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Old Wounds, New Narratives: Joint History Textbook Writing and Peacebuilding in East Asia

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Old Wounds, New Narratives

Joint History Textbook Writing and Peacebuilding in East Asia

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Powerful collective memories—whether real or concocted—often lie at the root of conflicts, nationalism and cultural identities. In most societies, history textbooks are the “agents of memory” and function as a sort of “supreme historical court.” This article reviews initially how controversies over history textbooks have become sources of conflict in East Asia and then examines the activities of a trilateral history textbook writing project between China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. It also aims to contribute to the theoretical discussion about why history textbooks are worth fighting over and how joint history textbook writing can be used as a means for peacebuilding.

Over sixty years after the end of World War II, the ghosts of war still haunt Chinese–Japanese and South Korean–Japanese relations. Although more than three decades have passed since relations were normalized, the enmity of the past remains alive. Historical issues and the interpretation of the past have been the major barriers for a real reconciliation between these three countries. To a great extent, as Gerrit Gong points out, the memories of past conflicts have come to shape international relations in East Asia.¹

History education is no longer a domestic issue in East Asia. The 2005 massive anti-Japanese protests in China and Korea were a recent example of how history textbooks have become a source of conflict in this

region. On April 5, 2005, the Japanese Education Ministry approved a new junior high school textbook titled *Atarashii Rekishi Ky kasho* (New history textbook) written by the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform.² This move ignited immediate outrage among some Asian countries, especially in China and Korea. Critics have charged that this organization has been using history textbook revision to minimize Japan's culpability for its wartime actions.³ According to the critics, the textbook provides a distorted and self-serving account of Japan's colonial and war-time activities, for example, in its description of the invasion of the Korean peninsula as an unopposed annexation, necessary for Japan's security.⁴ Two weeks after the textbook's approval, anti-Japanese protests broke out in more than ten Chinese cities, during which protesters burned Japanese flags and carried banners demanding "Japan must apologize to China" and "Boycott Japanese goods."⁵ On April 9, 2005, an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 Chinese demonstrators marched to the Japanese embassy in Beijing, throwing stones at the building. Outrage was also fierce in South Korea. In Seoul, two Koreans, Park Kyung-ja and Cho Seung-kyu, used weed clippers and a knife to chop off their fingers outside the Japanese embassy to protest Japan's claims to a group of desolate islands that South Korea insists are in its territory. The new textbook emphasized the legitimacy of Japan's claim to these islands.⁶

The controversy surrounding history education and the adoption of school history textbooks in East Asia raises the question of why history education and history textbooks in particular are important enough to fight over. Yet, if history education can become a source of conflict and exacerbate hatred between two peoples, can it also be used as a peacebuilding method for reconciling a deep-rooted conflict? This article sets out to explore this question through examining a trilateral history textbook writing project between China, Japan and the Republic of Korea.

In May 2005, the first joint history textbook in East Asia, entitled *The Modern and Contemporary History of Three East Asian Countries*, was simultaneously published in China, the Republic of Korea and Japan (the same version in the three different languages), after three years of preparation.⁷ This nongovernmental project, in which some fifty independent teachers, historians and members of civic groups from the three nations participated, aimed to establish a jointly recognized interpretation of history among them. This is not the first time that the multilateral writing

of a history textbook has been used as a method of peacebuilding and reconciliation. For example, history textbooks have been published jointly both by Germany and Poland and by Germany and France. These efforts have contributed to the reconciliation between these countries after the end of World War II and later during the integration of the European Union.⁸ Jeffrey Wasserstrom has argued that the publication of the tri-lateral history textbook in East Asia could, in retrospect, mark “another watershed moment in Asian relations: the point at which Japan, China, and South Korea finally began to accept a shared story of the past.”⁹ This statement might be too optimistic, but the efforts of this project deserve acknowledgment. Both the resulting book and the project itself are a rich case for analyzing the role of history education in intergroup conflict and reconciliation.

HISTORY TEXTBOOKS, TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

The battle over history education and history textbooks has certainly not been limited to Asia. Many studies have indicated that both are actually “common” phenomena in many countries engaged in deep-rooted conflicts. For example, Ian McBride finds that “in Ireland, the interpretation of the past has always been at the heart of national conflict”; Victor Roudometof considers that “the conflicting ethnocentric national narratives of the different sides have generated the Greek-Bulgarian-Macedonian dispute of the 1990s”; while Jerzy Jedlicki has noted that “the twentieth-century history of Eastern Europe is a perfect laboratory to observe how the genuine or apparent remembrances of the past may aggravate current conflicts and how they themselves are modified in the process.”¹⁰ Although many conflicts throughout the world are deeply rooted in history and memory, the place of these two factors in the process of policy making in international conflicts remains largely understudied. Particularly, as Elizabeth Cole notes, the relationship of secondary-school history education to conflict and reconciliation has not been extensively conceptualized.¹¹

Some scholars have examined the politics of history textbooks and tried to determine how their contents are determined by political considerations. According to Michael Apple and Linda Christian-Smith, for example, although textbooks masquerade as teaching neutral and legiti-

mate information, they are often used as “ideological tools to promote a certain belief system and legitimize an established political and social order.” The selection and organization of knowledge for school systems is, in fact, an ideological process that serves the interests of particular classes and social groups. Ever since the rise of the nation-state in Europe in the nineteenth century, history textbooks were used by states as instruments for “glorifying the nation, consolidating its national identity, and justifying particular forms of social and political systems.”¹² David Lowenthal argues that it is we, the contemporaries, who construct our past selectively and for a variety of reasons.¹³ Elie Podeh claims that both the school system and textbooks become “another arm of the state” or “agents of memory” whose aim is to ensure the transmission of “approved knowledge” to the younger generations. Thus, textbooks function as a kind of “supreme historical court” whose task is to decipher, from all the accumulated “pieces of the past,” the “true” collective memories, those that are appropriate for inclusion in the canonical national historical narrative.¹⁴

History textbooks have been regarded as major components in the construction and reproduction of national narratives. All nation-states place great emphasis on history textbook writing. Governments are extremely cautious about what to tell their younger generations about their national experiences. Moreover, the approach to writing the history of other peoples may frequently be influenced by political considerations. Political leaders as well as many citizens have a vested interest in retaining simplistic narratives that flatter their own group and promote group unity by emphasizing sharp divergences between themselves and other groups; they are highly resistant to histories that include the presentation of the other side’s point of view.¹⁵ The manipulation of the past often entails the use of stereotypes and prejudice in describing the “other.”

In relation to such propagation of history, there have been several studies examining how different countries deal with historical issues in their education systems. For example, Saburo Ienaga has shown how, since the 1920s, Japan’s textbooks have taught generations of its children that war is glorious and, consequently, have concealed many of the sad truths about war.¹⁶ Takashi Yoshida argues that the Japanese government has been reluctant to portray the wartime events in a detailed and critical manner.¹⁷ In trying to understand why this is the case, Tomoko Hamada has compared the portrayal of Japan’s colonization of Asia (1937–45) in

three Japanese middle-school history textbooks and one officially approved Chinese textbook. The results of his study indicated that the Japanese textbooks tend to employ formulae for describing the nobility of failure, while Chinese textbooks adhere to the conventional heroic folktale with such functional units as endurance, struggle and ultimate victory.¹⁸ Indeed, many Japanese connect China's anti-Japan sentiments with Chinese history education: according to a survey released by Japan's *Asahi* newspaper in April 2005, over 80 percent of Japanese believe that China's nationalistic education system encouraged the 2005 protests.¹⁹ In response to those protests, Japanese Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura accused Beijing of indoctrinating its students with an unbalanced view of the past, warning that "Chinese textbooks are extreme in the way they uniformly convey the 'our country is correct' perspective."²⁰

When people use different criteria and approaches toward their own national experiences as compared with the histories of other groups, this inevitably creates inconsistent narratives of history. Two countries may describe the same historical event very differently in their respective history textbooks, which can lead to misunderstandings in their bilateral relations. Countries with a long history of conflict between them are particularly sensitive about how specific parts of their history will be narrated and taught in the other country. History textbooks may thus become the source of new conflicts between old enemies. For example, Chunghee Soh has shown that Koreans harbor a deep sense of victimization in their memories of their checkered historical relationship with Japan, which has generated a nationalist sentiment towards Japan's ethnocentric representations of bilateral and regional events in its history textbooks. Soh believes that this is the reason why a new Japanese history textbook could create such vehement "national furor" in South Korea.²¹ As Laura Hein and Mark Selden put it, history lessons not only shape the behavior of citizens within their own society but also "chronicle relations with others." People argue over the contents of such textbooks because education is about the future, it reaches deep into society and is most often directly dictated by the state.²²

More specifically, people fight over the accuracy of history textbooks in telling what they perceive to be the "truth." Such "truth" is also an important factor in the process of reconciliation. According to John Paul Lederach, reconciliation involves the identification and acknowledgment of

what happened (i.e. truth), an effort to “right” the wrongs that occurred (i.e. justice) and forgive the perpetrators (i.e. mercy).²³ Reconciliation also involves the creation of the social space where both truth and forgiveness are validated and joined together, rather than being forced into a confrontation in which one must win out over the other. This is the approach taken by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.²⁴ According to James Gibson, the “truth-telling” or discussion process has significantly aided the process of reconciliation and democratization in South Africa.²⁵

If textbooks and other narratives of history can become a source of conflict between different countries, then, conversely, their revision through joint writing can promote reconciliation and conflict resolution. The main factor in determining to what extent history education can contribute to the process of reconciliation is the way in which the new textbooks reflect what the different sides perceive to be the critical truths of the past conflict. Indeed, confronting the past has become an established norm for reconciliation between countries, as well as for countries undergoing transitions from violence to peace, from authoritarianism to democracy. As Tristan Anne Borrer has shown, “truth telling” contributes to a number of elements that are deemed to be constitutive of sustainable peace: reconciliation, human rights, gender equity, restorative justice, the rule of law, the mitigation of violence and the healing of trauma.²⁶

THE CHINA-JAPAN-KOREA JOINT HISTORY TEXTBOOK

One such project of joint history textbook writing began in March 2002 when historians from China, Japan and South Korea attended a conference on history education, held in China. During this meeting, the participants reached a consensus that the transcription of a unified historical interpretation of the past conflicts would play a vital role in reconciliation between the three countries. Putting the idea into motion, a few Japanese scholars proposed that the participants should work together to compile the first joint history textbook. This proposal was supported by scholars from the other two countries. Immediately after the conference, three national history textbook writing committees were formed, and in August 2002 the first project meeting was held in Seoul.²⁷ The trilateral history textbook

writing committee was composed of fifty-three members from the three nations: seventeen from China, thirteen from Japan, and twenty-three from the Republic of Korea. Most of them were history professors or senior researchers affiliated with historical research institutes or museums in the three nations. Among the Japanese and South Korean committees, there were also middle-school history teachers and members of nongovernmental organizations and civic groups. All members participated as independent scholars, as the project was purely nongovernmental in nature and began without any sponsors or subsidies.²⁸ After eleven meetings and six revisions over the course of three years starting in 2002, the joint history textbook was finally published in 2005 in each of the three countries.

As discussed in the previous section, history textbooks in most countries serve as “agents of memory” to ensure the transmission of “approved knowledge” to younger generations. Prior to this collaborative textbook, each of these three countries had already established their own perspectives on this part of history and, naturally, these greatly divergent perspectives had been a source of tension in the region. But is it truly possible for these three countries to agree upon a joint account of history? How do historians from the three countries deal with the different interpretations of historical events? What are the major differences between this joint history textbook and the national textbooks published by the individual countries?

NATIONAL NARRATIVE VS. JOINT ACCOUNT OF HISTORY

History textbooks are often written from a single point of view, that is, they are based on domestic interpretations of the past. These texts are most commonly the basis for “national narratives” of history. By contrast, this first joint history textbook in East Asia places emphasis on the interactions between the three countries. As the preface to the book states, these three nations have very close geographical and historical ties and their histories cannot be understood separately.²⁹

This unprecedented trilateral textbook consists of six chapters, each of which focuses on the interactions and/or comparisons between the three countries. The prologue chapter provides a brief review of the political and cultural interactions of the three neighboring countries throughout history. The first chapter, “Opening of Ports and Modernization,” focuses on the

arrival of Western influences in East Asia starting from the late eighteenth century and how the three nations dealt with the crises and opportunities accompanying this intrusion. It also discusses the emergence of modern Japan after the Meiji Restoration and the conflicts between China and Japan arising in 1895. The second chapter, "The Expansion of Japanese Imperialism and the Resistance of China and Korea," and the third chapter, "Invasion, War and People's Sufferings," provide a detailed account of the history of the Asia-Pacific War, including how Taiwan and Korea became Japanese colonies. They also discuss China's War of Resistance against Japan before and during World War II. About half of the book (120 of the 230 pages of the Chinese version) is devoted to addressing Japan's expansion and invasion. The fourth chapter, "Postwar East Asia," covers the nation-building processes of the three countries after the war and the thorny processes of reconciliation. The epilogue chapter, "For a Peaceful Future of East Asia," addresses several controversial issues that currently affect relations between Japan and its East Asian neighbors: individual compensation, the use of "comfort women" during the war, problems over the content in history textbooks, and Japanese leaders' visits to the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo.³⁰

In the beginning of the first chapter, the editors pose several central questions that this book aims to examine: How did the three countries respond to the rise of the European and American powers in the late eighteenth century? Why did they have different responses to the pressure? What kind of reform and societal changes did they experience over the course of their modernization drives? Why did the three neighboring countries finally go to war following the emergence of Japanese power? And what actually happened during the tragic war of aggression and resistance? Indeed, throughout the textbook, the three countries are discussed as one community. The focus is placed on exploring the sources of the Asia-Pacific War. In the preface, the editors ask the readers to consider what lessons they can learn from studying the history of East Asia and state the guideline for compiling this book: "By remembering past mistakes, we can avoid repeating the same mistakes and can become wiser. We study history in order to remember the past experiences and lessons and to open up the future."³¹ To reflect on past mistakes and to learn from history are the main themes of this new book, throughout which readers are encouraged to explore the deep roots of the historical tragedies that the three

countries have all experienced. Instead of just describing what happened in the past, a reflective narrative of history encourages the readers to think for themselves about the causes for the events, and even to ponder on how to prevent the same thing from happening again.

Compared with previous national textbooks, the accounts of each country's domestic affairs and foreign relations are fairly brief. For example, while presenting China's War of Resistance, the book makes no mention of the internal conflicts between the Chinese Communist Party and the Nationalist Party, to which official history textbooks in mainland China have always devoted a major part of their content. The book also gives little information about the other battlefields of World War II or international relations during the war period. The lack of international context and the sparse details about the domestic history of each country make this book supplementary reading, rather than serving as the primary reading material for middle-school history classes.

VICTOR/VICTIM NARRATIVE VS. REFLECTIVE NARRATIVE

In accounting for a group's past conflicts with other groups, most national history textbooks usually adopt a mix of both "victor narrative" and "victim narrative." This is how the old Korean textbooks describe Korean modern history in relation to the country's suffering and the past atrocities carried out by the Japanese.³² While the Chinese and Korean textbooks provide detailed descriptions of the wartime atrocities committed by the Japanese, such content is downplayed in most Japanese textbooks. Instead, the Japanese versions tend to associate the war with the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the air raids on Tokyo. This trilateral textbook has attempted to provide a joint account of the war suffering of all three countries during the Asia-Pacific War.

When covering the war, traditional history textbooks focus on the events of the war—the major campaigns, battles, and stages of the war. This trilateral book, however, devotes more attention to the suffering that people of all the three countries experienced during the war. The third chapter, "Invasion, War and People's Sufferings," includes three sections, each focusing on the civilians in one of the countries. The section on Japan entitled "Perpetrators as Victims," outlines the suffering of Japanese civil-

ians during the war.³³ Besides a quite detailed account of the air raids on Tokyo and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, this section also introduces the Japanese people's anti-war movement and how the civilians were mobilized to support the war.

The section on Korea recounts the history of Korea under Japanese occupation between 1910 and 1945 when Korea was forcibly annexed by the Japanese Empire. It outlines Japanese economic exploitation to support the Japanese war effort. Many Koreans were conscripted into the Japanese military and were used as forced laborers and as sex slaves. This section devotes particular attention to Japan's forced incorporation of the Korean royal family into the Japanese royal family and the so-called "Imperial Citizen Forming" in Korea. The colonial government suppressed Korean culture and language in an attempt to root out all elements of Korean culture from society. Koreans were required to speak Japanese and take Japanese names.

The section on China introduces some of the most notorious war crimes carried out by Japanese troops in China, including the Nanjing Massacre, biological warfare and sexual violence. This section devotes two pages to Japan's covert biological and chemical warfare research and development unit—Unit 731. According to this book, Chinese, many of them prisoners, were used as targets for testing germ-releasing bombs, chemical weapons and explosives in the testing sites of the unit. Some prisoners were injected with diseases, disguised as vaccinations, to study their effects. During the war period, about three thousand people were torched and many were killed in the facilities of Unit 731.³⁴

The editors have made extensive use of archival photos, tables of statistics, eyewitness accounts and personal anecdotes to help today's young people understand the situation of more than sixty years ago. These contents take up about one-third of the total space of the book. The inclusion of such a large amount of archival photos and eyewitness accounts may also be a way of enabling the editors to redress nationalist bias and minimize their own comments to avoid disagreements on the presentation of sensitive historical events. For example, the book devotes one page to the picture and testimony of a former Japanese soldier, Hajime Kondo, who testified at the Tokyo High Court in 2003 on the sexual violence used by the Japanese army during the Asia-Pacific War. According to this excerpt, he said:

In September 1941, we conducted a “mopping up” raid in Shanxi province to attack a group of troops of the Chinese Communist Party. We entered a village but the troops had already gone. We ended up by raping the women we could find. We killed them together with all the other villagers and burned the village before we left. This was common practice at that time.³⁵

During the war, Japanese forces carried out fierce campaigns of suppression in certain areas of occupied China, which were known as the “Three Alls” (*Sanguang*): “Kill All,” “Burn All” and “Loot All.” In Japanese documents, the policy was originally referred to as “The Burn to Ash Strategy.” The soldier’s testimony is used to illustrate the brief description of the “Three Alls” strategy. The book also cites, in an inserted text box, the original text of the loyalty oath that Korean students had to recite publicly at all schools during the daily ceremony of worshiping the Japanese imperial portrait: “We are subjects of the Great Japanese Empire; We, in unity of our minds, fulfill the duty of loyalty and service to the Emperor.”³⁶

As the Chinese editors point out in their letter to the readers, the traditional national history textbooks place emphasis on their own country’s victimization and their own people’s suffering. The joint accounts of history and the reflective narrative were designed to help the younger generation better understand that the ordinary people of all three countries were victims of this war:

Chinese youngsters have had deep impressions of brutal Japanese war crimes, such as the Nanjing Massacre, “Biological Warfare Unit 731” and the “Three Alls” campaigns; for the Korean youth, their impressions of the war are the sad memories of their motherland falling into enemy hands, and people being forced to sever their cultural connections with their ancestors. However, the most profound impressions of the war for the Japanese younger generation are probably the events in which Japanese were victims, such as the bombing of Tokyo and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Although all these events are not fictitious, if people only have a one-sided understanding of the war, when they communicate with people from the other two countries, their discussion about the war would probably fall into endless debates and disagreements.³⁷

In their letter to Chinese readers at the beginning of the book, the Japanese editors also express the hope that the book will help Japanese students understand the trauma and tremendous disasters that the Japanese invasion caused the Chinese people, as well as helping Chinese students learn about the experiences of ordinary Japanese during the war.³⁸

MASTER NARRATIVE VS. DIVERGENT PERSPECTIVES

In most societies, history and civic textbooks present an “official” story or a master narrative of national experiences. The creation of such books is fairly simple as there are few, if any, competing points of view. However, the creation of the trilateral textbook was, naturally, a very different case and the writers and publishers acknowledged that there were “fierce disputes” during the writing process.³⁹ According to Zhu Chengshan, a Chinese participant in the trilateral project, the three issues that were debated most during the writing process were Japan’s use of poison gas, sexual violence and the death toll from the Nanjing Massacre.⁴⁰

There are three schools of thought in Japan on the Nanjing massacre: those who acknowledge that a “massacre” indeed took place, although many of them consider 200,000 to be the approximate death toll, as opposed to the official Chinese figure of 300,000; those who claim that it is a “hoax,” that the death toll was entirely military and that no civilian atrocities occurred; and those who play down the number of victims, believing the death toll to be anywhere between several thousand to ten thousand.⁴¹ According to Bu Ping (deputy director of the Institute of Modern History under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and one of the Chinese participants in the trilateral project), during the editing process the debate between the Chinese and Japanese scholars was primarily focused on the death toll. Interestingly, there were no “hoax” supporters among the Japanese participants. As he noted, “Many people are concerned about how the book depicts the Nanjing Massacre and other major issues. In fact, we do not have any differences over the massacre itself, and we all agree that the Japanese invaders conducted a cruel massacre in Nanjing.”⁴²

In the beginning of the writing process, according to Zhu Chengshan, the Chinese scholars insisted on the figure of 300,000 victims of

the massacre, which was the Chinese official estimate and the number that is engraved on the stone wall at the entrance of the “Memorial Hall for Compatriots Killed in the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Forces of Aggression” in Nanjing. This was also the number that Chinese students had been taught from their history textbooks. The Japanese scholars, however, continually disagreed with this number.⁴³ In order to resolve the matter, the editors finally decided that they would present three different numbers in the new textbook. The first two numbers are quoted from the verdict of the Nanjing War Crimes Tribunal in 1946; the third number is quoted from the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal:

According to the investigation of the Nanjing War Crimes Tribunal in 1946, some 190,000 people were executed on a massive scale at various execution sites and their bodies were disposed of by the Japanese military. There were also 150,000 corpses that were individually executed. These corpses were found and buried by the charitable organizations in Nanjing. The judgment of the Tokyo tribunal stated the following: “during the first six weeks of the Japanese occupation, over 200,000 civilians and POWs were executed. This number did not include those victims whose bodies were dumped into Yangtze River or executed by other means.”⁴⁴

For the Chinese editors, even though the death toll of 300,000 is not mentioned explicitly in this passage, if the figures of 190,000 and 150,000 are combined, the total exceeds even the official Chinese estimate. Some Japanese participants, however, believe there was some overlap between the two numbers. Nevertheless, the editors did not go any further to inform the readers about the existing debate over the death toll and how this controversy has become a barrier for reconciliation between the two countries.

Given the fact that this is the first time the three countries have worked together on a joint account of history, it is understandable that the editors were very cautious and tried to avoid any controversies. They seek maximum common ground among the editors from the three countries. This approach could also be a means to provide students with a more distanced view of the exclusive description of history from a nationalist point of view. However, in terms of teaching history, it may be preferable to tell the students that some historical events are interpreted differently

in the other country. Reading evidence and differing judgments can be empowering. Instead of providing only one side's story, history textbooks can present two or more narratives of past events and let students choose for themselves which they are willing to accept. By doing so, history textbooks can introduce students to the complex process of reconciliation and enhance students' critical thinking skills.

TRILATERAL TEXTBOOK VS. *NEW HISTORY TEXTBOOK*

Although the editors and publishers of the trilateral history textbook denied that its publication was intended as a rebuttal to the textbook published in 2005 by the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (JSHTR), it is illuminating to compare the two textbooks, especially their different accounts of several key issues that are highly symbolic in Sino-Japanese relations (such as the Nanjing Massacre).

The official website of the JSHTR provides an English translation of the 2005 version of its *New History Textbook*. Perhaps the most significant way in which this book differs from the new joint textbook is the fact that in the former there is no mention of the "Nanjing Massacre" or "Nanjing Incident." Indeed, there is only one sentence that refers to this incident—"they occupied that city in December." In context, it reads:

In August 1937, two Japanese soldiers, [and] one officer, were shot to death in Shanghai. After this incident, the hostilities between Japan and China escalated. Japanese military officials thought Chiang Kai-shek would surrender if they captured Nanking, the Nationalist capital; they occupied that city in December. But Chiang Kai-shek had moved his capital to the remote city of Chongqing. The conflict continued.⁴⁵

The editors of the book also added a footnote here, which makes the first, and only, direct reference to "The Nanjing Incident":

Note: At this time, many Chinese soldiers and civilians were killed or wounded by Japanese troops (the Nanking Incident). Documentary evidence has raised doubts about the actual number of victims claimed by the incident. The debate continues even today.

The trilateral textbook devotes two full pages of text, including two photos and two adjoining excerpts from the diaries of two Japanese servicemen who participated in this incident in order to describe what happened in Nanjing in December 1937. The title of this section, “Nanjing Massacre,” is fairly straightforward. The trilateral textbook also touches on areas that have been rarely addressed before and which were certainly not addressed in the JSHTTR book. Indeed, these are sensitive subjects such as the issue of the “comfort women,” sexual violence and the testing of biological weapons on humans. Furthermore, Japan’s colonial rule of Korea is described as illegal and compulsory, unlike in the JSHTTR book and many other Japanese textbooks.⁴⁶ According to Yoshida’s research, only two of the seven middle-school textbooks used in Japan in 2002 gave the numbers of the controversial death toll of the Nanjing Massacre, while others used more ambiguous terms such as “many” and “massive” to describe the casualties, in an effort to avoid the domestic challenges from the country’s right wing.⁴⁷

The prefaces of the two books immediately reveal the major differences between them. Indeed, the two books were compiled according to considerably different guidelines and present divergent conceptions of history. In the preface to the trilateral textbook, the editors emphasize the importance of “remembering the past experiences and lessons.”

People do not always attach importance to the experiences and lessons of the older generations. At times they even conceal memories of the past and erase them from the record. People have a tendency to try to forget the unpleasant things that happened in the past, and they consider this will help make their daily lives easier. But we should be careful. It is not always good to forget the unpleasant things in the past.⁴⁸

The editors of the JSHTTR textbook, however, emphasize the importance of understanding history in a particular “context.” They suggest that the readers should try to put themselves in the situation or “context” of their ancestors:

Most people may believe that the reason for studying history is to learn what happened in the past, but that is not necessarily correct. A more accurate definition of history as a discipline is learning how

people of the past lived in the context of the events of the past—what they believed, what caused them pain, and how they overcame difficulties. The most important aspects of studying history are to become knowledgeable about the problems our ancestors faced throughout history, and to imagine what you might have done in their place.⁴⁹

However, as shown by their treatment of the Nanjing Massacre, the JSHTTR editors seem to have made little effort to help students understand the “context” of this tragic event. It is not difficult to understand why a history textbook such as this could trigger massive protests in other countries. The assumption that history is about “our ancestors” is also quite common in East Asia, which is certainly different from conceiving history as about how people in the past lived and coped—whoever they may be. However, when history textbooks were compiled on the basis of such an assumption, they were often imbued with ethnocentric views, stereotypes and prejudices, and had difficulty in avoiding glorifying or demonizing particular groups. History textbooks thus become the sources of controversies and conflicts.

RECEPTION AND CRITICISM

All three versions of the trilateral history textbook have been well received in the markets of their respective countries. The first print run of the Chinese version, consisting of 20,000 copies, sold out within two days. The Korean and Japanese versions also sold 20,000 copies each in the first week, a remarkable number for a social science book in these countries. The Japanese publisher decided to publish second and third editions and added another 15,000 copies as a supplement to the first edition.⁵⁰ The three versions of this book had sold over 230,000 copies by May 2006, one year after it was first published. A new Chinese version was also published in May 2006 with some minor revisions and new pictures.⁵¹

The original objective of the editors was to make the book a textbook for middle-school students. However, strictly speaking, the trilateral history book is not yet a “textbook.” Textbooks have to go through a rigorous process of official approval, which this book has not received

in any of these three countries.⁵² As a supplementary text, the book has not been required reading for students in any of the three countries. The information from the Japanese publishers and bookstores also indicates that most buyers are individuals, not bulk orders for classroom use. Even though this book has not yet entered the classrooms, its relative success in the markets indicates that there is considerable interest in new narratives of history in these three countries.

The publication of the book has also received extensive media attention in the three countries, especially in China and Korea. China's major newspapers and news agencies, such as *People's Daily* and Xinhua News Agency, have all reported on this book, and some of the Chinese participants in the project have been interviewed by the national and local media. Most comments from the Chinese media are quite positive, and many reports compare this book with the JSHTTR's *New History Textbook*, which they consider as a "victory" to the Japanese right wing. A review article by Chinese publisher Guo Zhikun calls the trilateral book "a dagger and a spear striking at the Japanese right," suggesting that its publication would be a good beginning for a dialogue between China and Japan on historical issues that could eventually improve the economic relations and mutual trust between the two countries.⁵³

Even though the book has received favorable comments and endorsements from the Chinese official newspapers and websites, it has also been criticized in scholars' personal blogs and online discussion forums. For example, readers left more than twenty reviews on the website of Dangdang, China's major online bookstore. Although the majority of these comments are very positive, several of them found this book lacking in details. One commented that the editors of the three countries had had to compromise with each other and had therefore sometimes used very brief narratives to avoid disagreement.⁵⁴ The dissident Chinese writer Yu Hua also wrote a review of this book under the title "No Truthful History under Monopoly," in which he argues that the book does not offer the readers a truthful account of the role played by the Chinese Communist Party during the war against Japan and the outbreak of the Korean War. According to Yu, the book basically contains nothing that contradicts Beijing's official narrative on history. For example, it still gives much credit to the party for the success of China's war against Japan even though it

in fact did not play an active role during the war. The book also fails to identify the North Koreans as the instigators of the Korean War.⁵⁵

In Japan, much of the discussion on the trilateral textbook has focused on the Japanese participants in the project. Of the thirteen Japanese editors, six of them are from two organizations—Children and Textbooks Japan Network 21 (Kodomo to Kyōkasho Zenkoku Netto 21) and the Asian Network for History Education (Rekishi kyoiku Ajia nettowaku)—both of which are strongly opposed to the content of the JSHTTR's *New History Textbook*. Indeed, both these organizations were established with the aim of discouraging Japanese regional district boards from adopting the JSHTTR textbooks. Another participant, Kasahara Tokushi, the author of a renowned history of the Nanjing Massacre, is among those in Japan who acknowledge that a massacre did occur. In his book *Nankin jiken* (The Nanjing incident), he concludes that the Japanese army killed between 100,000 and 200,000 Chinese combatants and civilians between December 1937 and March 1938.⁵⁶ Precisely because most of the Japanese historians involved in this trilateral textbook project are identified as representing the Japanese left, and none of the Japanese "right-wingers" participated in the project, some Japanese see this book as simply another left-wing book in cahoots with the Chinese and the Koreans.⁵⁷

JOINT TEXTBOOK WRITING AS A MEANS FOR PEACEBUILDING

It is not easy to evaluate the impact of history education on individual students and the larger society.⁵⁸ The politics of collective memory are impossible to quantify and hard to measure with the methods of survey research.⁵⁹ Moreover, unlike peacekeeping, which can be implemented relatively quickly, and peacemaking, which can occur over a period of a few months, peacebuilding is a long, slow political and social process that in a sense is never completed. It is unrealistic, therefore, to expect a joint history-writing project to bring about dramatic changes in bilateral relations, especially in a short period of time. However, some positive changes have been witnessed since the publication of this trilateral book.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited China in October 2006. This was the first time in five years that a Japanese prime minister had received an invitation to visit Beijing. His predecessor, Junichiro Koizumi,

had upset Beijing by repeatedly visiting the Yasukuni Shrine. As a result, both China and South Korea had refused to meet with Koizumi either at home or in Japan, and there had not been any mutual visits between the Chinese and Japanese leaders since October 2001. During the meeting, Abe and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao reached an unusual agreement in bilateral relations. They agreed to establish a joint historical study group to conduct research on historical issues between the two countries in order to find similarities in their perceptions of history and analyze the differences between them.

According to this agreement, each country appointed a ten-member team to participate in the project.⁶⁰ On December 26, 2006, twenty Chinese and Japanese historians gathered in Beijing for the first-ever government-sponsored joint historical research. Bu Ping, a participant in the nongovernmental trilateral history textbook committee, was appointed head of the Chinese team. Shinichi Kitaoka, head of the Japanese team, had previously participated in a joint history study between Japan and the Republic of Korea and is the former deputy permanent representative of Japan at the UN. During the meeting, the two sides agreed on the work process, scope and topics for joint research. The teams met again in March and December 2007, and it was decided that the results of the research would be released by the end of 2008.⁶¹

As we have seen, the fact that most of the Japanese participants in the trilateral textbook are from the left wing is considered by its critics to be one of the major limitations of this book. But in this bilateral study, the officially appointed scholars represent a wider spectrum of political views. Shinichi Kitaoka, for example, is seen by some Japanese academic circles as a neoconservative. Moreover, the ten Japanese scholars come from different disciplines; besides historians, there are also political scientists, such as Tomoyuki Kojima of Keio University, and even a law scholar.

This initiative on the part of the two governments deserves encouragement. In many deep-rooted conflicts, past relationships and problems become ghosts for current realities and frequently impede constructive discussion. Therefore, most of these intractable conflicts are not ready for formal mediation or negotiation, which are central instruments of conflict management. Harold Saunders argues that in such conflicts “sustained dialogue” is a more appropriate response to underlying causes.⁶² Indeed, a growing number of conflict resolution practitioners have been utilizing

dialogue to transform deep-rooted, value-based conflicts, as well as ethnic conflicts, such as that between the Palestinians and the Israelis and among groups in Northern Ireland. Unlike debate, which seeks to score points and to persuade, the goal of dialogue, in which small groups of people who hold opposing views on highly divisive and emotional issues are brought together to hold a conversation, is to create mutual understanding and respect—essentially the recognition of the validity of opposing viewpoints.⁶³ Although this does not lead to a resolution of the conflict, it can lead to a transformation in the way the conflict is pursued. Evidently, the top leaders of China and Japan have also realized that joint history research and dialogues are necessary and effective steps for rebuilding relationships.

History teachers and historians alike can play important roles in the reconciliation of deep-rooted conflicts. History education and school history textbooks can serve as “agents of memory.” They shape our identity in dynamic ways—not only in how we understand ourselves, but also in how we are understood by others. Without meaningful educational reform, other political mechanisms—such as diplomatic meetings between political leaders and other official exchanges between countries—are likely to be “top-down” and will have only a limited impact on building peace and understanding.

Conflict resolution practitioners such as John Paul Lederach emphasize the importance of middle-range leadership and what they call a “middle-out” approach for building peace. This approach recognizes that mid-level leaders—“unofficial but influential” social and political groups and individuals—are a natural bridge for influencing both top- and local-level leaders. These leaders can be highly respected individuals (such as Nobel laureates and prominent scholars), leaders of civic groups and institutions, or leaders of identity groups. Such leaders are likely to have connections with people at both the top and the grassroots levels. Their position does not depend on political or military power. They can act as channels through which new perceptions and ideas are filtered to ordinary citizens, and they can also communicate with authoritative decision makers. They are the reliable sources for new information and new concepts. The “middle-out” approach can communicate new concepts to the upper echelons of leadership as well as to the general public. Each single book,

each public speech and each dialogue between the middle-range leadership of two countries, can make a difference.⁶⁴

The trilateral history textbook writing project is a good example of the “middle-out approach.” The fifty-three participants are all renowned historians and educators in their respective countries. Although they are from different countries, they received similar academic training in history. They came together because they all share a strong commitment to the social responsibility of historians. Through this book, they have transmitted new information about the historical events and new perspectives on reconciliation. The popularity of the book shows that there is indeed interest in these countries in learning about different perspectives and new information.

The publication of this trilateral textbook is, of course, only a first step in the effort to approach the controversial and sensitive historical issues with an awareness of multiple perspectives. Preventing conflict means preventing exclusionist discourse and symbolic politics by limiting opportunities for disagreement and changing the myths and attitudes that lead to hostility. A real reconciliation in East Asia will be contingent upon whether people can utilize a new “peace discourse,” a method using tolerance, forgiveness and reconciliation to replace the current use of historical hatred and trauma. The trilateral history-writing project can be seen as an important effort in East Asia to initiate such a new peace discourse.

There are several characteristics of the joint history textbook that distinguish it from other history textbooks that have been produced in these countries. First, it does not present history from a single country’s perspective but, rather, makes special efforts to create a jointly recognized interpretation of history among the three nations. The book primarily focuses on the interactions between the three East Asian countries. It points out that the history of the three neighboring countries cannot be understood separately. Second, this book uses an “introspective narrative” to replace the “victor narrative” and “victim narrative.” The traditional national history textbooks in the three countries use both a “victor narrative” and a “victim narrative” to account for past conflicts and violence. Contrarily, this book encourages its readers to explore the deep roots and causes of historical tragedies, to reflect on past mistakes and to learn from history. Finally, this textbook introduces students to the difficult and complicated process of reconciliation. Students will be able to learn

that the three countries have differences over the interpretation of some historical events and that the historical issues have been barriers to establishing healthy relations.

The trilateral joint history-writing project makes an effort to promote understanding and tolerance in East Asia. Although there may be disagreement with the account of history or the point of view expressed in the book, its publication has contributed to promoting a new approach that has become part of the political discourse in each of the three countries.

As Canadian Member of Parliament Irwin Cotler stated, where there is no remembrance, there is no truth; where there is no truth, there will be no justice; where there is no justice, there will be no reconciliation; and where there is no reconciliation, there will be no peace.⁶⁵ In each of the East Asia countries, a feedback loop has existed whereby nationalistic history education has stimulated the rise of nationalism and, in turn, the rise of nationalism has generated a bigger market for nationalistic messages. At the same time, the top-level leaders are not only often locked into their individual positions, but they also frequently use historical grievances as resources for political mobilization. Considering this dynamic, joint history research and writing projects—the “middle-out” approach—have become an essential step for reconciliation and conflict resolution in East Asia.

NOTES

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27. . Based on Xinhua News Agency's interview with Zhu Chengshan, July 5, 2007, available online (in Chinese) at http://www.js.xinhuanet.com/xin_wen_zhong_xin/2005-07/05/content_4569047.htm (accessed December 22, 2008).
28. Ibid.
29. *Dongya Sanguo de Jinxiandaishi*, 2.
30. Ibid., 214–15. The Shintoist Yasukuni Shrine, dedicated to the spirits of those who died fighting on behalf of the Emperor of Japan, is viewed by the Chinese as a symbol of Japanese imperialist aggression. Visits to the shrine by Japanese Cabinet members and prime ministers, in particular, have been the cause of protests at home as well as by Japan's Asian neighbors, such as China, North Korea and South Korea.
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45. See Kanji, et al., eds., *Atarashii rekishi kyokasho*, 49. The English translation here and below is by the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (available at http://www.tsukurukai.com/05_rekisi_text/rekishi_English/English.pdf). The quality of the translation is not good, but it provides a literal translation of the original Japanese version.
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