sup> As the general story goes, in the first decade of the

22 Rubinger, Richard. Education in Wartime Japan, 1937–1945. In: Lowe, Roy (ed.). *Education and the Second World War: Studies in Schooling and Social Change*. London: Routledge, 2012, p. 64.

23 Ibid.

24 Lincicome, Mark E. Nationalism, Imperialism, and the International Education Movement in Early Twentieth-Century Japan. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 58, No. 2, 1999, p. 341.

25 Ibid., p. 339.

Meiji Restoration, after having ushered in a hasty program of Westernization including the establishment of Asia's first system of universal, compulsory schooling in which Neo-Confucian metaphysics gave way to Western positivism and utilitarianism, the Meiji oligarchs were persuaded by conservative elites that this Westernization had gone too far. The result was a conservative counterattack that culminated in such measures as the Imperial Rescript on Education, a stronger emphasis on moral education, the reintroduction of Confucian ethics into the curriculum, the introduction of a military style of physical education and increased government control over curricula and textbooks.<sup>26</sup>

The problem with such accounts, claims Lincicome, is that they fail to perceive the dynamic, even contentious history of educational development in Japan after 1890.<sup>27</sup> Exploring the movement to “internationalize” education, he observes that it was not limited to reducing the amount of time that teachers, as servants of the state, were obliged to spend inculcating loyalty and patriotism (*chūkun aikoku*) in the hearts and minds of their pupils, but was rather aiming for a different brand of nationalism that was at odds with the “official” one prescribed by the state.<sup>28</sup> This internationalization was not a negation of the notion of *nation* itself, but rather a contentious struggle to reconceptualize the nature of Japanese national identity and Japan's role in the community of nations.<sup>29</sup>

There were, contrary to the simplified explanations, reformist movements seeking to liberalize and internationalize the curriculum, which questioned the dominant and officially prescribed meaning of nationalism and the official educational practices that were designed to perpetuate it.<sup>30</sup> However, not only were these movements constrained by the mounting pressure by the government to suppress any reform movements which smacked of democratic, socialist or communist influences, but also by the fact that these educational reform movements were not, in principle, opposed to the ideology centering on the Emperor and the national essence (*kokutai*).<sup>31</sup> Eventually most of their proponents backed away from their advocacy of liberal and international education in the increasingly hostile climate of Japanese militarism that overspread the nation during the 1930s, following the Manchurian Incident, Japan's censure by the League of Nations and its withdrawal from the League shortly thereafter.<sup>32</sup>

Both this sort of ethnic nationalism as well as internationalism serve as two sides of the same coin – the former establishing a group of individuals *as a*

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26 Ibid., p. 340, 341.

27 Ibid., p. 339.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., p. 355.

31 Ibid., p. 356.

32 Ibid., p. 356.

*national community*, whereas the latter positions the nation in the world *community of nations*. However, just as the function of the nation as an institution is to obscure its internal inequalities and struggles, i.e. to homogenize the imagined community from within, so the community of nations serves to obscure structural inequalities among different nations.

Japan was confronted with a choice: there were those who, believing that Japan could achieve an equal position in this world community of nations, stood behind their internationalism and professed their support for the League of Nations, while others began urging their countrymen to recognize the League and Western appeals to democracy and internationalism for what they really were: deceptive tactics designed to advance Western interests and Western power at the expense of Japan.<sup>33</sup>

Different regimes can impose their official history with various degrees of repression; however, there can never be a complete uniformity of ideological perceptions concerning national history (even if they are repressed or prohibited). History is constantly being redefined through discourses within society which are based on the power relations among classes or interest groups. The shift in the education policy in the wake of defeat can thus be understood not as a complete ideological reversal overnight, but as an adjustment to the new social circumstances. Let us look at this modification in the case of Japan's defeat.

## THE DAY THE HISTORY CHANGED

In the wake of defeat on August 15, 1945 and facing the occupation by the Allied Powers, there was a rapid fire of directives and ordinances by Japanese educational institutions. Immediately following the surrender, on August 16, the Ministry of Education declared an end to the mobilization of students, on the 24<sup>th</sup> the cancellation of all directives concerning military education and physical training, on August 28, a notice was issued that teaching should resume by mid-September at the latest; on September 15, the education plan for the construction of "New Japan" (*Shin Nihon kensetsu no kyōiku hōshin*) was pronounced, on the 20<sup>th</sup> a notice regarding the treatment of textbooks was issued, on September 26, another notice was issued that all evacuated pupils should return immediately, on October 3, the prohibition of training in bayonetting techniques was issued, and on November 6, the martial arts were prohibited.<sup>34</sup>

Many other notices and directives were also issued, but probably the most

33 Ibid., p. 357.

34 Shirosuke, Masuda. 墨ぬり教科書 前後 (*Suminuri kyōkasho zengo*), 長崎大学教育学部教育科学研究報告, 35, 1998, pp. 1-10. <http://hdl.handle.net/10069/30655>.

striking consequences came from the September 20 directive “Concerning the Handling of Textbooks in Accordance with the Post War Situation” (*Shūsen ni tomonau kyōkayō tosho toriatsukaikata ni kansuru ken*) addressed to the schools and requiring that teachers delete the militaristic content from textbooks and other educational materials, which resulted in the so-called blacking-out (*suminuri*) textbooks.<sup>35</sup> While the Ministry listed several general criteria for content removal, it did not specify the exact items to be removed, except those contained in the second-semester Japanese-language textbooks for elementary schools.<sup>36</sup> This resulted in a variety of textbooks where blackened-out parts differed from school to school and from class to class, based on the individual judgement of each teacher as to what could have been construed as problematic militaristic content. The items specified by the Ministry to be removed were mainly war-related descriptions, and many stories concerning adoration of the emperors remained untouched.<sup>37</sup>

This means that from the students’ point of view the historical “truth” had changed overnight. What was true yesterday, was no longer valid today. The parts painted over in black ink, which sometimes covered whole pages, were not unlike the black stripes over “indecent” parts in sexually explicit images or the “beep” sound covering “inappropriate” language on public television – and in a way revealed more than they concealed. The deleted parts were a visual reminder of the relativity of historical *truth*, being taught as *knowledge*.

The textbooks were censored even before the occupational authorities reached Japan, apparently because the Ministry of Education wanted to give a favorable impression to the SCAP.<sup>38</sup> The blackening out continued and was expanded in the fall of 1945 under the Civil Information and Education Section (CI&E) of the SCAP until new textbooks became available in the spring and fall of 1946.<sup>39</sup> According to Thakur, Herbert Wunderlich, who was the education officer at the time, listed two main categories of contents to be deleted from the textbooks – ultranationalism and militarism. The first category included the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere doctrine or any other doctrine of expansion, Japanese racial and national superiority, unquestioning loyalty to the Emperor and the superiority of the emperor system, while militarism included the glorification of war as a heroic and acceptable way of settling disputes, the

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35 Nozaki, Yoshiko. *War Memory, Nationalism and Education in Post-War Japan, 1945-2007: The Japanese History Textbook Controversy and Ienaga Saburo's Court Challenges*. London: Routledge, 2008, p. 3.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Thakur, Yoko H. *History Textbook Reform in Allied Occupied Japan, 1945–52*, p. 265.

39 Ibid.

idealization of war heroes by glorifying their military achievements, and the elevation of military service as a subject's highest patriotic duty and honor.<sup>40</sup>

Wunderlich's CI&E staff study apparently came to the conclusion that the majority of the textbooks contained so much propaganda that deletion by the pen-and-ink method was neither practical nor advisable, so on December 31, the SCAP suspended textbooks and courses in history, geography and morals until acceptable textbooks were to become available.<sup>41</sup> Subsequently the CI&E ordered the collection of wartime textbooks in these three subjects from all schools for the purpose of pulping, which was, according to Wunderlich, a pretext to avoid possible accusations of "book-burning" and violating the freedom of the press. The censorship of the SCAP was not limited to textbooks, but encompassed all media, including film and radio.<sup>42</sup>

If we take into consideration the fact that in 1948 the CI&E granted the Ministry of Education temporary textbook certification authority – a system which with some modifications continues in Japan to this day – it becomes even clearer that the issue is not one of *truth* versus *propaganda*, but rather one of historical narratives competing for the status of truth. That is why the SCAP did not simply decentralize and democratize the textbook system, but rather introduced new policies of censorship to promote its own agenda. And when this agenda changed again due to the events known as the Cold War, the Occupation policy changed as well. The real threat to liberal capitalism was no longer posed by the purged prewar militarists, but was rather seen in the spread of Soviet Communism. Consequently, the directions that were to follow called for less punishment and control over former enemies and a greater emphasis on their rehabilitation.<sup>43</sup>

## THE PROBLEM OF SCHOOL, IDEOLOGY AND HISTORICAL "TRUTH"

If we ask ourselves whether liberal societies such as the US or the European powers teach patriotism, whether they glorify military achievements and build statues to great generals or to unknown soldiers, whether being a military veteran, i.e. loyally serving one's country and even being prepared to die for that country is deemed the highest expression of patriotism, and whether these societies have behind them a history of territorial expansion, the answer to all these questions must be affirmative.

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40 Ibid., p. 266.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., p. 272.

It is therefore not patriotism, glorification of war, loyalty to the State or military expansion that are being condemned in the case of Japan, but rather the ideological *version* of Japanese patriotism, glorification of its *unjust* war, and its *unacceptable* expansion. Through the act of losing the war, the narrative condemning this version of patriotism, its unjust motives for war and the unacceptability of expansion was vindicated, and the new state apparatuses were employed to further validate and spread this new narrative – the narrative which emphasized the fact that Japan was a perpetrator, but that at the same time the majority of its people, including the Emperor, were actually its innocent victims. The new ideological framework was being renegotiated through various historical discourses and, as already mentioned, the initial project of completely eradicating Japan's prewar militaristic and nationalistic ideology needed to be toned down in order to prevent a threat from the other direction, namely, the threat of Communism.

The *suminuri* textbooks can be seen as a great symbol of the ideological nature of education systems. The real ideology is not what is concealed under the black ink, i.e. the blatant patriotism or emperor worship, it is rather the black ink itself. It is the perception that ideology is always what *others* believe, which is truly ideological. Whenever there is a regime change, it is the previous regime which is proclaimed ideological, while the new social order is perceived – at least among its supporters – as ideology-free. In the case of independent Slovenia, it is the socialist Yugoslav regime that was an ideological regime and whose school textbooks were mere vehicles of state propaganda, while modern liberal textbooks are believed to be more or less objective. The function of this *propaganda/knowledge* dichotomy is not to reveal the ideological nature of *propaganda*, it is to conceal the ideological nature of *knowledge*.

Liberal textbooks claim to be politically neutral and scientifically objective; however, such “neutrality” and “objectivity” are in themselves ideological mechanisms concealing the deep-rooted structure of a scientific paradigm.<sup>44</sup> As I have written elsewhere with regard to the question of school history textbooks, the creation of the modern education system was instrumental in the construction of *nation-states*. The role that textbooks play is the role of education which is in the service of sustaining and reproducing the current ruling ideology. Education, monopolized by the school system, plays the role of integrating the social structure which, in the modern perspective, means a sovereign nation-state.<sup>45</sup>

44 Culiberg, Luka. Speaking a Common Language: On the Unity in the Human Sciences and the Question of School History Curricula. In: Shiba, Nobuhiro, et al. (eds.). *School History and Textbooks: A Comparative Analysis of History Textbooks in Japan and Slovenia*, (Zbirka Vpogledi, 7). Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2013, p. 176.

45 Ibid.

In the case of the propaganda/knowledge dichotomy, the difference between the two notions is therefore not one of *lie* vs. *truth*, but rather one of *discredited ideology* vs. *ruling ideology*. When a certain discourse falls out of sync with the ruling ideology, it is denounced as propaganda, as was the case with the regime change from Yugoslavia to independent Slovenia or in Japan before August 15 and after August 15, 1945. The propaganda parts get blackened-out. What remains is just knowledge. Knowledge, however, is not simply the “neutral” or “true” awareness of some ontological “truth”; it is rather a ‘view’ of the world, i.e. a conception based on the power relations that are at work within a particular social formation.<sup>46</sup>

In order to understand the functioning of education, one must think beyond the notion of opposition between ideological education (propaganda) versus objective education (knowledge), and conceptualize education in general as an institution rooted in the specific social relations within society, which produces its own educational mechanisms and which maintains and reproduces them. Historically, we can find a system of education in every society, be it through institutions such as family, church, military or something else. The modern system of compulsory education is just one historical formation of an educational institution, coinciding with the formation of nationally organized societies and nation-states. Compared to the other types of social formations, national communities dissolved pre-modern hierarchic social bonds by producing atomized individuals, unbound by institutional constraints and seemingly equal in their social status. In order to integrate and organize these autonomous individuals into large (imagined) communities, various integrative institutions needed to be established, whereby the universal compulsory education system is one such institution.

In this sense, the most classical conceptualization of school is the one by Louis Althusser<sup>47</sup>, who defined similar institutions as Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA), with the school being the central one in modern capitalist societies. Althusser claimed that the *educational ideological apparatus* is the ISA which has been installed in the *dominant* position in mature capitalist social formations as a result of a violent political and ideological class struggle against the old dominant ISA:<sup>48</sup>

The mechanisms which produce this vital result for the capitalist regime are naturally covered up and concealed by a universally reigning ideology of the School, universally reigning because it is one of the essential

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46 Ibid., p. 177.

47 Althusser, Louis. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation). In: Žižek, Slavoj (ed.). *Mapping Ideology*, London, New York: Verso, 2012, pp. 100–140.

48 Ibid., p. 116.

forms of the ruling bourgeois ideology: an ideology which represents the School as a neutral environment purged of ideology (because it is ... lay), where teachers respectful of the 'conscience' and 'freedom' of the children who are entrusted to them (in complete confidence) by their 'parents' (who are free, too, i.e. the owners of their children) open up for them the path to the freedom, morality and responsibility of adults by their own example, by knowledge, literature and their 'liberating' virtues.<sup>49</sup>

However, school is not the only educational institution. There is a whole network of institutions we could identify as educational systems, from the family to so-called popular culture and various state-regulated institutions such as museums. Museums, like schools, are institutions which are based on "knowledge" and "facts". In museums, the past becomes a historical fact, yet in spite of this "factual" basis, museums in the US and in other countries on the "winning side" of history, for example, differ quite a bit from the so-called Japanese "peace museums":

War and military museums around the world—far more numerous and long established than museums for peace—are designed to venerate past wars and events by showcasing the heroic martial achievements of historical figures. For the most part, exhibits in those museums tend to valorize military tradition by offering accounts of campaigns, displays of weapons, and stories of leaders and soldiers, while limiting attention to the lethal consequences. The Imperial War Museum in London and Les Invalides (Musée de l'Armée of Hôtel National des Invalides) in Paris are examples of such repositories of military accomplishments and celebrations of a heroic heritage. However, the weight of moral persuasion there rests on the premise that the wars waged were fundamentally just and legitimate, and it is this premise that distinguishes the battles from unruly carnage, and the combat from arbitrary rampage.<sup>50</sup>

As Hashimoto notes, this doesn't work in defeat cultures, where military failures do not lend themselves readily to triumphant narratives of a just war and consequently there are many more peace museums than war museums in Japan.<sup>51</sup> However, there are also "war museums" such as Yūshūkan in Tokyo which is run by the Yasukuni shrine that proposes an alternative discourse with the narrative of the "Greater East Asia War" as a just and necessary war by

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49 Ibid., p. 119.

50 Hashimoto, Akiko. *The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 86.

51 Ibid.

referencing the hostile geopolitical environment of the time and symbolically equating the value of patriotic feats to samurai gallantry in feudal society.<sup>52</sup>

It is schools and wider educational material, museums, cultural media etc., that construct the narrative of the nation or by means of which this narrative is remembered, reoriented and reproduced. In the case of Japan, Hashimoto argues, the transmission of a generational war memory attempts to transform the culture of defeat into a culture of peace, not a culture of contrition as in the case of post-war Germany.<sup>53</sup> There is always a level of disagreement about how to recount past events. However, there might be a more or less firmly established dominant narrative within a certain ideological worldview. In Japan the postwar education was introduced by the US occupation (1945–1952) as a tool to re-educate Japanese citizens in *its* image, under neocolonial conditions:

The occupation banned history, geography, and moral education from Japanese schools, recognizing them as the prewar instruments of mobilizing nationalist pro-war sentiments. The old ideological canon of loyalty to the imperial state was supplanted by the new ideals of human rights in the democratic state, framed as the “correct” ideas for the new citizenship in the new society. Thus in 1947, social studies replaced the prewar nationalist instruction and introduced American democracy in occupied Japan.<sup>54</sup>

If the occupation period represented a radical ideological shift in molding the arch enemy nation in the new image of the victorious side, the post-occupation period again gave birth to new contentious ideological views forming against both the prewar regime and the occupational regime. The postwar state bureaucracy attempted to justify positive framing of the past, arguing that in history education national stories of accomplishment should foster national belonging and confidence in the nation’s future citizens and thus such education should explicitly serve the national interest.<sup>55</sup> On the other side, mainly the teachers and teacher unions maintain that education should be based solely on academic historiography without state interference and thus Japan’s past should be taught in all its facets, including inconvenient truths like colonial oppression, wartime atrocities and war crimes.<sup>56</sup> In each case, the underlying argument is that the school is an educational institution intended for the purpose of educating national subjects in the fundamental ethical notions of what is right and

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52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., p. 87.

54 Ibid., p. 89.

55 Ibid., p. 89.

56 Ibid.

what is wrong. However, it is these notions of “right” and “wrong” which differ, according to the underlying worldview.

It is therefore too simplistic to view prewar history as propaganda and postwar occupational history as objective and free knowledge. The history textbook reform in occupied Japan, 1945–1952, was one of the major educational policies implemented by the SCAP. However, as Thakur writes, since 1952 both history textbooks and the textbook system that certifies them have been extremely controversial.<sup>57</sup> The problematic notion of a prewar/postwar dichotomy can after all be pointed out by the fact that the so-called liberal postwar politicians who came to power soon after the occupation, were essentially the same people who were in power already before the war. The narrative claiming how the occupational authorities and the US introduced democracy into Japanese education has been challenged on many occasions. As Yamashita and Williams write, “This belief that the USA introduced democracy to Japan is therefore questionable. Many of these developments can be traced back to the modernization policies of the Meiji Era, if not earlier”, and they continue, “The roots of democracy existed well before 1945, although not necessarily in a form that would be recognized as Western.”<sup>58</sup>

The proponents of the view that democracy can be found in Japanese education long before the occupation authorities revised the system in the postwar period, claim that it was a different style of democracy, based rather on consensus than voting.<sup>59</sup> However, from the point of view of the occupation authorities, their efforts needed to be legitimized through a discourse, which left no doubt that it was the West that brought democracy to Japan. According to Fred N. Kerlinger,

The American education officer working in Japan would say that a democratic philosophy of education has been encouraged in place of the old authoritarian philosophy of education. To be more precise, a pragmatic, scientific, democratic philosophy of education has been encouraged in place of the old Japanese idealism based on nationalistic principles.<sup>60</sup>

In the eyes of the winning side, this “new” democracy did not simply represent a form of new ideology; it meant “pragmatic, scientific and democratic” knowledge. At the same time, this new narrative needed to stress a radical break

57 Thakur, *History Textbook Reform in Allied Occupied Japan*, p. 261.

58 Yamashita, Hiromi, Williams Christopher. A Vote for Consensus: Democracy and Difference in Japan. *Comparative Education*, Vol. 38, No. 3, Special Number (25): *Democracy and Authoritarianism in Education*, 2002, p. 278.

59 Ibid.

60 Kerlinger, Fred N. The Modern Origin of Morals Instruction in Japanese Education. *History of Education Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1951, p. 125.

between the old *authoritarianism* and new *democracy*, especially since it was originally the American education system which served as a model at the time Japan was introducing the universal education system. As Tokiomi Kaigo, a professor of education at Tokyo University at the time, wrote toward the end of the occupation period in 1952, the American system played a major role in establishing a modern education system back in 1872.<sup>61</sup> Experts from the US came to Japan as consultants to the Ministry of Education and consequently, according to Kaigo, “democratic operation of schools was laid out. At that time, the system was said to conform to the principles of the American educational administration. It is recognized as evidence that Japan’s educational administration was influenced by that of America.”<sup>62</sup>

It is therefore from the very beginning of the modern education system in Japan, that this education was perceived as an ideological tool of the capitalist state. It was Fukuzawa Yukichi, one of the key intellectuals in the Meiji Period, who had asserted that in the future, schools must teach practical knowledge which is necessary in the daily lives of the people and that students must be taught the knowledge which will make possible the creation of a new era, discarding the learning of Japanese poetry, Chinese poetry or the classics, etc., which belonged to the feudalistic society.<sup>63</sup>

The Japanese and American school systems had been tightly connected all the way up to the 1930s, when, according to Kaigo, “a great change was to be seen in the world situation and in our country”:

Especially after the German-Japanese relation became intimate, Japan became (sic!) to veer away from the American educational thoughts and practice. As incidents began to occur in various parts of Asia, ultra-nationalists began to criticize the free, democratic thought of education learned from America and tried to sweep it out of the schools.<sup>64</sup>

After the war, according to Kaigo, this special relation with the American system of education was resumed and conditions that were quite different from the wartime ones were created which gave birth to the new postwar education system in Japan.<sup>65</sup> Frank N. Freeman, Dean of the School of Education at the University of California, was a member of the US Education Mission to Japan, and in 1946, he lamented the difficulty of the task the Mission faced, running

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61 Kaigo, Tokiomi. The American Influence on the Education in Japan. *The Journal of Educational Sociology*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 1952, p. 9.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

65 *Ibid.*

the “risk of undertaking to impose on another people the pattern of education of the United States”,<sup>66</sup> not realizing that this system already was at the roots of the Japanese education system. At the same time, Freeman could dispel his “fears” of cultural imposition by holding to the belief that there exist general principles underlying any system of education in a country which aims to be democratic.<sup>67</sup> The ideological framework of the occupation authorities’ reform plans was therefore classical cultural relativism crossed with scientific universalism.

## CONCLUSION

With Japan’s defeat in WWII and the successful implementation of liberal democracy by the occupying authorities, the “truth” had won over “propaganda”. However, if the prewar authoritarian “propaganda” was defeated by the new democratic “truth”, this truth was far from secure in its new dominant position; it needed to continue its fight against various ideological challenges to its undisputable status *as truth*. Soon after the occupation ended, Cecil Carter Brett detected a new threat against this liberal truth:

The propaganda tactics of the left-wing Japan Teachers’ Union have provided the occasion for the passage of two repressive pieces of legislation. The Diet in June this year passed two “education neutrality laws” which have as their declared aim the elimination of “biased political education” in schools. ... Recent events have placed the Yoshida government in the anomalous position of carrying out a rearmament program and at the same time defending a peace Constitution. The Japanese government has thus become an obvious target for the Soviet “peace offensive”, a situation which has been exploited to the full by Communist and left-wing elements. Conspicuous in this anti-government, anti-American “peace” movement has been the powerful Japan Teachers’ Union ...<sup>68</sup>

Brett, who was the Political Science Instructor at the International Christian University in Tokyo, warned that this Japan Teachers Union is one of the most radical unions and under strong Communist influence. According to him, the union had supported or directly sponsored publications, motion picture films and other propaganda material with the intent of discrediting the government and fostering anti-American sentiments.<sup>69</sup> His examples of such propaganda are the films *Hiroshima* and *Children of the Atom Bomb* which “depict the horrors

66 Freeman, Frank N. Educational Problems of Japan. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 1946, p. 72.

67 Ibid.

68 Carter Brett, Cecil. Japan’s New Education Laws. *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 23, No. 11, 1954, p. 174.

69 Ibid.

of atomic warfare, 'Children of Mixed Blood' which deals with abandoned 'G.I. babies', and 'Red Line Base', a film portraying sordid and immoral conditions in a Japanese community adjoining an American army camp."<sup>70</sup>

We need to look no further than this example to understand the workings of the school as an ideological state apparatus. The purpose of the school system within the liberal democratic framework, which was to replace the previous undemocratic system of education, was to teach objective knowledge instead of propaganda. In the eyes of the liberal regime, prewar propaganda was represented by extreme patriotism, emperor worship and other forms of ultra-nationalist and militaristic content, while postwar propaganda was recognized in discourses dealing with Hiroshima victims, depicting the horrors of atomic warfare, or caring for abandoned children. If we ask ourselves what ultra-nationalism, glorification of war or emperor worship on one side, and the horrors of war, the miserable lives of innocent children, or Japanese communities directly affected by the American occupation on the other have in common, the answer is simply that all these narratives are critical of the American regime, which apparently automatically qualifies them as propaganda. Propaganda is not simply an "untruthful" narrative in contrast to "factual" history, but it is rather a narrative which, in Brett's own words, is propagated "with the intent to discredit government and foster anti-American feelings."

The school system, be it in an authoritarian militarist state or in a liberal democratic society, functions primarily as an ideological state apparatus, with the aim of maintaining and reproducing the system that supports it. By insisting on the dichotomy of propaganda vs. factual truth we actually never really take any historical lessons, but rather keep revolving in the dialectical loop of the *propaganda-truth* cycle, where all the past mistakes by definition happened in the realm of propaganda, which is why we, who are in possession of the truth, won't repeat them. Yet, when we do repeat them, they will retroactively be recognized as propaganda. Instead of obsessing about truth, school, and especially history education, should therefore strive to explain the reasons why people inevitably succumb to propaganda and should focus on teaching how to create a better society for the whole of mankind.

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70 Ibid.

