

*Imagining Japan in Post-War East Asia:
Identity Politics, Schooling, and Popular Culture*

by Paul Morris, Naoko Shimizu, and Edward Vickers, eds.

London: Routledge, 2013

—

Gregory S. Johnson
Otsuma Women's University

As senior editor Edward Vickers notes in the foreword (xiv), this insightful collaborative volume on East Asian views of Japan is even timelier than it was at its inception with a small group of scholars in 2009. Japan's international role is now intensely negotiated and contested both inside and outside its borders. The work studies what Japan means to its neighbors, how and why those meanings have changed, and how they reflect the identity politics of those nearby nations.

The editors frame the varied contributions with a chapter-length introduction. They observe that Cold War ideological differences have been replaced in a number of nations by intensified nationalism, as in Europe. However, the nations of East Asia remain within the Cold War's geopolitical contours. Meanwhile, Japan's economic rise has given it cultural influence throughout the region. They provide four rubrics for seeing Japan. The "normative other" interpretation makes Japan an Asian model of modernization or a symbol justifying modernizing agendas. Japan as a "dominant other," a legacy from historical experiences of invasion and war, defines Japan as an eternal enemy in order to bolster nationalism or mask domestic trouble. The "distant other" Japan, found in

the Philippines, is related to the “dominant other.” It is a picture of a disadvantageous historical relationship like that of the “dominant other” but the power of which to intensify Philippine nationalism has either weakened or is unused. The editors also find an “alternative other,” that is, a reference point used to emphasize difference between the society viewing Japan and a dominant third entity such as the West or the People’s Republic of China. The foreword carefully explains that these broad categories are not mutually exclusive, that “Japan has served as a repository for an enormously diverse range of images carrying an equally diverse range of messages” (20). The first collection of essays in the volume covers “Japan” in popular culture and [non school textbook] public propaganda. While inevitably identifying forms of official control, the section goes beyond sanctioned discourse to explore such influences as consumers and folk beliefs. The second grouping is “Japan” in official discourse, meaning textbooks. An epilogue discusses efforts of the Annual Seminar for History Teachers from China, Japan, and South Korea to achieve mutual understanding, provided by a participant in that endeavor.

Singaporean authorities instituted a Learn from Japan campaign from 1979 until the onset of Japan’s post bubble economic stagnation. The goal was not to make citizens more like Japanese, but rather “productive, patriotic, and compliant *Singaporeans*” (29, italics in original). Officials were attracted by Japan’s supposed ability to retain its Asian character while becoming an economic power and sought to unify their citizens against individualism and other scourges of Westernization. While practices from Japan were implemented, a greater legacy is found in the existence of a modernized but ostensibly little Westernized Japan as a model to justify authoritarian governance and neoliberal economic policy.

I-yun Lee and Christine Han explore transition in Taiwan from an anti-Japanese posture resulting from five decades of colonial rule to a popular culture import boom in the 1990s. Colonial Japanese assimilation measures and harsh postwar Kuomintang (KMT) treatment of Taiwanese elicited affinity for Japan. The result was a positive view of Japan by the

Taiwanese contrasting with a negative KMT image of the same country. “Nostalgia for the Japanese era thus became a symbol and a resource with which to sustain resistance against the KMT” (52). The KMT relaxed its anti Japan position during the Cold War but reinstated it when Japan followed the United States in recognizing the PRC. Nevertheless latent interest in and consumption of Japanese cultural products remained to ignite a Japan boom as Taiwan’s economy grew, particularly after the end of martial law in 1987. Japanese anime, manga, and romantic TV dramas created “an image [of Japan] onto which [Taiwanese fans] projected their desires and wishes, as well as their own rules and logic” (63).

Kinnia Yau Shuk-ting examines Japanese portrayals in Chinese war films, finding in collaborative Sino-Japanese works from the 1980s on images distinguishing “good Japanese” from bad “to promote historically and culturally rooted relationships between the people of China and Japan” (70). China’s government in the interest of trade relations sanctioned films separating good Japanese, who were war victims, from militaristic predatory devils. Chinese empathy in such films is intended to show the magnanimity of a rising Chinese civilization. Evil Japanese demonstrate China’s heroic struggle against them, but more nuanced Japanese characters open a space for cooperation. They also depict a fantasy of Japanese contrition that, to the Chinese government, remains unexpressed by Japanese officialdom, and illustrate the virtue of Chinese society.

The Philippines differs from many of its neighbors, in Karl Ian Uy Cheng Chua’s reading, because it has “refrained from using schooling to transmit a strong sense of national identity premised on a coherent narrative of the national past” (86). Therefore, the author investigates extracurricular images, specifically comic books or *komiks* from the 1940s to the 1970s. While the Japanese as war enemies were portrayed negatively, “post-war depictions of Japanese villainy were accompanied, from the earliest days by emphasis on the dastardly role of native collaborators” (91). The prominence of the Second World War as a stage

for Filipino-Japanese interaction survives in personal narratives but has diminished over time in *komiks*. The appeal of Japanese economic development during the corrupt and divisive Marcos era prompted a reconsideration of Japan that popular print entertainment reflects.

Jung-Sun N. Han's contribution analyzes the shifting purposes and meanings of the Japanese Government-General Building in Seoul from the colonial period to its razing for the 50th anniversary of the war's end. The Chosŏn dynasty's Kyŏngbok Palace, destroyed by invading Japanese armies in 1592 and rebuilt nearly three centuries later, was where the Japanese occupation regime built its headquarters. The war-damaged Government-General Building was neglected after the Korean War but became the seat of government under the Park Chung Hee regime after 1961, and was later turned into a museum. Because of Park's prewar identity as a soldier in Japan's army and his need to prioritize economic development, he decoupled the issues of historical repression from the renewal of postwar ties to Japan. The issues of collaboration and reparations, like the ultimate fate of the building, remained unresolved. A directly elected government was established in the late 1980s and Roh Tae Woo, the first incumbent thereof, planned to demolish the Government-General Building and restore the palace. Proponents considered it a symbol of national disgrace and collaboration, a place Japanese visited to celebrate its colonization of Korea, or a curse disrupting the geomantic *pungsu* forces of the nation. Calls to save or move the edifice were based on either the perceived need to preserve evidence of a painful past or the Government-General Building's historic architectural value. It was dismantled starting August 15, 1995, celebrated as the 50th anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japan, but lawsuits delayed the work. Its destruction and the reconstruction of the palace "signify a growing self-confidence among Korea's people in coming to terms with a past freighted with difficult memories" (123). The building that seldom appeared in postwar Korean textbooks while it existed has since its demolition reappeared in them, now a historical memory bereft of

disruptive power.

Part III explores images of Japan in one form of official discourse, school textbooks. Textbooks and curricular contents are popular targets for research on the construction of national Selves and Others.¹ Textbook contents do not show what children actually learn or believe about their or other nations, and say nothing of their influence on the opinions of adults.² Nevertheless, the widespread reach of course materials in modern compulsory education systems and their official imprimatur make them an important issue for analysis.

Caroline Rose observes a shift in PRC history textbooks from focusing on the CCP/KMT struggle to greater attention on the war against Japan in the post Mao era. Patriotism that includes some recognition of KMT resistance to Japan became the new ideological centerpiece, particularly in response to the 1989 Tiananmen Incident. Coverage of the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance has diminished since then, although Japan remains a “‘dominant other,’ the malevolent author-in-chief of China’s national humiliation” (131) in school texts. Reforms in the early 2000s made history compulsory for three years rather than one and changed the goal to “holistic development” (quoted by Rose, 132) and cultivation of innovative attitudes, adding more world history and thematic rather than purely chronological treatment of the subject. Some room for difference in detail within government guidelines is manifested in contemporary Chinese textbooks. A reduction in information on the KMT/CCP conflict during the war, to strengthen an image of Chinese unity and patriotism, intensifies the impact of remaining material covering Japanese aggression. Extracurricular anti-Japanese images are prevalent to

¹ Among monographs, see, for example, Julian Dierkes, *Postwar history education in Japan and the Germans: guilty lessons* (New York, Routledge, 2010); Gotelind Müller, ed., *Designing History in East Asian Textbooks: Identity politics and transnational aspirations* (London and New York, Routledge, 2011); and Gi-Wook Shin and Daniel Snieder, eds., *History Textbooks and the Wars in Asia* (New York, Routledge, 2011). There are also many research journal articles on the subject.

² See Jones, 187, note 1 in the volume under review.

the extent that “textbooks allude to what are now established tropes of the officially sanctioned narrative of the AJWR” (145).

Paul Morris and Edward Vickers examine changes in Hong Kong’s texts from 1996, the eve of its 1997 reversion to Chinese sovereignty from Great Britain, to 2009, when education ostensibly lies under local, not Beijing central government purview. The old boss is similar to the new in that post colonial officials continue, as under Great Britain’s control, to govern in tight cooperation with local economic leaders. Pre-reversion texts offered more attention to Japan’s identity as a successful modernizer, while later ones have increased coverage of militarism, aggression, and atrocities against China. Postwar Japan was added to texts in 2004. Recent treatment praises Japan’s experience of one-party governance in parallel with that of China’s Communist Party, faulting the Liberal Democratic Party’s weakening in the 1990s as well as the supposed rise of individualism in Japan. Japanese history has “been tweaked to reinforce elements of CCP orthodoxy, such as the benefits of one-party rule” (167). This makes Japan an erstwhile “normative other.” While mainland China has occupied the role of an aggressive “dominant other” in the minds of Hong Kong residents, recent texts put Japan in that role satisfying both local elites and Beijing’s central rulers.

Content was little altered in Taiwan’s textbooks for decades after World War II. Alisa Jones finds that China was long portrayed as Japan’s “normative other,” as the influence of the Tang dynasty is credited with Japan’s becoming a nation. Japan’s modernization on Western models is drawn in parallel to the earlier Chinese contributions. World War II focuses on Japanese aggression and KMT Chinese resistance. Coverage of Japanese aggression and atrocities intensified after it recognized the PRC. The change from the meaning of Taiwan as merely a temporary refuge for China’s rightful governors increased academic attention to local histories and also transformed the meaning of Japan as a colonizer of Taiwan. The colonial era let Taiwan see a period of relatively benign pre KMT development separate from the mainland “allowing Taiwan to assert

‘historical memories’ separate from...the Chinese national story” (185). School texts after the KMT lost control of the government cover Japan’s oppression and modernization of Taiwan, “free from the anger that colours Korean textbooks” (184). Texts also subtly distinguish between China and Taiwan histories, making the 1937-1945 conflict “a war between two states, neither of which is ‘us’” (185). Japan opens for Taiwan its own historical space between the former and China.

Helen Ting analyzes Malaysian official Malay language and private Chinese language textbooks. Japan’s invasion and occupation differentiated ethnic Chinese as enemies and employed ethnic Malays as proxy administrators to replace the expelled British. This history flavors current treatment of the war era. Chinese language texts call Japan’s action an invasion, while Malay teaching material uses the more neutral terms of “the coming of Japan” (197) and explains its success against British forces. Malay texts link the occupation to the emergence of nationalism, “If anything, the West emerges as a more significant ‘Other’ than Japan” (203). Both sides criticize colonialism but Chinese textbooks are clearer that Japan was the enemy, while national textbooks cast suspicion on the potential threat of domestic communists, among which ethnic Chinese were more numerous.

Officials initially deemphasized national history in Singapore out of concern that the subject would illuminate ethnic differences, but now use it to instill a national identity. Khatera Khamisi and Christine Han find increased attention to Japan’s occupation in social studies texts but decreased attention in history texts. They suggest that “Social Studies, even more than History, is seen by the curriculum development authorities as a vehicle for the official nation-building agenda” (218). Negative portrayals of Japanese soldiers increased after the government’s 1980s “Learn from Japan” campaign ended but texts included admirable characteristics, highlighting British weakness and the perceived strengths of Japan as an Asian power. Tales of multiethnic resistance were added to emphasize national unity. Content on the origins of the war with Japan has

decreased, while coverage of the experience of occupation memory increased, showing “a growing emphasis on inculcating a collective memory” (218) in which Japan plays “the roles both of enemy and model” (225).

Mark Maca and Paul Morris report that “the period of Japanese occupation has not been used to create a ‘historical narrative’ focused on constructing a unified sense of Filipino national identity” (230). It is mainly private publishers that create textbooks, under minimal governmental regulation. While Japan is described as more brutal than Spain or the United States, textbook emphasis on the Philippines’ anti colonial wars has weakened, as has content on the Japanese occupation. Postwar cooperation between Japan and the Philippines has gained ground instead. Internationalism is stressed over nationalism. Without the strong administrative institutions of a developmental state, the government lacks the power to lead the education system towards its constitutional goal of strengthening patriotism and nationalism.

In the epilogue, Guopeng Shi evaluates the Annual Seminar for History Teachers from China, Japan, and South Korea. The meeting provides a regular international forum for teachers to discuss politically divisive issues in an atmosphere of “mutual respect and open-mindedness,” (253) and motivates teacher-initiated historical research. The need for simultaneous interpretation between three languages, the domestic politics of participating teachers’ unions, and national political agendas limit its effectiveness. Participants tend to agree to condemn historical Japanese militarism, but merely “to use history as a blunt instrument” (257) for respective domestic nationalisms. The author believes that to improve mutual understanding, there is a need to turn the gaze inward on one’s own national history with as critical an eye as that cast upon the other.

There is little else one could ask of this interesting and varied collection. Indonesia is a significant omission, given its large population, Muslim majority, and experience with Japanese occupation. Another

unfortunate, but perhaps unavoidable absence is North Korea (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea). Scholars who work on the DPRK may have limited access to North Korean discourse on Japan. However, given the tense relationship between those two nations and the editors' utilitarian goals for the volume, that is, formulating understandings as the basis "to untangle image from reality, and prevent the war of minds from becoming a war of men," (23) such a study would have enhanced an already rich volume.