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**CONTROVERSY OVER  
HISTORY TEXTBOOKS,  
THE PUBLICATION OF  
REGIONAL HISTORIES  
AND IMPROVEMENT  
OF HISTORY  
EDUCATION IN JAPAN  
AND EAST ASIA**

**D**uring the first decade of this century, heated controversies over historical memories emerged in East Asia. At first, the focus was on the memories of Japanese invasion of its neighboring countries during the first half of the 20th century. The Japanese government's approval of a nationalist history textbook in 2001 not only evoked a fierce controversy within Japan but

also brought about harsh criticism of Japan from South Korea and China. Yet, recently we also witnessed a controversy between South Korea and China over their territorial rights to the ancient states Koguryo and Bohai that are situated across the contemporary border between North Korea and China. Today, all East Asian nations are involved in controversies over historical memories confined by nationalist imagination.

These controversies not only evoked political tensions, but also efforts to overcome them. Many historians in these countries became acquainted with each other through numerous meetings on historical dialogue and reconciliation. Without these historical controversies, they would never have been acquainted with each other. Some became friends and developed their interests in histories of neighbors and East Asia. These meetings revealed the discrepancies between the various historical memories as an indicator of what is and is not possible in sharing historical images among the participating East Asian nations. Although historical reconciliation is yet to be achieved, there emerged a sense of living together in East Asia. This is why some historians began to publish regional histories of the East Asia – an initiative in which I was one of the first to participate.

After the harsh controversy in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Japanese historians and history educators began to think of reorganizing their history curricula for middle schools. This was because they believed that the existing history curricula that sever Japanese national history from world history prevent Japanese citizens from developing a global identity as human beings. Also, their purpose was to make education more effective and useful by improving teaching method through asking middle school students fundamental questions in each class instead of urging them to memorize names and incidents listed in history textbooks.

Let me make a brief sketch of recent controversy over history textbooks, publication of regional histories and movement for the improvement of history education in Japan and East Asia y. The interpretation below is mainly based on my own experiences and the brief researches I have conducted.<sup>1</sup>

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1 I am a historian studying 19<sup>th</sup> century Japanese and East Asian history, specifically such themes as the Meiji Regeneration of Japan, the regional history of East Asia, and comparative studies of nationalism and the public sphere. I am a co-author of two history textbooks for middle schools: one is a junior high school textbook published by the Shimizushoin Publishing House, and the other is a senior high school textbook published by the Yamakawa Publishing House. I have also participated in non-governmental projects on historical dialogues among Japan, South Korea and China.

## 1. THE CONTROVERSY OVER HISTORY TEXTBOOKS IN THE EARLY 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Today, in 2012, there seems to be little controversy over Japanese history textbooks in East Asia. Yet, it does not mean that this issue has been fully addressed. Through harsh controversies, East Asians learned that it was very difficult to change neighbors' historical understandings, secured supporters in each camp and diverted the arena of debate from hot, political discourses to calmer waters of academic discussions. It is necessary to reflect upon the crux of this history textbook controversy in order to understand the present situation and to prepare for the future.<sup>2</sup>

### a) Japanese Institutions for School Textbooks

To begin with, it would be best to present a brief sketch of Japanese educational institutions; specifically, how textbooks are made, authorized and adopted.<sup>3</sup> In the Japanese public educational system, elementary and middle schools are legally required to use the textbooks officially approved by The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (hereafter, the MEXT). Textbooks are produced by private publishers. They organize editorial boards made up of university professors and middle school teachers to decide the contents of their textbooks according to *The Course of Study* set by the MEXT. While *The Course of Study* prescribes the purposes of education and gives an outline of the contents, each editorial board tries to write its own understanding of history by considering up-to-date academic interpretations and civic necessities.

After compiling the drafts, the publishers present their copies to the MEXT for its official approval. There is a review board in the Ministry, consisting of professional historians and experienced educators, that judges if the draft textbooks are of an acceptable quality or not. In doing so, it consults elaborate

2 For the outline of this issue, the following book may be useful for consulting the relevant papers: Hiroshi Mitani (ed.), *The History Textbook Problem*. Tokyo: Nihon Tosho Center (三谷博編『歴史教科書問題』日本図書センター), 2007.

3 Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, *An Outline of the Textbook Institution*. Tokyo: Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau (文部科学省初等中等教育局『教科書制度の概要』文部科学省初等中等教育局), 2004. Also available at the website: [http://www.mext.go.jp/a\\_menu/shotou/kyoukasho/gaiyou/04060901.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/kyoukasho/gaiyou/04060901.htm). For a detailed analysis in English, see my paper in Daqing Yang, Jie Liu, Hiroshi Mitani and Andrew Gordon (eds.), *Toward a History Beyond Borders: Contentious Issues in Sino-Japanese Relations* (Harvard East Asian Monographs). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2012. For some experience on the approval procedure, see also Hiroshi Mitani, "Writing History Textbooks in Japan", in Gi-Wook Shin and Daniel C. Sneider (eds.), *History Textbooks and the Wars in Asia: Divided Memories*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

reports written by ministry investigators. Usually, the board does not approve the draft without demanding revisions. If the demands pertain to factual or typographical errors, they are met immediately by the publisher. However, if the demands are in the area of interpretation, the publisher and the MEXT commence negotiations in order to reach a compromise. If the board considers the revised draft acceptable, it gives its final approval to the textbook. In 2010, among eight history textbooks for junior high schools, seven passed this approval procedure.

After the textbooks are approved, a process of selection begins. There are two systems to select a particular textbook for school use. Private schools and senior high schools choose their own textbooks from a list of approved textbooks, while local school boards, organized into about 570 units, choose textbooks for public elementary and junior high schools. Thus, in the Japanese textbook institution, the official approval process is centralized in the MEXT, while the selection process is decentralized.

### **b) The Beginning of History Textbook Controversy**

The contemporary controversy over Japanese history textbooks began in 1982 when China and South Korea accused the Japanese MEXT of having forced the publishers to change the word 'invasion' into 'advance' in the drafts describing Japanese military campaign on Chinese territory.<sup>4</sup> In one sense, this was an extension of an ongoing Japanese domestic, harsh controversy over history textbooks. In Japan, there had been a long controversy over history textbooks since the mid-1960s. Professor Saburo IENAGA had filed lawsuits against the MEXT when the ministry had refused to approve his draft textbook. He maintained that the ministry's approval system was illegal because its intervention into textbooks was equivalent to censorship, which was prohibited by Japanese Constitution. His movement became powerful as leftists, not only among academics but also school teachers and publishing industry workers, passionately supported it. Although the courts ruled that the MEXT's approval system to be legal, some of them criticized its individual demand for revision as excessive in the mid-1970s. At first, the MEXT tried to have these rulings overturned by appealing to higher courts. It seemed that the criticism from neighboring countries in 1982 was linked to Japanese domestic movements attacking the MEXT.

On the other hand, there was an influence from world politics, especially in China.<sup>5</sup> China had re-opened its diplomatic relations with Japan when tensions

4 Op. cit. For details, see Hiroshi Mitani (ed.), *The History Textbook Problem* (三谷博編『歴史教科書問題』).

5 Yoshikazu Shimizu, *Why Chinese government chose anti-Japanese policy?* Tokyo: Bungeishunju (清水美和『中国はなぜ「反日」になったか』文藝春秋社), 2003. Yoshikazu Shimizu, *Chinese*

between China and the Soviet Union heightened in 1972. In order to mend its ties with Japan, the Chinese government made efforts to keep its bitter memories under control and mounted a campaign to persuade the Chinese people that Japan was necessary for the future of China. Chinese diplomatic policy changed yet again in 1982 when Deng Xiaoping embarked upon his bold 'reform and opening' policy by sending many students abroad and by utilizing advanced technology and economic support from Japan, while at the same time beginning a domestic campaign to remind his nation of Japanese invasion in the past, in which he ordered the construction of a memorial museum dedicated to the Nanjing Massacre in order to avoid strong objections against his reforms from the conservatives in the Communist Party of China.<sup>6</sup> This is the reason why Chinese government could not overlook any indications that Japanese government might conceal its evil past.

### c) Responses of Japanese Government

Japanese government responded to the protests quickly.<sup>7</sup> The Chief Cabinet Secretary of Suzuki Cabinet made a statement that Japan would follow through on the promise to reflect upon its past that it had made to re-establish diplomatic relations with South Korea and China, sincerely listen to the protests from its neighbors, and revise the "Standards for Authorization of School Textbooks" in order to promote mutual understanding and friendship with its neighboring countries. This promise was realized in the same year. The MEXT added the clause: "In dealing with events in the modern and contemporary history of relations with neighboring countries of Asia, appropriate consideration should be given to viewing these events from the standpoint of international understanding and international cooperation."

This policy was followed by the Nakasone Cabinet whereby Nakasone recognized the second Sino-Japanese war as a 'war of invasion' for the first time after WWII and also took other measures to promote further cooperation with Japan's neighbors. Much of this was because Nakasone wished to gain support from Japan's neighboring countries to make Japan a world political power in addition to the economic power it already was. In cooperation with the U.S., he engaged in the world power game to separate China from the Soviet Union, and perceiving that this great game should not be obstructed by the memories of

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*government is going to abandon anti-Japanese policy.* Tokyo: Kodansha (清水美和『中国が「反日」を捨てる日』講談社), 2006.

6 His policy was similar to that of South Korean president Park Chung-hee, who started a big anti-Japan campaign while establishing official relations with Japan in 1965.

7 Same as note 4.

the past, he tried to protect the Chinese leaders from the criticism within the Communist Party of China that they were making an excessive concession with an unforgivable enemy.

Later, in 1989, the Japanese government revised the “Standards for Authorization of School Textbooks”, simplifying the approval procedure and making it more transparent in response to the rulings that had criticized the MEXT’s demands regarding draft textbooks as excessive. Moreover, the MEXT faced a fundamental change in the political setting in 1993 when the first non-LDP cabinet was formed. It became imperative for the MEXT to comply with the stipulation of a transparent legal procedure if it were to remain in power during the future alterations of ruling parties.

Under this condition, the MEXT approved several draft textbooks for senior high schools in 1993 that described the sensitive issue of ‘comfort women’. However, this move evoked strong backlashes: a big ideological split in the LDP and a new civic movement for seeking an innocent Japanese identity.

#### **d) A Bitter Controversy in 2001<sup>8</sup>**

The 50th anniversary of the end of WWII came in 1995. The Murayama Cabinet, based on the coalition of the LDP and the Social Democratic Party, expressed remorse for the Japanese invasion during the war and announced its will to strive for eternal peace on August 15. However, extreme conservatives in the LDP published a history on “The Great Asian War” on the same day. They considered ideology more important than certain interests and had been dissatisfied with the successive cabinet’s policies of apology towards Japan’s neighboring countries.

On the other hand, a group of intellectuals began a civic movement for a righteous historical identity of Japan.<sup>9</sup> Deeming it improper to have high school students learn about comfort women, they organized the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform to supply a better textbook for junior high school students in 1997. In contrast to the traditional right wing, they appealed to the grass roots and became influential. The Japanese public during the 1990s was in deep distress after a period of long prosperity and welcomed the society’s movement to recover their honor as citizens.

In 2001, the MEXT approved the draft textbook of the Society after having demanded a revision of nearly 200 segments. This decision evoked a bitter

8 Tsuyoshi Hasegawa and Kazuhiko Togo (eds.), *East Asia’s Haunted Present*. West Port, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008.

9 Fujioka Nobukatsu (ed.), *The Vision of Japan the Japanese Society for Textbook Reform Presents to the Public*. Tokyo: Fusosha (藤岡信勝編『新しい歴史教科書を「つくる会」が問う日本のヴィジョン』扶桑社), 2003.

controversy over history textbooks on both national and international level. Traditional leftists criticized the textbook as having not only numerous factual errors but also nationalist tendencies such as: whitewashing the dark side of modern Japan, the colonization of Korea, the invasion of China, the Nanjing Massacre and comfort women. The South Korean and Chinese governments also denounced the MEXT's decision and not only demanded the exclusion of the Society's textbook from adoption for schools, but also revisions of other textbooks. On the other hand, the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform was set on gaining a 10% share of the textbook market and subsequently implemented an unprecedented tactic: making the 'New Textbook' available on the open market to gain public influence in order to place pressure on local educational boards during the adoption process.<sup>10</sup> As the controversy in the media heated up, it seemed at first that they would succeed in attaining their goal. However, it was revealed in August that the adoption rate of the textbook had not even reached 0.04 %. As a result of this development, Japan's neighboring governments also eased off on their denouncements and claims.

This controversy in 2001 changed the framework of historical debate as new people began to participate in the debate in the final stage. In July 2001, professor Makoto IOKIBE, a historian of Japanese diplomacy who had close connections with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and later became the head of the National Defense Academy of Japan, criticized the New Textbook as "intentionally neglecting the failure of the government that opened war against the whole world and that induced young men to suicide attacks; instead, the textbook is designed to deceive junior high students into admiring this government".<sup>11</sup> This was the first time a realist's criticism of the *New Textbook* appeared in the media. During the 1990s, not only trade but also mutual visits greatly flourished in East Asia. Business people working on international relations became aware that peace and cooperation in East Asia were indispensable. IOKIBE's article revealed the existence of this latent opinion of realists that accepted the need to face up to the unpleasant aspects of the Japanese past.

After the 2001 controversy, the traditional split between the right and the left, measured by the attitude toward Marxist ideology, began to play a far smaller role in judging the pros and cons of nationalist history. Instead, there emerged the simpler criterion of whether or not one supported international cooperation

10 Japan Society for History Textbook Reform, *The New History Textbook: The Version for Public Sale*. Tokyo: Fusosha (新しい歴史教科書をつくる会『〔市販本〕新しい歴史教科書』扶桑社), 2001.

11 Iokibe Makoto, "Reading the New History Textbook: A Narrow-Minded Approach to History Addressing Only the Decline and Fall of the State" (五百旗頭真「つくる会の『新しい歴史教科書を読む』 国家の存亡だけで歴史を語る貧しさ」), in *Ronza* (『論座』) (Tokyo: The Asahi Shimbun Company), July 2001.

in East Asia. The Japanese media had now opened their doors to the new people who had long been the silent majority during the post-war era.

### e) De-Politicization of the Textbook Issue

In 2005, textbooks for junior high students were again sent to local educational boards for selection. This time, a passionate dispute over history textbooks did not occur, although another political issue concerning Yasukuni Shrine gave rise to big protests against Japan in South Korea and China. Chinese youth launched extensive campaigns on the streets of major Chinese cities when they perceived it unforgivable for the Japanese prime minister to have visited Yasukuni Shrine where not only those fallen in war, but also major war criminals of the Tokyo Tribunal were enshrined. This was the most dangerous crisis in Japan-China relations since the recovery of diplomatic relations in the 1970s. Nevertheless, the local educational boards still made calm decisions following the precedence set in 2001 and the selection rate of the New Textbook remained 0.05%. After experiencing this grave crisis and relieved by the outcome, the governments of South Korea and China decided to separate the history issue from future diplomatic relations.<sup>12</sup>

At present there is little dispute within Japan over history textbooks. Both sides have already secured supporters and it has become an established routine to denounce the other side. Little change is also expected in this situation in the near future, unless the governments in East Asia make drastic changes in their policies.

## 2. EAST ASIAN HISTORICAL DIALOGUE AND THE QUEST FOR REGIONAL HISTORIES

The 2001 debate over the Japanese history textbooks generated various attempts to open dialogues for sharing historical memories in East Asia. At first, numerous movements on the non-governmental level to publish common histories emerged, which brought some results. Later, the Japanese government organized cooperative history research groups with South Korea and China respectively. However, these official, bi-lateral attempts not only fell short of expectations, but also sowed mutual distrust among the historians engaged in them.

<sup>12</sup> Shimizu, *Chinese Government Resolves to Abandon Anti-Japanese Policy* (清水美和『中国が「反日」を捨てる日』).



### a) Efforts on the Non-Governmental Level

One of the most famous efforts on the non-governmental level might be the teaching material titled 'A History for the Future' (2005) produced by historians from three countries: China, South Korea and Japan. This book focuses on modern history in East Asia, especially on Japanese aggression against its neighboring peoples.<sup>13</sup> It was in fact the publication of the 'New Textbook' that provoked these historians to undertake this project, their intent being to make the Japanese younger generation understand their version of modern history in East Asia in order to prevent another aggression from Japan in the future.

This book, however, could not avoid some shortcomings. One is that it concentrates only on the negative aspects of modern Japan. For middle school students in South Korea and China, it is the common knowledge already learnt from their detailed history textbooks. There may be nothing fresh as far as the description of Japan is concerned. Also, for Japanese students, it is not pleasant to read only about the dark side of Japanese history. Another problem is that the book became a collection of national histories in the sections describing the aspects of modern East Asia not pertaining to Japanese aggression. Subsequently, this book as a whole could not overcome nationalist interpretations and failed in presenting a well-integrated regional history of East Asia.

On the other hand, we have a successful cooperative work between Japan and South Korea edited by historians who organized *the Symposia for Creating Common History Textbooks between Japan and Korea*. After having 15 symposia in 10 years from 1997, they finally published a complete history dealing with "The Exchanges between Japan and Korea" in 2007.<sup>14</sup> This book for senior high students is an excellent achievement that succeeds not only in presenting balanced knowledge but also in guiding the readers in both countries to think more from the other side's viewpoint. As for the Prehistoric and Ancient Age, this book is exempted from the anachronism of projecting the idea of modern sovereign states onto the Ancient world. Also, its modern history content is valuable. On the most important topic, Japan's invasion and colonial rule of Korea, this book avoids denouncing Japanese activities hastily but nevertheless guides the readers to think over why the Japanese invaded and committed such acts of cruelty. Moreover, it introduces some notable figures in both countries: a few Japanese

13 Nitchukan Sangoku Kyotsu Rekishi Kyozaï Iinkai, *A History for the Future: A Modern History of Three East Asian Countries*. Tokyo: Koubunken (日中韓3国共通歴史教材委員会『未来を開く歴史 東アジア3国の近現代史』高文研), 2005; 2nd ed., 2006.

14 Rekishi Kyoiku Kenkyu Kai (Japan) and Rekishi Kyokasho Kenkyu Kai (South Korea) (eds.), *A History of the Exchange between Japan and Korea: Common History Teaching Material for Japan and Korea*. Tokyo: Akashi Shoten (歴史教育研究会(日本)・歴史教科書研究会(韓国)編『日韓歴史共通教材 日韓交流の歴史』明石書店), 2007.

intellectuals who criticized Japan's colonial rule or adore Korean culture and some Korean intellectuals/statesmen. This is actually a college-level textbook that, for the first time in history, offers the foundations for shared historical memories of Japan and Korea. The editors confess in their postscript that there remained many differences in interpretation. Yet, they still succeeded in overcoming major differences and points where they found themselves at loggerheads, through their enthusiasm, perseverance and sincere will to achieve reconciliation between the Japanese and the South Koreans.

The third attempt was the book "*Contentious Issues in Sino-Japanese Relations*" co-edited by Professors LIU Jie, YANG Daqing and me, published both in Japan and China in 2006.<sup>15</sup> In this project, we selected some crucial historical events and issues that lay between Japan and China although such issues as the Tokyo Tribunal and national compensation were left out. We invited authors from both countries, i.e. more precisely the Japanese and the Chinese abroad, with whom we had frank discussions based on original materials. During the process, the participants who have initially had serious reservations began dispassionate discussions by sharing a modest and critical approach to original materials. Although the symposia revealed many differences between the nationals from the two countries, our understanding of the other party was deepened by understanding the reasons behind the differences. In the process, we all came to comprehend better why the other party presented different interpretations.

Publication of this work in Chinese was especially epoch-making in that it enabled the Chinese people to read the interpretations by Japanese scholars that differ from the Chinese official interpretation. It is our hope that this book will not only provide reliable historical knowledge but also present suggestions and guidelines for future history discussion, that should be conducted beyond borders. With the help of dedicated support by Professor Andrew Gordon of Harvard University, an English version of this book was also published in 2012 and our wish is also to share our knowledge with other people who face similar problems concerning historical reconciliation in the world.

After the international crisis in 2005, I organized a research group to publish a series on East Asian regional history. The intent was to provide the Japanese public with a detailed knowledge of modern East Asia. In my observation, one of the causes of the recent historical controversies was a lack of concrete

15 Jie Liu, Hiroshi Mitani and Daqing Yang (eds.), *Contentious Issues in Sino-Japanese Relations: Toward a History Beyond Borders*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press (劉傑・三谷博・楊大慶編『国境を越える歴史認識——日中対話の試み』東京大学出版会), 2006. Its Chinese version is 『超越国境の歴史認識——来自日本学者及海外中国学者的視角』(Beijin: 社会科学文献社, 2006). English version is Yang, Liu, Mitani and Gordon (eds.), *Toward a History Beyond Borders: Contentious Issues in Sino-Japanese Relations*.

knowledge among Japanese adults about what had happened between Japan and its neighbors during the modern era. For the adults who were directly responsible for this controversy, the scanty school textbooks were quite inadequate food for thought on history. As I considered this a rather burning problem, I organized a publishing board consisting only of Japanese East Asian specialists with the exception of a Russian specialist from the USA. The first volume that dealt with the transition from the Early Modern to the Modern Period was published in 2009 under the title of “*A Modern History for Adults: The 19th Century*.”<sup>16</sup> There were ten authors, among whom the late professor Yori-hisa NAMIKI, a China specialist, and Tatsuhiko TSUKIASHI, a Korea specialist, were coeditors.

The first volume consists of four differing chapters; the first covers the history of international relations in East Asia; the second contains brief sketches of domestic conditions of China, Korea, Ryukyu and Japan; the third examines the activities of surrounding countries like Russia, Britain and the United States; and the fourth is an interpretive overview of the East Asian region, including the formation of international public goods. After some discussion, we decided to end this volume with the first Sino-Japanese war in 1894-1895. It was to change the master narrative spread by Japanese history textbooks. Heretofore, Japanese modern history had been described from a pure nationalist viewpoint; Japan was threatened by the West, began thorough reform to protect itself, and this was accomplished by its victory over Russia in 1905. This was true from the standpoint of contemporary materials written by the Japanese. However, it is improper for an understanding of East Asian history as a whole. From a regional history viewpoint, the first Sino-Japanese war was more important, and when Japan turned into an empire with overseas colonies, Korea and China began sincere efforts for modernization. Our aim was to replace the popular Japan-centric view with the regional perspective in order to extend Japanese historical imagination to encompass regional and global levels. We also added comments by 22 specialists in order to provide different understandings of the body of each chapter. Our purpose was to stimulate the readers to think about the possibility of various interpretations.

This volume was welcomed by Japanese adults, especially by high school teachers as having detailed, reliable information. The Korean version of this textbook was also published in 2010 with the dedicated assistance of professor PARK Hun. Our hope is that the Chinese version might also be published in the near future and we are now preparing the second volume on the 20<sup>th</sup> century in cooperation with professors KAWASHIMA Shin, LIU Jie and NAMIKI Masato.

16 Hiroshi Mitani, Yori-hisa Namiki and Tatsuhiko Tsukiashi (eds.), *A Modern History for Adults: 19th Century*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press (三谷博・並木頼寿・月脚達彦編『大人のための近現代史——19世紀編』東京大学出版会), 2009.

## b) Efforts on Official Level

After the historical controversy of 2001, the Japanese government launched international history research projects in conjunction with South Korea and China.<sup>17</sup> Two successive committees were organized with South Korea from 2002 to 2005 and 2007 to 2010, and one with China from 2006 to 2010. Although these attempts produced voluminous reports, it is doubtful whether they were successful or not because there was little evidence of expanding shared historical understandings to the public or promoting mutual friendships among the participants.

The first joint research group between Japan and South Korea began in May, 2002 and published its reports both in Japanese and Korean in 2005. The theme of this project was the cooperative research of Japan-Korea historical relations. After Japan rejected the South Korean proposal to conduct direct research on history textbooks, both sides agreed to pay special attention to the similarities and differences in historical interpretations between the two countries. The two governments invited 11 historians from each side to form a joint research committee. The committee covered 19 historical topics in Japan-Korea relations and organized three sub-committees for the research of the Ancient, Medieval and Modern periods. A total of 6 meetings and 45 sub-level meetings were held, and in conclusion, a 4-volume report was published.

The report consisted of numerous individual papers and comments. Although there might have been some useful papers that shed light on the hitherto hidden aspects of Japan-Korean relations as well as the differences in historical understandings between the two nations, the report had little influence in both countries. It was not sold on the market and for the most part ignored by intellectuals.

One of the reasons for this neglect was the reputation among historians it had garnered before its publication. Just after the first meeting, complaints were heard from Japanese members - 9 among 11 of whom were acquaintances of mine - that it was very difficult to reach an agreement with the Korean side on what topics should be addressed, what approaches should be taken, how to run each sub-committee, etc. From the viewpoint of some of the Japanese members, the South Korean side was too nationalistic. The Japanese members wanted to engage in an academic, impassionate dialogue on specific topics and to present their individual understanding. The South Korean side, however, demonstrated a collective, nationalist view, especially in front of the TV cameras, that offended the Japanese side.

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17 <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/korea/rekishi/index.html>  
[http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/china/rekishi\\_kk.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/china/rekishi_kk.html)

Most of the Japanese members were the pioneers of Korean studies after WWII or the independence of Korea from Japanese colonial rule. This means that they had taken the subject of Korean studies as their lifeworks in a time when Japanese society still looked down upon Korea and neglected this field. They had dared to visit South Korea for study purposes when the Korean people still had a strong antipathy towards the Japanese. They were the very people who had taught me the importance of knowing the people who lived next door. Yet their attitude toward South Korea became chilly during this official joint research project. Two of them joined the rightist movements while the majority of them retreated to the realm of pure academic study.

Watching this tragic event, I decided not to join any international history research projects on the official level and to concentrate solely on non-governmental activities. From my own experiences of Japan-China and Japan-South Korea joint research, I found it very effective to engage in non-governmental joint studies. Only when participants on both sides become self-reflective, if not self-critical, can we experience productive, deep communication and develop mutual understanding and respect. It is almost impossible to expect this attitude from the members of official committees because they are inclined to regard themselves as national representatives.

The second committee between Japan and South Korea encountered no more success than the first. This time, Japan agreed to open a sub-committee for textbook studies, but in this case, Japan chose many hardliners hostile to Korea as members, while the Korean side chose less antagonistic people. Although the committee published thick volumes on the websites at the end of 2009, I heard that the atmosphere at the meetings was very chilly and produced little friendship among the participants. I am not sure if the present Japanese government will agree to open the third committee or not, but I believe it will not be able to find a sufficient number of respectable historians among the Japanese willing to participate.

On the other hand, we had the Japan-China joint research committee, that was also far from a success. At first, both sides set a moderate goal. The chair of the Japanese side, Professor Shinichi KITAOKA, announced that they would adopt a so-called 'parallel approach.'<sup>18</sup> It seemed that the Chinese side, led by Professor Bu Pin, had also adopted this attitude 'to agree to disagree.' This was because both governments wanted to shelve the history issue by handing it to historians after the bitter clash of public opinions between Japan and China in 2005.

18 Shinichi Kitaoka, "Japan-China Joint History Research Gets Under Way" (北岡伸一「日中歴史共同研究の出発」), *Gaiko Forum* (『外交フォーラム』) (Tokyo: Toshi Shuppan), no. 226, May 2007. Ditto, "Looking Back on the Japan-China Joint History Research" (北岡伸一「日中歴史共同研究」を振り返る), *Gaiko Forum*, no. 261, April 2010.

I hear this committee went well during its early stages in 2006. It consisted of two sections covering pre-modern and modern history in which the former group was to discuss 7 themes and the latter took up 9 themes including the post-WWII era. However, this joint research committee faced not a few difficulties when it reached the concluding stage in 2008. The Chinese side began to limit the contents of the final report, and demanded the exclusion of the papers on the Post-WWII era when peaceful Japan-China relations were established. A Chinese historian presented a bitter comment on the paper written by a Japanese colleague saying ‘Describing the Japanese pirates from the 14th to 16th century as multi-ethnic groups including Chinese is tantamount to concealing the Japanese continuous ambition to invade China.’<sup>19</sup> By the final stage, the Chinese side demanded that the final reports be published only in the mother tongues of the respective participants, that is, that the papers authored by the Chinese scholars be published in Chinese only and those published by the Japanese would only be published in Japanese.<sup>20</sup> This was to prevent ordinary Chinese readers from reading the papers written by the Japanese side.

After these bitter concessions, the Japanese side agreed to place the final reports on the respective websites in January 2010, two years after the initial scheduled date. Although translated versions were finally put up on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan in September of the same year with the addition of Japanese scholars’ version of modern history in English,<sup>21</sup> I hear that this course of events left feelings of deep distrust between the two parties, especially on the Japanese side. Also, it is not certain if the second committee will be organized or not.

### c) The Spread of Historical Controversy: from Japan Problem to South Korea-China Dispute

We are now witnessing territorial disputes between South Korea and China over the ancient states of Koguryo and Bohai. In 2002, China began an extensive project called the ‘Northeast Project.’<sup>22</sup> This was a national project organized by the Centre for China’s Borderland History and Geography Research under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Its website explained the aim of this project

19 Shōsuke Murai, “Who Were the ‘Japanese Pirates’?: With a Focus on the Korean Peninsula in the 14th and 15th Centuries”, (村井章介「倭寇とはだれか——十四～十五世紀の朝鮮半島を中心に」), *Tohogaku* (『東方学』) (Tokyo: The Toho Gakkai), no. 119, 2010.

20 Kitaoka, “Looking Back on the Japan-China Joint History Research” (北岡伸一「日中歴史共同研究」を振り返る) .

21 [http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/china/rekishi\\_kk.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/china/rekishi_kk.html)

22 <http://www.historyfoundation.or.kr/eng/>  
<http://bjzx.cass.cn/news/129976.htm>

as follows: “Because the North-Eastern area (comprised of three provinces) is located at the center of North-East Asia, it is situated in an important strategic location. Given this condition, we must carefully monitor any so-called ‘research’ being conducted that distorts historical facts as well as preventing politicians from disseminating erroneous images to the public with the intent of causing political troubles.” This was to keep its borders with numerous ethnic groups within a single body of Chinese territory. The project consisted of various kinds of research on topics such as present societies, international relations and history. Among the history researches, the ancient states such as Koguryo (Goguryeo) and Bohai (Balhae), located on the border of present China and North Korea, were to be regarded as the local governments of the central dynasties of China.

This interpretation sparked outrage amongst the Koreans. The South Korean people understood it at “a project to steal the history of Goguryeo.” After the compilation of the ‘History of Three Kingdoms’ during the 12th century, the Korean people considered Koguryo, a state that ruled Eastern Manchuria and the Northern half of Korean peninsula from the 1st to the 8th century, as one of the three states that later produced an integrated Korea. According to the website of the Northeast Foundation, originally established to protest against China’s ‘Northeast Project,’ the “distortion of the history of Goguryeo was the most sensitive issue to Koreans because they have a deep affection toward Goguryeo. It was the most independent and brave kingdom in Korea’s history, and possessed a vast territory. This is also why Goguryeo is a recurring inspirational dream and fantasy theme to Koreans. Goguryeo is a place of national pride to the Korean people, and subsequently, the Koreans were shocked when China argued that the history of Goguryeo belongs to its own history.”<sup>23</sup>

South Korea lodged an official diplomatic protest in 2004 and exchanged with China “an oral agreement in which they agreed that the two countries will not raise political disputes over the history issues but settle them through academic discussions.” The South Korean president met the top leaders of China twice in 2006 to call to China’s attention the need to “take considerate measures to prevent this issue from having a negative impact on Korean-Chinese relations.” The ‘Northeast Project’ itself ended in 2007.

However, South Koreans’ anxiety over the Chinese version of history still has not been calmed. The website says “the conflict with China over the history of Goguryeo has continued as China has not stopped spreading the “Northeast Project-style awareness of history” amongst the public as well as in Chinese academic circles by attaching information guides to every artifact in every museum and setting up information boards in the heritage sites of Goguryeo.

23 Cited from the website in 2010. These sentences have been removed since. (March, 2012).

It has become a history conflict that will take a long time to resolve correctly between the two countries.”<sup>24</sup>

According to the graduate students from these countries in my class at the University of Tokyo, the Korean people regard historical Kogryō as a self-evident territory of Korea, while the Chinese people regard it as one of the local governments of the ‘central dynasties’ of the Chinese Empire. It is obvious that both the South Koreans and the Chinese are projecting their conceptualizations of modern nation-states onto the ancient world. I know that some historians in South Korea are critical of this tendency and consider it anachronistic. There may also be similar historians in China, even though their numbers would be much smaller. Yet, non-governmental exchanges between the two countries are less influential than those between Japan and its neighbors. The clash of historical memories caused by nationalist interpretations will no doubt also continue in the foreseeable future.

### 3. IMPROVEMENT OF HISTORY EDUCATION IN JAPAN

The storm of historical controversy during the first decade of this century has recently calmed down as far as Japan is concerned. The textbooks question will no longer be a serious political or diplomatic issue as long as the governments keep paying close attention to the lessons during the first decade of this century.

Under these conditions, another history textbook problem emerged in Japan. Namely, the plan to improve senior high school curricula for ‘history and geography.’ One of the subcommittees in the Science Council of Japan, of which I was a member, publicized a recommendation to the Japanese government for the revision of ‘history and geography’ in August 2011 after two years of enthusiastic discussions.<sup>25</sup>

#### a) A Proposal Made by the Science Council of Japan

At first, this subcommittee was organized in order to address to an urgent issue; not a few high schools were found to be neglecting the compulsory subject ‘World History’ in order to be able to assign more hours to other subjects such as English for the university entrance examinations. According to the *Course of Study*, the course of ‘History and Geography’ consists of three subjects: Japanese History, World History and Geography, of which only World History is compulsory. The

24 <http://www.historyfoundation.or.kr/eng/> (March, 2012)

25 <http://www.scj.go.jp/ja/info/kohyo/pdf/kohyo-21-t130-2.pdf>



MEXT could not neglect this violation of its regulations and asked the SCJ to come up with a solution.

Yet, the discussion in our subcommittee took a different course in considering the complete revision of 'History and Geography.' The geographers in the subcommittee insisted on making geography compulsory because they were afraid of the decline in geography education in senior high schools. Upon hearing this, the specialists in Japanese history also began making the same demand for Japanese History. For the educators in high schools, this solution was unacceptable as it was absolutely necessary for them to stop increasing the number of compulsory subjects in their classes. Thus, the committee members were forced to make a compromise; the subject of World History (4 credits) would be altered to become one of the elective subjects and instead, a set of basic Geography and History (2 credits each) were to be created.

The historians in the subcommittee began to write possible drafts for the Basic History curriculum. The first plan was to compress the existing subject of 'World History A' down to half its size. Yet, it was obvious that middle school educators could not teach such a comprehensive history in the limited hours in class available to them (about 72 50-minute school periods at most). Originally, 'World History' aimed at complementing the history taught at the junior high level that focused mainly on Japanese history. Yet, after the junior high history textbooks had added more contents on foreign history, it became necessary to search for other curricula solutions. Subsequently, we provided two alternative plans in our recommendation. One was to focus on modern history in a way that integrated Japanese and world history and the other was to abandon the history of incidents and to make the subject of History a collection of histories on various important subjects.<sup>26</sup>

### **b) The Idea of Basic History that Focuses on Modern History**

The aims of Basic History with a focus only on modern history are as follows. Although I drafted this proposal, my view has partly changed after the discussion with my fellow Slovenian historians in December 2010 and having faced the disaster of the great earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

The major aim of the subject of Modern History in my mind is to cope with the Japanese people's amnesia of Japan's modern history with its neighboring peoples. As I explained before, contemporary Japanese people have little knowledge about what their ancestors did during the first half of the 20th century. When the Koreans and Chinese refer to Japan's evil past, ordinary Japanese are woefully

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26 Ditto, pp. 35-46.

unprepared to respond, both owing to their lack of knowledge and also due to the topic's inherent psychological obstacles. This does not mean that the present history textbooks lack information on the Japanese invasion and oppression of its neighbors. The problem is that their contents are too frugal to explain why the Japanese did, what they did and how Japan's neighbors suffered as a consequence of these actions. To overcome these defects, it is absolutely necessary to supply readers with a concrete knowledge of modern history with special attention to Japan's relations with its neighbors. The diffusion of such detailed knowledge among the Japanese public will also lessen future conflicts with our neighbors if we are cautious enough to avoid hurting the identity of younger Japanese generations who have not engaged in any kind of war.

However, it is not proper to stress immediate political purposes only when introducing a new course into the secondary school curriculum and there are two other reasons for drawing the attention of the Japanese public to the reform. One is to integrate Japanese history into world history in order to nurture the sense of global citizenship among future Japanese. The traditional division of Japanese history from world history in the senior high school curriculum is harmful because it enhances the Japanese sense of isolation that has been deeply rooted from the early modern period onwards. Because Japan isolated itself from the world from the 17th century to the mid-19th century, it is only possible to present Japan as a part of the world in modern history. The second reason is that it is useful to teach other subjects in the field of social studies, and this applies not only to Japanese History or World History but also to Civics, that contains politics, economics and morals. High school teachers must welcome a detailed knowledge of modern history in order to teach these subjects.

On the other hand, there are defects in the focus on modern history. I expect that human beings will face an age of no economic development in the future. If it comes to this, they will regard the story of development as useless for their lives. It may be better for them to study pre-modern history when human beings experienced various lives in societies that expected no development, from acceptable to unendurable ones. On the other hand, there are some themes that require long-term explanations even for understanding contemporary life. Themes such as the tectonic movements of the earth, the environment, natural resources, infectious diseases, family structures, gender, world religions, etc. I think it is possible to meet this demand if we provide some special chapters explaining the historical backgrounds of modern phenomena.

### c) The Principles of the New Plan

After the second workshop of our symposia, I began to think of introducing fundamental change into the possible curriculum for Basic History. The idea was to change its structure from the explanation of consecutive events to the presentation of questions in order to encourage next generations to think about the meanings of historical events rather than to force them to memorize specific items of factual knowledge about the past.

Another problem I faced was caused by the earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011. It reminded us Japanese that we are living on an unstable archipelago on the Pacific Rim. If we are to lessen the damage of such catastrophes in the future, we had better learn about the periodical disasters that our ancestors have suffered from. References to similar disasters that have struck foreign peoples in such cases are also useful. The people living on the Pacific Rim as a whole have experienced such large-scale earthquakes as the one in 2011 once a decade, while within Japanese history, such disasters occur once every thousand years. Because of this, I thought it better to increase the volume of chapters that would deal with long term phenomena and consider it crucial for history textbooks for future generations to transmit a basic knowledge of long term phenomena in human history.

Thus, I would like to present a new, possible version of the curriculum for Basic History. The improvements should be made both in the area of contents and the method of teaching.

- 1) To integrate Japanese history into world history. This is to enable future generations to nurture their identity not only as the Japanese but also as good citizen of the world.
- 2) To construct the subject of Basic History within the framework of global history; that is, to stress the connections between various peoples on the global level: by that I mean not only diplomatic relations but also non-political relations such as trade, migration, infectious disease and the spread of ideas, etc.. This means that descriptions of domestic affairs will be limited to a minimum. For example, Britain will be described only in the context of technological innovation, world trade and military campaigns, while the USA will be described as the first large scale nation-state that embodied liberal democracy. Yet, there are exceptions such as the East Asian countries.
- 3) To enable Japan's future generations to acquire a concrete and better understanding of their neighboring peoples: the Koreans, the Chinese, etc. Up until now, the Japanese public has had less historical knowledge of its neighbors than that of Western peoples. The situations in China or Korea are not far from that of Japan. Improving this unfavorable condition of a mutual ignorance of one's neighbors is of great importance.

- 4) To provide a knowledge of long term historical phenomena. It is crucial that future generations, not only in Japan, but also of the whole of human kind, study long term phenomena in order to survive the future crises. Future generations will experience not only periodical disasters but also irreversible ecological conditions, the seeds of that human beings are creating now. Some of these themes might be the history of planet earth, especially of its tectonic movements, the evolution of life, the emergence of Homo Sapiens and their migration to various continents, the global trade of commodities and the spread of infectious diseases, etc.
- 5) To cover one question in four classes over the course of two weeks. This course requires at least 68 periods per year. (Although there are 72 periods officially, 4 days must be allotted for exams or special events). Thus, this course consists of 17 questions. On the first day of the four classes, a teacher presents one historical question or theme and has the students read the textbook to acquire a basic knowledge of the subject. On the second day, the teacher and the students discuss the possibilities of further research for a better understanding. The teacher presents several topics for homework. Students may go to a library, a museum or consult the internet for the relevant information. On the third day, the students present the results of their research according to the topics set by the teacher. The teacher nominates some students to write summaries of their research for the next class. (All students are assigned this role in turn.) On the fourth day, the students read the summaries and engage in more discussions.
- 6) To have the students read certain sections of history books. This will give them precious experience in academic reading and also help them notice the differences in the interpretation of historical phenomena.

#### **d) A Possible Curriculum for Basic History**

There are 17 questions for 68 history classes in a year. Tentatively I suggest dividing them into 6 parts.

1. Introduction: The place we live in
2. Basic features of the pre-modern world
3. The acceleration of globalization: The West and the non-West
4. The age of modernization and imperialism
5. The Cold War, de-colonization and economic development
6. Conclusion: The age of interdependence

#### **(1) Introduction (1 period)**

- a) Where do we live? : The Pacific Rim – a place of great earthquakes and tsunamis
  - Q. How many people were lost during the East Japan Great Earthquake and Tsunami of 2011?

Q: How many times did great earthquakes of a magnitude over 8 occur in Japanese history?

Q: How many times did great earthquakes of a magnitude over 8 strike the Pacific Rim in these 100 years?

Q: How many times did Mt. Fuji erupt in Japanese history?

(2) Basic features of the pre-modern world (3 times)

a) Where and when did Homo sapiens emerge?

Q: Where and when was Homo sapiens born?

Q: When and how did Homo sapiens migrate to various continents?

Q: What happened to other animals when Homo sapiens scattered across the Globe?

Q: Why are there many languages on the Globe?

b) How were the peoples on the Globe connected during the Pre-Modern Period?

Q: What kind of commodities did distant peoples exchange?

Q: What kind of religions spread to distant regions?

Q: Who conquered the world during the Pre-Modern Period?

c) What kinds of civilizations existed on the Earth during the Early Modern Era?

Q: What kind of civilization were there in East Asia?

Q: What kind of civilizations were there on the rest of the Eurasian continent?

Q: What kind of civilizations were there in Africa and America?

(3) The acceleration of globalization: The West and the non-West (4 times)

a) How did Western people begin sailing to non-Western regions?

Q: Which people in Europe began sailing to non-Western regions in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and why?

Q: What relationships developed between the Europeans and the non-Europeans?

Q: What exchanges occurred between the Europeans and the non-Europeans?

b) How was science connected to technology in the West?

Q: Enumerate the technologies people used in daily life up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Q: What was the 'Scientific Revolution' in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe?

Q: Enumerate the technological developments achieved by the application of science in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

- c) What kind of polity was introduced after the American and French Revolutions, respectively?
    - Q: What was new in the polity Americans introduced at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century?
    - Q: What happened to the French polity during the French Revolution?
    - Q: What was the influence of the French Revolution on the rest of the world?
  - d) How did Asian people meet with the West?
    - Q: What happened to the 'Middle Eastern' people after the coming of Westerners?
    - Q: What happened to the Indian people after the coming of Westerners?
    - Q: How did the Chinese and Korean people meet with Westerners?
- (4) The Age of Modernization and Imperialism (4 times)
- a) How did the Japanese begin modernization?
    - Q: What polity, economy and culture were there in Japan just before Perry?
    - Q: What were the changes during the Meiji Regeneration?
    - Q: How did the Japanese combine the Western civilization with their traditions?
  - b) What happened in East Asia after Japan reorganized the relations with the neighbors?
    - Q: What happened to the Ryukyu and Ainu peoples after the Meiji Regeneration?
    - Q: How did Japan recommence relations with China and Korea?
    - Q: What happened to China and Korea after the first Japan-Chinese war?
  - c) What happened to the world when Western countries engaged in imperialist rivalries?
    - Q: What happened to the South East Asian and African people during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century?
    - Q: What characteristics were new to World War I in comparison with other wars?
    - Q: What changes occurred to the European and other countries after the WWI?
  - d) What happened to East Asia when Japan began another invasion?
    - Q: What were the conditions in Japanese society at the turn of the 1930s?
    - Q: Why and how did the Japanese military grasp power?
    - Q: What were the responses of China to the Japanese invasion?

## (5) The Cold War, de-colonization and economic development (4 times)

- a) What happened to the East Asian people after the collapse of the Japanese Empire?

Q: Why were two Korean countries established after 1945?

Q: What happened to the Mainland China and Taiwan after 1945?

Q: How did the Japanese rebuild their society?

- b) How did the countries all over the world get involved in the rivalry between the socialist and the capitalist regimes?

Q: What were the differences between the capitalist and the socialist regimes?

Q: How did major countries get involved in the 'Cold War'?

Q: What did native peoples in the Western colonies respond to the 'Cold War'?

- c) How did some non-Western countries commence their economic development?

Q: What was the position of Japan in the world during the 1960s?

Q: What happened to South Korea and Taiwan in the spheres of economy, society and polity?

Q: What happened to the oil-producing countries?

- d) What happened to the world after the 'Cold War' ceased?

Q: How did East European people gain their political freedom?

Q: Why did some countries suffer from ethnic conflicts?

Q: Does economic development necessarily lead to political freedom?

## (6) Conclusion (1 time)

- a) How are the peoples connected in a world growing increasingly smaller?

Q: Visualize the distribution of population and GDP in the world today.

Q: Illustrate the movement of people, goods and cultures between major countries.

Q: What are the problems accompanying globalization?

## CONCLUDING REMARKS: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I learned much from four workshops on comparative study of history textbooks in Slovenia and Japan. I could now clearly recognize what had happened during and after the historical controversy in East Asia during the first decade of this century. I learned how the Balkan peoples, including the Slovenians, continued to revise their history textbooks. This suggested me a method of how

to meet the need for national history without amplifying the antipathy towards neighboring peoples, despite some inadequacies. I also learned how to organize the structure of a textbook, especially the importance of Qs and As, after listening to the information and remarks by the experienced educators in both regions. I would like to express cordial thanks to all the participants in this joint research who have given me invaluable suggestions on the important task of improving history education for the next generations.