

The Beginning of History: Japanese and Chinese views of the World

David A. Turner

email: david.turner@southwales.ac.uk
Beijing Normal University. United Kingdom

Abstract: The teaching of history is an important way in which the older generation, who control education systems, curricula, content choice and so on, pass on to the younger generation ideas, especially the idea of nationhood, which they hope will form the basis for future national cohesion. The younger generation, however, receive these messages and interpret them through the lens of their own experiences, experiences that they do not share with the older generation. Consequently, the idea of history is re-formed and reformulated by each generation. This paper looks at the role of textbooks, principally history textbooks, in that process. The style of textbooks is to present history as uncontentious, a descriptive account of facts and events. In practice, however, textbooks can only present an arbitrary selection from history, and a crucial decision made by educators is when to start their account – the beginning of history – as this can radically affect the interpretation of events. This facsimile of neutrality stands in sharp contrast to the professional historians' hope that the teaching of history can develop a critical sense of important and contested events in history. The discussion is illustrated with examples of how history is presented in China and Japan, and how the conflicting accounts serve the interests of the policies adopted by the older generation, but may have unanticipated consequences for the younger generation.

Keywords: history; textbooks; China; Japan; generations; curriculum.

Received: 23/03/2019

Accepted: 09/06/2020

1. Introduction

This paper looks at the role of text books, principally history text books, in the process of educating young people. The style of text books is to present history as uncontentious, a descriptive account of facts and events. In practice, text books can only present an arbitrary selection from history, and a crucial decision made by educators is when to start their account – the beginning of history – as this can radically affect the interpretation of events.

Education has many facets, and cannot easily be defined in a few words. But if it has one central theme, it is the passing on of a community's culture from one

generation to the next. That is to say, it is the older generation's effort to pass on their own interpretation of the culture to the younger generation, and thereby shape the younger generation according to their own (the older generation's) purposes. The simplicity of that goal may account for the persistent popularity of the idea that education involves the «transmission» of curriculum content from teacher to pupils and students. The role of the student in that traditional model is essentially passive, a receiver of fixed views.

That traditional view of education has been disrupted somewhat by the move toward active learning, and the idea that the student reconstructs curriculum content in her own terms, and is not a mere passive receiver. But the model of transmission persists in many common expressions relating to classroom practice.

In «The Problem of Generations», Karl Mannheim (1952) does not address questions of education directly, but does examine the question of how culture is transmitted from one generation to the next. He imagines a utopia in which individuals live for ever, and in consequence there is no need for culture or traditions to be passed on from one generation to the next. In contrast with this utopian (or dystopian) vision, the world as we actually experience it involves a constant flow of generations, with older generations passing out of society as new generations join. This process provides the invaluable benefit of giving society a mechanism for forgetting old attitudes, and for facing situations with an open mind, unburdened by the weight of experience, both of which may prove more difficult for individuals than for society as a whole.

At the same time, it creates a need for mechanisms to pass on the culture of the older generation to the younger. This need is perhaps more keenly felt by the older generation than the younger, but we can hardly imagine a society in which each generation was forced to start from nothing, with no inheritance from previous generations. But this is not so much a case of the older generation consciously choosing what should be passed on; as Mannheim makes clear, by far the most important part of what is passed on is unconscious, the transmission of ideas and attitudes of which the older generation may not itself be fully aware.

However, talk of «transmission» misses the key point about intergenerational renewal. The younger generation are not passive receivers of information, knowledge or culture. They face the present problems of their own day, and can only experience their cultural heritage in the context of those contemporary problems. As Mannheim (1952, pp. 294-5) puts it: «All psychic and cultural data only really exist in so far as they are produced and reproduced in the present: hence past experience is only relevant when it exists concretely incorporated in the present».

This necessarily creates a problem for the older generation who wish, above all, to convey and perpetuate a sense of what it is like to be a member of this specific society, what it means to be «one of us», since their sense of societal cohesion is founded and based upon experiences from their past, experiences that the young generation necessarily do not share. This problem may have become especially acute in the early part of the twenty first century. It is a cliché to say that change is happening at a pace that is completely unprecedented, and yet it is nevertheless true to say that the world that schoolchildren now experience is very different from the world in which most curriculum designers grew up. Technological change and

globalisation have certainly made a great difference to the way in which generations experience the world. But there may be other, perhaps more important cultural differences that can be identified.

The generation that is now over the age of 50, and therefore in a position to be selecting the aspects of culture that are considered important to pass on, grew up, if not with direct experience of the conflict of the Second World War, at least with the very direct heritage of the generation before, with all that they had wanted to pass on in terms of ambitions and lessons for the future. Those ambitions and lessons may look very different, and perhaps seem only marginally interesting, to a generation that has grown up with global interconnectivity and a level of material security that is relatively high.

Although Mannheim argues that the conscious content of cultural transmission is relatively unimportant, when compared with the implicit and unreflective, the conscious choice of what should be passed on is important for curriculum developers. The curriculum, and text books, are the distillation of what the older generation believes the younger generation needs in order for them to fit into society. It might even be true to say that, though consciously selected, the format, one might say the genre, of the text book, is designed specifically to make the content seem uncontested, natural, and obvious. The text book presents knowledge in all spheres in such a way as to dull reflection and conceal the implicit assumptions on which its foundations are built. Whether such an attempt to smuggle unconscious assumptions into the minds of the young generation will be successful will in part depend on the gap between the experience of the old generation and the young, and how well the curriculum designers have understood that gap. With the increasing speed of change in attitudes and experience, that process may become more difficult, and text book authors and curriculum designers may become more desperate, and more vocal, in their efforts to influence the young generation.

While most text books in various subjects present the knowledge and experience of the older generation in bland terms, as though there has never been dispute, never a time when plate tectonics was regarded as heresy in geology, never a time when Darwin and Lamarck went head to head, never a time when Whistler threw a pot of paint in the face of the public, it is in history that the tendency is perhaps strongest. That is because what it means to be part of this specific society is tightly bound up in its history. Organisations and countries have «foundation myths», stories they tell themselves about who they are, what they do, and what keeps them together. But awareness of history as «myths», that level of reflection, is precisely what is to be avoided if attitudes are to be passed on effectively. School text books present an image of knowledge as settled and uncontested that detailed study of any subject shows to be untrue. While aspiring, in terms of general principle, to stimulate and develop critical thinking, and the ability to evaluate competing points of view, education systems frequently present a facsimile of consensus that actually inhibits critical understanding.

In this sense one might see the full impact of such a revolutionary inversion of the text book process, as suggested by Freinet, of having the students write and print their own text books (Legrand, 1993).

2. History and Nationalism

History is not found, ready made. It is constructed by innumerable acts of selection and inclusion, and by acts of forgetting and omission. As a consequence, history should not be seen as separate from nation building, or as accidentally linked. The specific selection that is made from history frames the way that the community views itself, and thinks of itself. History is therefore intimately engaged with nation building and of telling the story of what makes us who we are. As Hobsbawm (1992) noted:

Historians are to nationalism what poppy-growers in Pakistan are to the heroin-addicts: we supply the essential raw material for the market. Nations without a past are contradictions in terms. What makes a nation is the past, what justifies one nation against others is the past, and historians are the people who produce it. So my profession, which has always been mixed up in politics, becomes an essential component of nationalism.

So history is the primary instrument by which one generation passes on to another the older generation's conception of who the younger generation should become, who they should like, who they should hate, and how they should view their position in the world. But history is also the story that the older generation tells itself, to justify itself, and to give context to its actions. As such the telling of history shifts in order to meet current political needs. Different aspects of the past are emphasised, and others are ignored. This is taken to extremes in Orwell's (1949) novel *1984*, as it was in the totalitarian states that he parodied, but it is a feature of all nations that they tell a carefully edited version of events to frame their self-understanding.

If history is written by the victors, it is not absolutely clear whether that is because only the victors are in a position to write history and to disseminate their story, or because those who write history always choose to depict themselves as victors. There is a complex dynamic here between who writes history and how the readers of history come to view themselves, or perhaps how the readers of history wish to see themselves and how history is written.

There are many ways to tell history; through fairy tales, and moral lessons for children, through soap operas and references in popular culture, as well as the more formal tomes of professional historians. Even the countryside can be used to depict a story. A coastline marked by naval defences, or a countryside dotted with the remains of castles, speak to a different kind of history than do peaceful fishing villages or bucolic farmland. And history can change. The industrial relics of the Ironbridge Gorge in what is now green countryside in Shropshire, England, do not conjure up the heat and intensity of the industrial revolution. They call to mind an industrial past that combines power and ingenuity, cleansed of pollution, urban slums, child labour and exploitation, an industrial revolution of which the English people can be proud. This reshaping of history to tell new generations what it means to be like us, and unlike anybody else, goes on all the time. It presents a one-sided view that is typical of school history text books.

The school text book is but one way of passing on this history to the younger generation. But it is an important way, for a number of reasons. It is a very public statement of the history that is considered important, and consequently it is open for critique or acceptance. The fact that something is in school text books, therefore, gives it something of an official status of being widely accepted. And that official imprimatur may be quite literal if there is a mechanism for approving text books for use at the national or local level, in which case school text books can be seen as an expression of something like the government's view.

The other important point is that most school systems nowadays maintain it as one of their aims to stimulate critical thinking, to provide children with the skills to weigh and evaluate evidence from the vast array of information that is available, and come to sound conclusions on the basis of evidence. But while the role of the professional historian may involve sifting conflicting evidence and forming mature judgements, such activity is not much in evidence in schools anywhere, but perhaps least of all in history lessons. Unable, for the most part, to access relevant original sources, students are dependent on what they are told about history, and what is reported in history text books, for their grasp of the «facts» of history.

The result is that history becomes malleable in the hands of nationalists, with some past events being glossed over or ignored, and others shown in a chosen context. Where necessary, the significance of events may change to suit present political purposes.

The sleights of hand in shaping a particular attitude happen everywhere. The history I was taught in school ignored most of the actual experience of colonialism. Wars of conquest and acquisition were highlighted; how those colonies fared after was not the focus of attention. It was only later that I came to understand that there are more than two sides to most historical stories. But in east Asia the contest over history, especially history as it is going to be taught to the next generation is strident and unavoidable.

3. Beginning at the beginning

In telling a history, one of the key decisions that has to be made is when to begin. This will be shaped by, and shape, the history that is told. It may influence and be influenced by various current political concerns, not least specific claims over territory. The idea that such-and-such a piece of land is traditionally part of our country can be directly influenced by when the story that is being told begins.

For example, the history of the United Kingdom, as told to children in school, generally starts in 1066, the last time the islands were successfully invaded. This has the advantage that it emphasises the existence of the nation as an island apart, and takes the starting point as the time when there was first a nation that was identifiably England. Of course, the islands had a history before that, which is acknowledged in references to the Romans, and to the invaders who followed them, but this was a key turning point in the history of the nation. Telling the story this way, therefore, has advantages in stressing who «we» are as a nation. It has certain disadvantages, too, in that it does nothing for the Scots and the Welsh, who are not included in that notion of «we» until much later, to say nothing of any migrants who have come to the

islands since. The point at which history is deemed to start is intimately tied up with the story that is being told, the perspective that is being given.

The importance of the date on which Japanese history is deemed to start was borne in on me on a visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park.

A visit to Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park is a moving experience. Who can fail to be touched by the sight of a child's bicycle that has been melted and warped by the heat of an atomic explosion? But, of course, a child's bicycle is much more than just a bicycle; it is supposed to convey an emotional message of innocence lost and destroyed in the carnage of war. The story of Hiroshima is the story of horrendous inhumanity arriving, quite literally, out of the blue, the blue sky of an August morning.

It was for that reason that I hesitated to make a second visit to the Peace Memorial Park. It might, on a second visit be more apparent that one's emotions had been manipulated, more obvious that the exhibits were designed and intended to tell a particular story. On balance I would say that fear was not justified. The brute events of 6 August 1945 make an emotional response appropriate, almost inevitable. But I did become aware of something more, something else. The history that was being presented around the use of nuclear weapons itself was certainly designed to cast events in a particular light.

The displays that presented the context for the use of atomic weapons started their narrative on 7 December 1941. Clearly, I thought, the Japanese had made the mistake of learning history from the Americans, and believed that the Second World War started in 1941. This was the beginning of an extended reflection on the question of when history starts that I have continued over years. In general, the question of when history begins is a much more important and interesting question than when or whether it has ended.

The choice of 1941 as the date at which to start history underlined a very important point. The use of nuclear weapons was an event *sui generis*, quite distinct and with no precedent in history. In that sense, the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki stand outside history. Most importantly, as the authors of those displays suggest, and as I was already predisposed to believe, there could be no moral justification for the use of nuclear weapons, and particularly no attempt should be made to argue that Japan had brought this destruction on herself by her earlier actions.

As an aside, I would add that the predisposition to believe that there was no reason for using atomic weapons on Hiroshima, and most certainly not on Nagasaki, also came from a reading of history, a close reading of the negotiations for peace and the terms of a final peace treaty in July and August of 1945 (See, for example, Pape, 1993).

A slightly different perspective was provided by visiting Kure, approximately twenty kilometres south east of Hiroshima. Kure, with its extensive docks and shipping facilities and the Kure Maritime Museum, which recalled nothing so much as the Imperial War Museum in London, was clearly a major naval centre. One can hardly walk around Kure without making comparisons with Chatham or Portsmouth. It was clearly a major naval centre. Which prompts the speculation: if atomic weapons were used to cripple the Japanese Navy in west Japan, why was Kure not the target? One obvious conclusion is that Hiroshima must have been a prodigious centre of naval activity. And one comes to the conclusion that Hiroshima itself, like a

museum, can be dressed and prepared to tell a story of history. I am not arguing that it is inappropriate, given its history after 1945, that Hiroshima should be dedicated as a city of peace, or that all symbols of militarism should be removed. But the Peace Memorial Park does not tell the story of Hiroshima as it was before August 1945, any more than it captures the modern bustling city with its industry, culture and festivals. A history picks out a particular perspective and freezes it.

The idea that the Second World War was a conflict between Japan and the United States that started on 7 December 1941 is not a perspective that everybody in the region can agree to. While the Chinese and the Koreans may accept the story of Hiroshima, they wish to present it in a different context. The context is of a prolonged war and an occupation of varying degrees of savagery. The official view of the Chinese Government, pressed with increasing fervour, is that the Second World War can only be understood in relation to Japanese actions in Nanjing and Manchuria (Phillips, 2014). For the Chinese, history must start no later than 1937 and the Rape of Nanjing, or perhaps 1931 and the occupation of Manchuria, or even 1894-5, and the First Sino-Japanese War, when China lost Korea as a tributary state, the latter falling under Japanese domination.

Those who watch the disputes over text books in the region from outside should not be too complacent and see the history of east Asia as a local concern with no ramifications for the west. There is another possible reading of the history which puts these events in a yet longer context, where they are seen as having been made possible, and perhaps precipitated, by the Meiji Restoration in Japan, in 1868, which was followed by a rapid modernization of Japan, not least in her military strength. And that in turn was a response to the arrival of the US Navy's «black ships» in Tokyo Bay in 1853. In that move, the United States simultaneously forced Japan to open trade, and humiliated Japan. In another reading of history, starting at 1853, the last hundred and sixty years have been a protracted effort on the part of Japan to ensure that she should not be so humiliated again, and establish an empire that could withstand the power of the United States in the Pacific.

The Chinese generally adhere to a perspective of their history that parallels this last interpretation of Japanese history, especially in the government's official stance. (Kaufman, 2011) The Chinese official stance has been that China is emerging from a «century of humiliation», or has emerged from a «century of humiliation», which started at the beginning of the First Opium War. Like Japan later, China was confronted by superior military power and forced to open her markets and cede both territory and extra territorial rights to foreign powers in part along her coast. And, also like Japan, China saw this as the outcome of weakness in the face of western powers.

Consequently, the Chinese should well understand the position of the Japanese, as they hold a rather similar long view of history in relation to the Opium Wars. But for obvious reasons they are not likely to be sympathetic to Japan's efforts to resist American naval power, however much they have in common. What they share most clearly though, is a sense of victimhood, refreshed in the Chinese case by the Japanese occupation and in the Japanese case by the bombings that ended the Second World War. In both cases, this sense of grievance is linked to a future orientation not to allow such a thing to happen again.

East Asia is by no means the only part of the world where arguments over the best date on which to start history are the focus of attention, and intimately linked with different interpretations of events. Especially when it comes to claims in territorial disputes, when history starts is crucial in deciding historical precedent, as can be seen in the Falkland/Malvinas, in the Middle East, or in Texas.

In *The Devil's Dictionary of Education*, Tyrrell Burgess (2002) offers the definition of intelligence as the ability to keep two contradictory ideas in mind at the same time and not be paralysed. This is not to be confused with George Orwell's (1949) definition of doublethink as the power to hold two contradictory beliefs in mind and accept both of them. Intelligence of the kind Burgess advocates is dependent on a healthy scepticism about contradictory accounts, and of doubting both beliefs rather than accepting both.

4. School History Text Books

Text books are, by intention, impersonal and detached. Where, in other books, one's attention is frequently drawn to the viewpoint or perspective of the author, in text books the opposite is the case, and content is presented as though uncontentious, or settled by experts. Knowledge is decontextualized in text books, and, strangely, text books largely ignore academic conventions of citing sources and examining precedents. In the field of education, which relies less heavily on text books than do the fields of physics or engineering, we expect a scholarly study to start with a review of the literature, identifying different perspectives, examining different approaches, and expressing judgements about what has already been established, as a foundation for basing the current study. Engineering and physics students (and others) sometimes find this difficult, since the use of text books renders such discussion, exploration and evaluation redundant. Or at least, the use of text books hides any such differences of opinion.

It follows that text books are not very intelligent. They rarely suggest two contradictory points of view, or, when they do, they present two competing ideas only to dismiss one as outdated, and probably rather quaint. Rather, text books are intended, and designed, to represent knowledge as completed and settled, and the personality and opinion of the author are minimized or disregarded altogether. It is perhaps this implicit claim on the part of the text book author to have a privileged understanding of the subject that makes text books such a fertile field for contestation, especially in the field of history.

In Japan, there is not exactly an official view of history, but the Ministry of Education approves only a short list of history text books, and have offered guidance as to the content of history textbooks, and how specific aspects should be treated. Controversy has focused on the questions of whether Japan waged a war of aggression, whether some of the acts committed should be described as «atrocities», and the question of so-called «military comfort women» (Ogawa and Field, 2006). Schools are free to choose the text book that they use, but can only select from that relatively restricted list.

Since the 1960s, Saburo Ienaga, a prominent Japanese historian and the author of text books has been suing the Ministry of Education, claiming that this vetting of

school text books is unconstitutional. Although he has not prevailed, he has scored some minor victories along the way, resisting the imposition of changes of wording in his texts that would tend to minimize the representation of violence in the Japanese occupation of Korea and China in the 1930s (Masalski, 2002). The issue has been fought out in the courts on the question of whether selecting text books for approval, and requiring certain changes for approval, amount to censorship in a form that would be unconstitutional or not. Although the courts are independent, the rulings, and the actions of the Ministry of Education, have been influenced by the broader political trends in the country, with the socialist parties more likely to express regret over the war, and the conservative parties more likely to take a more revisionist stance.

This attempt to extend an understanding of the history of Japan back into the pre-war period has been accompanied by an oppositional movement headed by the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, an ultra-conservative grouping, that, while happy to see history extended back before 1939 also wanted to see the history sanitized to project an image of Japan that the youth of Japan can be proud of. And that means whitewashing out many of the inconvenient truths, and claiming that reports of Japanese aggression and violence have been fabricated by unfriendly neighbours in the region.

These are clearly issues that stir up heated emotions. Although the new history book produced by the Japanese Society for Textbook Reform came to be used in only a tiny proportion of schools (Saaler, 2005), its publication provoked responses at governmental level in both China and the Republic of Korea, as well as popular protests. At the same time, the low take-up suggests that the majority of people in Japan, or at least the majority of history teachers, do not approve of a revision of Japanese history.

In contrast with the level of public debate that has occurred in Japan, the Chinese Government has been more controlling of both the content of history books and the level of debate that is possible, as Shi (2013) makes clear in his account of the trilateral Annual Seminar for History Teachers from China, Japan and South Korea. Chinese participants were encouraged to see themselves as envoys on behalf of their country, presenting a united position in the face of the world. In addition, when China was the host of the Annual Seminar, the titles selected included slogans that reflected the priorities of the Government, rather than of the history teachers working in the classroom.

From this it can be seen that not all responses are emotional, and the response of the Chinese Government may have been designed to meet its own political purposes. Recently, the Chinese Government has announced that it intends to treat 1931 as the start of the Sino-Japanese War (Cain, 2017). Previously, the start of the war had been considered to be 1937, in China as it is by historians in other parts of the world.

When politicians are engaged in the discussion of school text books, they are addressing a domestic audience as well as an international one. And the starting of the Sino-Japanese War in 1931 has a very specific domestic purpose, quite apart from the likely international response it will provoke. 1937 is normally considered to be the date of the start of the war, and coincides with the Communist Party and

the Kuomintang (the Nationalist Government) coming together to join forces against the Japanese occupation. Consequently, the actions of the Communist Party and of the Kuomintang cannot easily be separated in the period normally considered to be the war. By going back before 1937, the independent actions of the communists against Japan can be singled out for comment, although Cain quotes a historian who specialises in the period as saying that the efforts of the communists against the Japanese were much less significant than those of the Kuomintang.

However, this example highlights the importance that can be attached to the date on which one starts one's historical account, as it makes it possible to interpret events in a different way, and support a specific political perspective. With current disputes between China, Japan and Korea in the South China Sea and East China Sea it is hardly surprising that all sides should try to use history to their advantage.

5. Popular Culture

The debates about school text books in the region have been heated and vocal, and are likely to be so, or become even more heated, as they ignite broader interest. The boundaries between what is learned in school and popular culture more generally are not hard and fast, and what is widely known often has a foundation in school, even if it is wrong.

The Chinese, for example, know that China has 5,000 years of history, even while commemorating the first Qin Emperor, generally seen as the founder of Imperial China, as having lived in the fourth century BC. Even then, what counts as China is unclear, with the official media of China maintaining both that China is a peaceful country that has never invaded another country, and that China is now bigger than at any time in history. A certain vagueness may be useful to propagandists who wish to advance a particular line, but it is also part of the philosophical approach in east Asia which contrasts strongly with notions of a nation state developed in Europe. Whereas, in the latter case, competing nation states struggled to define fixed and lasting boundaries between them, China at the centre of a more fluid arrangement, with vassal states which might from time to time come under central control, has no such sharp boundary.

In the Chinese popular imagination, China is the senior partner in international relationships in Asia, although that imagination was sharply inverted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when Japan's rapid industrialisation and modernisation showed a potential way of competing with Europe. At that time, and in some aspects since, Japan has been a model for national modernisation, a «normative other» as Morris et al. (2013) describe it. And one can see some of this ambivalence toward Japan also in the attitude of young people who, now that the Chinese have more opportunities to travel, enjoy visiting Japan, and like some of what it has to offer.

Yu (2014) notes that there has been a recent upsurge in popular historical literature in China that presents this populist nationalism. This literature, widely circulated by social media, presents a picture of China's past in which a benevolent Chinese regime shared the fruits of her knowledge with grateful neighbours, who were happy to pay tribute to China in return. These historical fictions sometimes

masquerade as genuine historical research, presenting a simulacrum of references and footnotes to give the appearance of scholarship.

More worrying, the official history of China seems to be adapting by moving toward this nationalist vision. As Morris et al. (2013) note, popular culture has sometimes led official rhetoric, and the relationship between the official view and the popular understanding is a complex one. The Communist Party of China has previously insisted on marking a sharp breach in history in 1949, and under Mao Zedong sought to root out the traditional culture. Today the Party is more inclined to see continuities, using the name of Confucius, and even references to Confucius' philosophy, to promote social harmony and balance.

In Chinese popular culture, the central ideas that China has 5,000 years of history and has enjoyed benevolent relationships with the surrounding nations, raises in the Chinese a sense of entitlement, the idea that the world owes them something for all this bounty. And it seems that the distance between this populist nationalist view and the official view is narrowing, as official rhetoric becomes more emphatic that China is recovering its proper place in the world rather than doing something new.

Hashimoto (1998) contrasts the experience of Germany and Japan, and their reactions to the Second World War in the post-war period. She argues that for Germany the project of moral recovery after the war involved introspection, and reflection on what had gone before, in a process analogous to taking personal responsibility for wrong-doing. However, as she notes, «The notion that the unexamined life is not worth living is a Western construct; as such, it carries no cultural legitimacy in Japan, or, for that matter, in many other parts of the world». Her thesis is that rather than ruminate on the past in a way that was seen as fundamentally pointless, Japan chose to seek moral recovery through a concentration on the future, and a promise to embrace peace in the future. And, certainly, this is an interesting sidelight on the prominence of the rhetoric of peace in the official statements of both China and Japan.

At the same time as China starts to embrace its history, albeit in a specific form, Japan seems set to ignore hers. Controversy seems to have lessened the time devoted to recent Japanese history with many controversial issues being relegated to a footnote in a text book, on a page that may not be reached anyway if the curriculum is not covered in its entirety. In addition, one of the questions that has angered Japan's neighbours is that some school text books have put myths about Japan's pre-history on a par with more fully recorded history. Japan's history in popular culture may also become detached from sound scholarship.

However, popular culture is more difficult to fathom than the content of textbooks, partly because there is no definitive source, but mainly because it is the less tangible, unconscious, ideas and attitudes that are received by the younger generation, but not necessarily given by the older.

6. Conclusion

The point here is not that one party or another «distorts» history. To claim that a version of history is distorted would require that the commentator has access to

an undistorted history. Insofar as all history is a selection from an infinite range of possible material, no history can claim to be undistorted. That does not mean that all history is created equal and that we should not form judgements as to whether the selection misses anything crucial, or is shaped with a purpose that is not explicitly acknowledged by the historian. Nor does it mean that histories should not be supported by evidence, or that a failure to reflect the known available evidence is acceptable.

Vygotsky drew a distinction between signals and signs; signals merely indicate, while signs signify and carry meaning (Rieber, 1997). So, a signal might be purely mechanical, or involve a physical connection, as when lightening signals a thunderstorm. But a sign is consciously attached to an event and is used to exercise some control over the event to which it is attached. In that sense a sign is an exclusively human device, whereas signals might be involved in unthinking responses to stimuli. We might deduce here that the older generation views history as a signal, to be passed without reflection onto the younger generation, as a way of indicating the coherence of the social group, in this case of the nation. But once people have developed the use of signs, the higher mental function, they cannot again revert to using mere signals, and the connection between stimulus and action must pass through the crucible of reflection.

Put another way, the curriculum designers may see the transmission of historical knowledge as a process of training, where a view of the nation can be created in the younger generation. Increasingly in the twenty first century, the younger generation have other sources of information than school, and will be bound to interpret what they «receive» in school alongside messages and interpretations that come from the Internet, from news media, from novels and films, and from direct personal contact with people from different cultures. It may never have been the case that pupils and students could be relied upon to accept curriculum content unthinkingly, but the proliferation of new sources of information makes such a view of the teaching process increasingly untenable.

Not all the older generation will hope to pass a specific interpretation of history on to the younger generation. As Shi (2013) makes clear, even in a nation where there is an official view of history, history teachers may have a professional engagement with instilling a critical engagement with the sign of history in the younger generation, and not merely the signal of history. And as Mannheim noted, this production and reproduction in the present depends not only on what is passed on, but also on the present day situation and experiences of the younger generation.

These are judgements that every informed citizen needs to be able arrive at himself or herself. Schools should be preparing pupils to understand that history is an arena of contest, and to give them the necessary tools to examine the case being presented and to form an opinion. The school text book, with its implicit claim to present an authoritative and unbiased version, is singularly poorly suited to prepare young people to take a dispassionate, and as Burgess would say, intelligent, view of their own history.

In the present day and age travel is increasingly likely, and travel increases the likelihood that one will meet people who have a different interpretation of history than one's own. In a world that we like to think of as increasingly globalised, that first

encounter with a different perspective may well be challenging, but it should not be a shock or a surprise. The next generation deserve something better than either a doctrinaire history built for short-term political gain, or silence.

Exactly what will be the outcome of this complex process will remain unclear until the younger generation come into their full power, and can define for themselves how their history affects the school curriculum, popular culture, foreign policy and much else besides. But it is unlikely to be exactly what the older generation hopes for. Hashimoto (1998) cites a survey of young Japanese people, the grandchildren of the war generation, and notes with some surprise that, «When questioned in youth surveys about their willingness to fight if Japan were to become directly involved in a war, this generation has astounded many observers by declaring that it mostly wants to “run away or hide”». To the extent that the older generation may have hoped that the strategic goal of moral recovery would make it possible for the younger generation to take pride in their nation again, this may be a disturbing result, although it may well align more closely with the tactical choice of ignoring the past and placing emphasis upon a peaceful future.

At the same time, Chinese young people seem to be more detached from politics and more involved with consumerism – a generation that has «never had it so good», at least as far as it is viewed by the older generation. How these diverse influences will bring about a new perspective on history in east Asia will only be known in the future, when it will itself be history. In the meantime, the older generation will continue to promote an interpretation of history that serves the purposes of their current national policies. The younger generation may well interpret the history they receive in ways that the older generation do not, and cannot, anticipate, with unexpected and unintended consequences for how the younger generation come to see the world.

7. References

- Burgess, T. (2002) *The Devil's Dictionary of Education*. London: Continuum.
- Cain, S. (2017). China rewrites history books to extend Sino-Japanese war by six years. *The Guardian*, 13 January 2017. Extracted the 7 of november, 2017 from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jan/13/china-rewrites-history-books-to-extend-sino-japanese-war-by-six-years> accessed
- Hashimoto, A. (1998). Japanese and German Projects of Moral Recovery: Toward a new understanding of war memories in defeated nations, paper presented at *The Japan Forum at the Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies*, Harvard. Extracted the 29 of april, 2019 from <https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~rijs/pdfs/hashimoto.pdf>
- Hobsbawm, E. J. (1992). Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today. *Anthropology Today* 8(1), 3-8.
- Kaufman, A. (2011). The «Century of Humiliation» and China's National Narratives. Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission

- Hearing on China's Narratives Regarding National Security Policy. Extracted the 28 of April, 2019 from <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/3.10.11Kaufman.pdf>
- Legrand, L. (1993). Célestin Freinet. *Prospects: the quarterly review of comparative education*, XXIII(1/2), 403-418.
- Mannheim, K. (1952). The Problem of Generations. In Mannheim, K., *Essays* (pp. 276-322). London: Routledge.
- Masalski, K. W. (2002). *History Textbook Controversies in Japan in ERIC Digest*. Bloomington IN: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education. Extracted the 2 of November, 2017 from <https://www.ericdigests.org/2003-1/japan.htm>
- Morris, P., Shimazu, N., & Vickers, E. (2013). *Imagining Japan in Post-War East Asia*. London: Routledge.
- Ogawa, M., & Field, S. L. (2006). Causation, Controversy and Contrition: Recent developments in the Japanese history textbook content and selection process. In Nicholls, J., *School History Textbooks across Cultures: International debates and perspectives*. Oxford: Symposium.
- Oi, M. (2103). What Japanese history lessons leave out. London: BBC News. Extracted the 7 of November, 2017 from <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-21226068>
- Orwell, G. (1949). *1984*. London: Martin Secker and Warburg.
- Pape, R.A. (1993) Why Japan Surrendered. *International Security*, 18(2), 154-201.
- Phillips, T. (2014). China steps up propaganda war on Japan. *The Telegraph*, 26 February 2014. Extracted the 2 of November, 2017 from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/10662966/China-steps-up-propaganda-war-on-Japan.html>
- Rieber, R. W. (Ed.) (1997). *The Collected Works of L.S.Vygotsky, Volume 4: The History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions*. New York: Plenum Press (Translated by Marie J.Hall).
- Saaler, S. (2005). *Politics, Memory and Public Opinion: The History Textbook Controversy and Japanese Society*. Munich: Ludicium.
- Shi, G. (2013). Some reflections on the Annual Seminar for History Teachers from China, Japan and South Korea. In Morris, P., Shimazu, N., & Vickers, E., *Imagining Japan in Post-War East Asia*, (pp.249-258). London: Routledge
- Yu, H. (2014). Glorious Memories of Imperial China and the Rise of Chinese Populist Nationalism. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 23(90), 1174-1187.