

American Historians and Japanese Textbooks

Jim Matson

The 2000 and 2001 Pulitzer Prizes were won by American historians of modern Japan. This is the first time that any books on Japan have been so honored. John Dower's *Embracing Defeat* and Herbert Bix's *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* present new perspectives on the institutional dynamics and popular culture of mid-twentieth century Japan. Their work poses a significant challenge to the controversial *New History Textbook* published by Fusosha.

This lecture examines the contributions of these two prize-winning histories and poses the more general question about the role of international scholars in the kind of history incorporated into the Japanese school curriculum.

It is a pleasure to speak with my friends and colleagues at ICU on the topic of "American Historians and Japanese Textbooks." My talk will focus on the work of two American historians of modern Japan – John Dower and Herbert Bix – who have had the singular honor of winning, in 2000 and 2001, the Pulitzer Prize for non-fiction books. For those of you who may be unfamiliar with the Pulitzer Prize, this is the most prestigious award for an American book, named in honor of Joseph Pulitzer, a 19th century newspaper publisher who pioneered high standards of journalistic accuracy and integrity. This afternoon I will discuss some of the most important features of these two fine histories, to provide you with a sense of why these scholarly studies of mid-twentieth century Japan were judged to be so significant in America and, I hope, to encourage you to read them for yourselves. Both are selling well in Japan in paperback editions; however, since John Dower's book weighs in at a sumo-like 700 pages, you may prefer the two-volume Japanese translation from Iwanami that is already available; the translation of Herbert Bix's yokozuna-sized 800-plus page biography will be published this summer (2002) by Kodansha.

One reason why I think these books deserve to be read is that the material they present poses a significant challenge to the controversial New History Textbook (*Atarashii rekishi kyokasho*) for middle school students published recently by Fusosha, and certified by the Ministry of Education. The efforts to revise what history gets taught in Japanese schools merit more extended scrutiny than I can offer today, but I will try to identify the most crucial issues at hand and highlight several areas where these prize-winning works by American historians make major contributions to this debate. I will conclude with some thoughts about the role of international scholars in the kinds of history incorporated into the Japanese school curriculum.

Let me begin with a note of incredulity. It is remarkable – and quite fantastic – that

the work of these two senior scholars of modern Japan should receive such an honor as the Pulitzer Prize. It is so remarkable, in part, since both Professor Dower and Professor Bix have consistently criticized the “establishment” in the field of Japanese studies and, more generally, of the ways in which the American government has exercised power in Asia. These views continue to be well reflected in their prize-winning works. Both authors have long been associated with the editorial board of the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* – as have I – and continue to serve with me on the advisory board of the journal *Critical Asian Scholars*. So I am speaking with a certain vicarious pleasure, thoroughly enjoying their much deserved honors, if still somewhat mystified at how these long-time outsiders should be welcomed, outspoken criticism and all, into the honor roll of the American media’s elite. However, if you harbor hopes that these fine scholarly studies suggest a new level of sophistication in the American perception Japan, don’t hold your breath.

Although both Professor Dower and Professor Bix were published by major commercial publishing houses and, by academic standards, have sold very well, popular perceptions of Japan continue to be formed predominantly by films and television. Moreover, even in the print media, a novel like Arthur Golden’s *Memoirs of a Geisha* far over-shadows their impact. Golden’s fictional account of the life-time travails of a geisha in the Gyon district of Kyoto, including an elaborate descriptions of her training, rivalries and, of course, her deflowering, has sold, as of a year ago, 40 million copies in English, and has been translated into 32 languages. By my rough guesstimate, this is more than the total for all scholarly English-language works on Japan, ever, combined. If you had any doubts, as Golden’s *Memoirs* have proven, Japan, as exotic and erotic, still sells in America and around the world.

There have been many serious, scholarly studies of Japan over the past fifty-some years that have captured America’s attention, and one can trace not only changes within Japan, but the changing preoccupations of America through these works. Ruth Benedict’s wartime study, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, borrowed the “patterns of culture” approach from her field of anthropology to assume that, like a small village, Japanese society was composed of a homogeneous individuals who shared the same set of values – completely different from America, but thoroughly understandable. By the early 60s, the modernization school of John Whitney Hall, or even Edwin Reischauer, heralded Japan as a successful case of evolutionary transformation, as a Cold War anti-communist model. By the late 70s, Ezra Vogel was celebrating *Japan as Number One*, championing Japan’s managerial practices, industrial relations, and education system as models that could transferred and transplanted to an America in decline. Japan as an economic superpower had, by the 80s, provoked many critical appraisals of what lay behind trade frictions; Chalmers Johnson’s study of *MITI and the Japanese Miracle* focused on the vested interests of bureaucrats, businessmen and politicians that promoted adversarial trade and lacked accountability. Other books, such as Karel van Wolferen’s *The Enigma of Japanese Power*, were far more sweeping in their condemnation of one-party rule, structural corruption, manipulated law, submissive media, conformist education, and so on, that had no possibility of change. But Japan continues to change, and not just in hair color.

By the late nineties, Japan’s unstoppable economic juggernaut had run out of steam.

Japan was dismissed as having caught what was once called the “British disease” – not mad cow, but stagnant industry, over-priced assets, increasing doubts about the educational system, crime and cohesion in general. Especially after the Asian financial crisis of '97 placed ever more doubts about the intervention of government bureaucracies in industry and commerce, the Japanese model lost its allure for other nations. The continued inability to address non-performing loans in the banking sector and the reliance on massive deficit financing, particularly for public works that appear mired in collusive deals between contractors, politicians and bureaucrats, is not inspiring. Doubts about the durability of the so-called Japanese system – for example, lifetime employment and promotion by seniority – have coincided with a realization that even in their heyday, they applied to only a minority. Recent sociological works on Japan have emphasized diversity, with several characterizing Japan as a multicultural society.

So why should two serious, wrist-racking histories capture the attention of the Pulitzer Prize board? Why now? Why should they win, in successive years, the accolade of the best non-fiction books published in America?

One reason is certainly that they deal with that part of the Japanese past that is, still, of most interest to America – the dynamics that led to the Pacific War and the consequences of the Occupation. The history, if you will, where “we” (as Americans) are in it. But surely there is also another element that makes these works so significant in the eyes of the American establishment. Both draw overwhelmingly from Japanese sources, and exhibit the best characteristics of engaged scholarship, addressing important issues and making accessible, for today’s audience, the nature of personalities and politics at a time that profoundly shaped the course of postwar US-Japan relations. Perhaps more importantly, both draw on post-Cold War and post-Showa sources that help them build a densely textured, persuasive argument that significantly overturns the orthodox historical account of how and why the US forces of the occupation acted, and with what effect. These new histories cast familiar depictions of the Emperor in a new light, and help bring to light the experiences of ordinary Japanese citizens. This attention to the details and nuances Japanese experiences marks a departure from most American accounts that focused on the actions of occupation personnel. The dynamics of this period are worth remembering, revisiting, and reevaluating because they had such a profound influence on the last fifty-plus years of East Asian history, and continue to affect many important issues that confront Japan today: war guilt and responsibility, remilitarization, national identity, and democracy.

Let me begin then, to sketch out some of the most significant findings of these two histories and to tell you a little bit about the individuals who wrote them. These authors share much in common: both were born in 1938, attended college in Amherst Massachusetts (Bix at the public University, Dower at the elite small private college); both have Harvard Ph.D.s, and write on similar periods of modern Japanese history; both men have graying, receding hair, glasses and a great debt to their Japanese wives who were heavily involved in these studies, as both authors acknowledge. Dower and Bix came of age, intellectually, in the context of the Vietnam War, and sought to express, through their scholarship, their antipathy toward the gross exercise of state power and

their empathy for ordinary people who bore the enormous costs of imperialism, racism and war. Both men also have shown a keen appreciation for the individual lives of leaders, and the ways that personal biographies intersect with larger forces and structures. Historical figures are portrayed sympathetically, as real people making difficult choices, and if the judgments these historians offer are highly critical, they are always complex and carefully rendered.

Bix

Allow me to begin with the most recent Pulitzer winner, Herbert Bix. He was born into a working class family in Winthrop, Massachusetts, close to Boston. By his own account, there were no books in his house growing up; if he wanted to read, he went to the public library. After graduating from the public University of Massachusetts, he did a stint in the Naval Reserve that took him for the first time to Japan. He entered Harvard and became engaged in the anti-Vietnam War movement, and active in the Committee for Concerned Asian Scholars which, in the late 1960s, sought to challenge the complicity of academics in the misuse of American power abroad.

In some ways, his selection for the Pulitzer was more surprising since he has been much more of an outsider his entire career. He was previously best known for his monograph on peasant rebellions in early modern Japan, but his academic career was highly nomadic. Over thirty years, he taught for a number of major universities, such as Hosei and Hitotsubashi, Sheffield (UK), the University of Washington and Harvard – in addition to several smaller and less prestigious institutions – but these appointments were all short-lived. He joined my alma mater, the State University of New York at Binghamton as a tenured senior professor just prior to the publication of his biography of Hirohito. His hiring was facilitated by an argument, made by a member of the search committee, that his forthcoming book would be the most important study published in Japanese studies in thirty years. But no one, not even his supporters, imagined it could win a Pulitzer.

“Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan” took Bix ten years to complete. It benefited from the post-Showa release of documents from the archives, notably the Emperor’s “Monologue” that had been prepared for Occupation authorities in March and April 1946 and released only after his death, as well as its English summary that was only available in 1997. There were, in addition, a series of post-Showa diaries of many top aides and inner circle members [Makino Nobuaki (’90), Kawai Yahachi (’93-4), Irie Sukemasa(’90-1), + 7 volumes of Prince Takamatsu’s diary] that were published in the early 90s. But perhaps the general shift in attitudes in Japan played the most important role in allowing Bix not only documents, but on-going dialogue that scrutinized, from many points of view, the nature of man and the exercise of his office.

Bix portrays the pre-1946 Hirohito as a nervous, reticent, privately wary, lonely individual, someone thoroughly isolated from the Japanese people, despite becoming the center of fanatical national worship. Hirohito considered himself responsible to a long line of divine ancestors, and was “single-minded [in his] dedication to preserving his position, no matter what the cost to others.” While he expressed condescension

about his subjects – the Japanese people were childlike, and unable to make their own decisions – he also thought of them as a spiritually superior race. Hirohito diligently carried out the job he was trained from childhood to do: to serve as the head of the empire (*genshu*), supreme commander (*daigensui*) of the armed forces and the center of the national polity (*kokutai*). Although he projected the image of a passive monarch, Hirohito participated, directly and decisively, as an independent force in policy making.

So the first significant revision offered in Bix's biography of the Showa emperor is to correct the common mischaracterization of him as a monarch who reigned, but did not rule, as an impotent figurehead, a puppet of the military. As Bix shows in exhaustive detail, Hirohito was at the center of political and military decisions of the Japanese state and, especially from late 1937, acted as a real war leader. This assessment of the emperor's role has many important implications, especially in considering responsibility for the staggering loss of life in Japan's 15-year war, when over 3 million Japanese and some 20 million other Asians were killed.

The Meiji Constitution provided the framework of Hirohito's power. But he was not, in the ordinary sense, a constitutional monarch. His power and authority stemmed from the religious-cum-political ideology of the Emperor system, a late 19th century construct that was only fully realized under Hirohito's early reign. His interests, equated with those of the Japanese state, were perceived as divinely ordained, and justified the brutal suppression of domestic political dissidents and the aggressive expansion of the empire. As Bix notes, there is a striking parallel between the mystique of the Emperor system and the American idea of manifest destiny, which "also served to justify expansionism – and the obliteration of those, such as native Americans, who got in the way. In both cases, claims of a larger moral mission served to marginalize political opponents and blunt moral challenges."

Bix also sheds important new light on Hirohito's role in the ending of World War II and on the use of the atomic bomb. Bix shows that Hirohito had many opportunities to end the war from February 1945 on. He argues that the emperor consciously chose to delay Japan's inevitable surrender because he was desperately trying to devise an "exit strategy" that would shift blame for defeat away from the throne and thereby preserve his own prerogatives and the "imperial way."

Hirohito clung irrationally and foolishly to the hope that somehow the Soviet Union might be persuaded to help Japan achieve a negotiated settlement that would maintain the position of the emperor. He and the government leadership were "looking for a way to lose the war that would enable them to stay in power with the aid of a politically empowered monarch in the post-surrender period." [Kathleen Krauth's interview, EAA Winter 2001, 6(3):12]

Given that Hirohito had choices open to him – and given that his main concern was with his own position – Bix sees Hirohito as "mainly" responsible for the lives lost in the indiscriminate bombing of civilians in major Japanese cities, including Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Quite simply, he could have and should have chosen to end the war earlier.

There are two other significant revisions to the orthodox history in Bix's book that I would like to briefly note. Bix details the conscious and deliberate campaign by Gen.

Douglas MacArthur and a few of his top aides, such as Bonner Fellers, to shelter the emperor from any responsibility for the conduct of the war. Much of this is already well known. Many of you may be familiar with the story of how, at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (better known as the Tokyo War Crimes Trial), even the prosecution was scrupulous at ensuring that no testimony be admitted to suggest that the Emperor was in any way involved in the conduct of the war. Where Bix makes a major contribution is in elaborating the complex orchestration of testimony from the Japanese side.

In Bix's view, dismissal of the trial as "victors justice" is simplistic and misleading. Bix would characterize it as a joint – Japanese-American – political trial where the Emperor and those closest to him operated behind the scenes to select and influence the testimony of those persons charged with war crimes. "Palace aides and Foreign Ministry officials instructed the Class A suspects in Sugamo Prison on what to say," and cultivated relations with the lawyers on both the prosecution and the defense side. In this, Hirohito proved adept at the give-and-take of politics with the Americans. For Bix, in the complex postwar political undertaking of protecting the emperor and remaking his image, "Hirohito never lost sight of his larger aims, which were to stave off domestic and foreign pressures for his abdication, to preserve the monarchy, and thus maintain a realm of stability and a principle of legitimacy in Japanese political life."

A final point from Bix that I would emphasize is that even as a postwar "symbol" of national unity, Hirohito continued to act as a restraint on democratic trends. In his New Year 1946 Rescript to Promote National Destiny, popularly known as the Declaration of Humanity, he emphasized political continuity, asserting that Japan's democracy derived from the five articles of Emperor Meiji's Charter Oath. MacArthur, and even the New York Times, celebrated this declaration as a radical departure from the past, and as the promise for a more progressive, democratic future. But as Bix shows, this was not the Emperor's intention. Subsequently, both GHQ's official history of the occupation and the account by Yoshida Shigeru would claim that the draft of the new constitution was accepted by the Japanese government only after the enthusiastic support of the Emperor. However, Bix, citing Japanese historians, demonstrates that these assertions were based on fabrications.

Hirohito did finally assent to the constitutional reform, but in Bix's view, "after clinging tenaciously to the *kokutai* longer than anyone else, he finally acted from fear... [especially] fear that with prolonged public discussion of his hesitancy would come an uncontrollable debate on republicanism, which would end in the monarchy itself being eliminated. Thereafter, for the rest of his life, he continued at odds with his symbolic status, psychologically unable to adjust to it" (575).

Hirohito, like most of Japan's postwar political elites, was opposed to the principles of the new constitution (which, after all, had been forced on them), especially "the notion of the demilitarized state and the principle of the separation of politics and religion." This, despite the ample evidence that these principles were "in conformity with the wishes and aspirations of most Japanese." After the return to independence, the emperor served as a symbol as much for containing dissent as for national unity. He played a central role in the conservative politicians' program for the remembrance of war dead and bereaved families, depicting their sacrifice as the basis for future

economic prosperity. The Emperor also remained preoccupied with geopolitical issues, and sought to operate, behind the scenes, against the Soviet Union and to cultivate strong ties to the United States. When Hirohito died, Prime Minister Takeshita's official eulogy reiterated the two central myths of his reign: that "the great Emperor" had "always been a pacifist and constitutional monarch." This myth obscures understanding the major political and military events in 20th century Japanese history.

Dower

John Dower was also born in New England, in Providence, Rhode Island. His first encounter with Japan was not, like Bix, from the deck of a navy ship, but as a summer exchange student in the late 50s. What attracted Dower to Japan was the aesthetics. He would develop a fine eye and critical appreciation for Japanese aesthetic sensibilities, as evidenced in an early book on Japanese *mon* design, as well as in subsequent books on Japanese photography and the Hiroshima mural artists Iri and Toshi Maruki. Dower also served as executive producer of a 1986 documentary on the Maruki's work "Hellfire: a Journey from Hiroshima" which was nominated for an Academy Award.

After college, Dower had taken some years off and, initially, planned to return to graduate study in literature. But then he became active in organizing campus anti-war groups, and in making connections between the exercise of American power in Japan with the catastrophic destruction in Vietnam. As a graduate student, he wrote an exceptionally fine introduction to E.H. Norman's 1940 study *Japan's Emergence as a Modern State*, that had been reissued by Pantheon Press. [EH Norman, for those who may not know, was the son of Canadian missionaries to Japan, and who, even though a high-ranking Canadian diplomat, was hounded to his death in the early-50s by the McCarthyite tactics of the US House Unamerican Affairs Committee.] Dower's introduction to Norman's book served for a generation as the best survey of American influence on the way Japanese history was studied and taught.

In contrast to Bix, John Dower is someone you might expect to win a Pulitzer Prize (although, of course, he was the first in Japanese Studies to do so). His career has moved along the main tracks of academia, beginning in 1971 at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and then accepting a succession of endowed chairs, in 1986 at the University of California at San Diego and from 1991 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His first major book, "Empire and Aftermath" (1979) was a definitive political biography of Yoshida Shigeru. That study mapped out, through the complex course of Yoshida's life, the principal tensions in Japanese politics, domestic and international, as the state careened into war, and after. Dower's subsequent 1986 study, "War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War" contrasted the use of race and racism by the US and Japan in the Pacific War. This was a powerful and disturbing book on a controversial topic, but received much critical acclaim, including a National Book Critics Circle Award.

If Bix's book on Hirohito took a decade to complete, Dower's book, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, took nearly twice as long. It was begun in 1980, although with several intervening books and projects, before its final publication in 1999. *Embracing Defeat* swept the major awards, not only winning the Pulitzer, but also the (publishing industry's) National Book Award and (Columbia University's) Bancroft

Prize.

This is a work of “history from below,” and its greatest strength is in conveying the complex range of social and cultural responses to defeat – and to liberation from war and wartime regimentation – recovering the voices of people at all levels of society. Dower uses an incredible diversity of materials to capture the contradictory reactions of Japanese to the first two years of the Occupation: exhaustion, despair and guilt, but also revolutionary visions, comic insouciance and philosophical stock-taking. He also places them against the background of the hybrid legacies of the American Occupation: self-righteously reformist and consciously obstructionist; unleashing democratic impulses and fortifying autocratic conservatism.

Dower begins with a powerful account of the anguish of physically and materially ‘shattered lives.’ The shock, devastation and exhaustion are unremittingly chronicled. The depth of loss and confusion which the Japanese people experienced is vividly portrayed, notably in Dower’s accounts of the huge scale of social displacement and missing persons, and the long drawn out period of food shortages.

Against this background of economic and social misery, however, Dower is also concerned to locate the transformative effects of defeat. Even in despair, people were reshaping their future identity and discovering new aspirations. Dower presents the diverse and spirited dynamism of the Japanese response to defeat, a “popular consciousness” that was untidy, but also energetic and often emancipating.

Dower’s treatment of the Occupation’s rehabilitation of the emperor, new constitution and war crimes trials are informative in large measure because he doesn’t focus solely on the occupiers, but on how Japanese sought to engage and define these issues. He does not pursue indictments, in the way that Bix does relentlessly against the Emperor, but seeks to contextualize the complex postures and pronouncements of many actors, from the Imperial household and the motley assortment of pretenders to the Chrysanthemum throne to new religions and their followers. However, Dower does provide very fine discussions of many particulars in these events, and is not shy in reaching judgments.

A favorite section of mine reviews the Emperor’s so-called renunciation of divinity, New Years Day, 1946. The language of the drafts of this rescript, composed, initially, by a mid-level American officer (Lieutenant Colonel Harold Henderson) and an expatriate British aesthete (Reginald Blyth) was revised at the last minute. The unambiguous draft declaration denying that either the emperor or the Japanese were “descendents of the gods” (*kami no shison; kami no sue*) was intolerable to Kinoshita Michio, the emperor’s vice chamberlain. Instead, he substituted the term “manifest deity” (*akitsumikami*, kami in human form; three characters meaning, literally, visible exalted diety) to “cut smoke with scissors.” The term was obscure enough that, as Kinoshita noted in his diary, Foreign Minister Yoshida didn’t know what it meant (he was dismissed as an idiot) and when the rescript was presented to the cabinet, furigana was written alongside the characters so that the ministers would be able to grasp the reference. “In Japanese, the ‘renunciation of divinity’ was far more obscure than was apparent in the official translation or that appeared in the earlier drafts.” Hirohito never repudiated his mythological genealogy.

Dower finds considerable continuity in the autocratic and militaristic exercise of

authority by MacArthur, not to mention high-handed censorship and rigidly hierarchical commandism. The occupation authorities also continued and even exacerbated bureaucratic intervention in the economy and financial concentration that had begun under wartime mobilization.

What strikes this reader is the sympathy he is able to convey for those in the midst of traumatic change, remaking their world. As Dower notes, the ease with which the majority of Japanese were able to throw off a decade and a half of the most intense militaristic indoctrination suggests the inherent limits of socialization and fragility of all ideologies, however pervasive they may seem. Similarly, the continued reliance in everyday language on catchphrases used during the war for new goals of democracy and peace suggests the importance of finding something familiar to hold on to avoid psychological disorientation. For example, terms like construction and culture used in wartime slogans of “Construct a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere,” “Master the Yamato Heart for Construction,” or “Imperial Culture Is the Light of Asia,” elided into “Construct a Nation of Culture” (*Bunka Kokka Kensetsu*). For Dower, the contradictory impulses of abrupt change and dogged continuity are means to illustrate fundamental human dilemmas, not as something unique to Japan.

Dower’s ultimate objective is to describe how, “despite the ultimate emergence of a conservative postwar state, the ideals of peace and democracy took root in Japan – not as borrowed ideology or imposed vision, but as lived experience and a seized opportunity. They found expression through a great and often discordant diversity of voices” (23). Dower believes that the history of the immediate postwar “popular consciousness” remains important today. “Japanese neonationalists depict the period of defeat and occupation as an overwhelmingly humiliating epoch when genuinely free choice was repressed and alien models were imposed.” But for Dower, what matters is what the Japanese themselves made of their experience, an experience that affirmed the ideals of “peace and democracy.” “No matter how affluent the Japan later became,” Dower writes, “these remained the touchstone years for thinking about national identity and personal values.” (25)

Textbooks

So what do these two Pulitzer Prize winning histories have to offer to the current debate about what kind of history is taught in Japanese schools?

As the father of a middle school student, I would like to begin with what my daughter would call a “reality check.” In fact, it is a decade-old yarn of the classroom, from T.R. Reid, when he was the Washington Post’s Tokyo bureau chief. Reid liked to tell the story of a Japanese TV film crew visiting a high school history class. Recall that this was ten years ago, shortly after the 50th anniversary of Pearl Harbor. As Reid told it, the film crew visited a high school history class in Saitama-ken to ask the students what they knew about the Pacific War. When asked, many hands immediately shot up and, virtually in unison, all said “Genbaku” (Atomic Bomb). Well, fine, the TV crew said, what else. And the kids were stumped. They couldn’t really identify anything else related to the war. Sometime shortly thereafter, that same Japanese TV crew visited a high school history class in Wilmington, North Carolina, and asked “what do you know

about World War II in the Pacific?” Now, the presumption of the crew was, so Reid would have it, that they would respond “Pearl Harbor” (again, this was just after the 50th anniversary commemorations and not a few public controversies). However, the American high school kids couldn’t come up with anything about WWII in the Pacific. Themselves somewhat stumped, the Japanese TV crew said, well, what do you think about when someone says, “US-Japan relations” and, again, it drew a complete blank from the American students. In frustration, the TV crew said, “well, when someone says ‘Japan’ what do you think about?” (Now, remember, this was in 1991.) Finally, several hands went up and, in unison, they said “Tienanmen Square,” thus, confirming, I’m afraid, Japanese suspicions about American education.

I mention this possibly apocryphal account to remind us of the difficulties of teaching anything in middle schools, even in Japan, and to note that a middle school textbook, by necessity simplifies and offers, at best, partial coverage of complex issues.

The Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform was founded in 1996, specifically to produce a middle school textbook that would counter the tone and content that all others offered at that time. What seems to have precipitated this development was the inclusion of brief references to “military comfort women” in the middle school texts’ discussion of Japan’s actions during WWII. Now most of you are familiar with the process of textbook certification by the Ministry of Education and, probably, have some notion about the long struggles of Ienaga Saburo to challenge this process. Without going into the details of Ienaga’s protracted thirty-year legal battles, let me note that in his third and final lawsuit he won the right to include some accounts of Japanese military brutality (such as Unit 731’s biological weapons and human vivisection experiments, and the Nanjing massacre, but also a simple photograph of a Japanese veteran with an amputated limb), however, the Mombusho’s authority to screen textbooks was found constitutional. By the mid-90s, middle school history textbooks had begun to include references to many aspects of Japan’s wartime conduct that had previously been excised by the Ministry of Education. In this context, the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform began its far-reaching campaign for “the correct version” of history from “the Japanese point of view.”

The New History Textbook (*Atarashii rekishi kyokasho*) for middle school students was published by Fusosha, and certified by the Ministry of Education in March 2001, despite the appeal issued by several Japanese historical associations identifying extensive errors and misleading information, and a firestorm of public controversy in Japan and across East Asia. My objective tonight is not provide a critique this textbook; others have done this far more effectively, exhaustively than I would be able to do, and I draw on their work for my remarks (Yoshiko Nozaki, Richard Minear, Mark Selden). But I am compelled to note a few basic characteristics of the New History Textbook’s treatment of the 20th century to identify what I consider to be the basic dilemmas of teaching this period of Japanese history today.

The New History Textbook’s discussion of the 20th century is chauvinist. The language employed – “extension of the battle line” (*sensen no kakudai*) to describe the Manchurian incident of 1931 (p. 267) or “advance” (*shinshutsu*) into Southeast Asia – is similar to 1982 changes in textbooks that drew heated criticism from South Korean and Chinese

officials and citizens. Depicting the Asia-Pacific War to liberate Asian countries from (western) colonialism ignores not only Japan's colonial goals, but also the heavy toll in human lives suffered by the victims of nations that Japan invaded. In repeating the language of the wartime claims by the Japanese state, it leaves students with no basis for understanding that, in reality, those claims masked Japan's own colonial rule. In general, it ignores the extensive historical research (notably by Japanese historians) exposing the heavy cost of empire to the peoples of Asia, including Japan.

Having said this, I think it is also important to remember the context in which this textbook was written. Demands for apologies and reparations from Japan have escalated in the post-Cold War. Right-wing dictatorial regimes had previously kept a lid on expressions of anti-Japanese sentiment; democratization, notably in the Philippines, Taiwan and the Republic of Korea, has unleashed popular calls for retribution. Its imperialist past became more frequently invoked in the post-Cold War as Japan became increasingly enmeshed with the prosperous Asian economies of the 80s and 90s.

The Chinese government's longstanding campaign to fully account for Japanese war crimes and resist whitewashed Japanese history textbooks rests not on post-Cold War democratization, but on a state mobilization of intellectuals and official spokespersons that does not respect freedom of expression, independent scholarly inquiry or legitimate dissent. Japanese nationalist revisionists point to the limits of historical inquiry so constrained. South Korea, as some may note, also still has a system of government authored textbooks. Critiques of Japanese textbooks by other Asian states principally maintain their public's support by fueling anti-Japanese nationalism.

Citizen's groups, activist intellectuals and individual scholars in Japan and elsewhere are also significant contributors to this public debate. In the last few years, the term "memory activists" has been employed to refer to those struggling to recover a past obscured by official obstructionism or myopic conventions. This term was coined by Carol Gluck, a Professor Japanese History at Columbia University – reflecting the need for new vocabulary to characterize post Cold War politics. Since the late 80s, these "memory activists" struggled to bring to light the wartime system of military brothels staffed by coerced Asian female labor. Some in the Society for History Textbook Reform have questioned the authenticity of testimonies by individuals who claim to have been victimized or victimizers. Skepticism is an appropriate response of professional historians. Professor Hata Ikuhiko (Chiba University), who is part of this Textbook Reform group, has been quite effective in debunking many of the most egregious assertions in Iris Chang's 1997 best-seller *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*. But to doubt specific assertions of Iris Chang does not justify a sweeping denial of massive atrocities at Nanjing or elsewhere, as has been periodically expressed by high-ranking LDP politicians, among others.

Memory activists address issues that are difficult to document, especially in the face of official obfuscation and hostility. But they are here to stay, a part of public culture in an increasingly globalized world. And they are guaranteed to continue to raise troubling issues that are difficult to evaluate in public discourse.

So it is in this context – post-Showa, and not quite post-Cold War globalization – that Japanese educators and the public at large confront the choices of how to teach history.

The New History Textbook restricts discussion of Japanese war atrocities to a single sentence – “Japanese also committed unjust killings of and ill-treatment of captured enemy soldiers and civilians” (trans. Nozaki, Minear, Selden) – amidst more detailed atrocities committed by Allied forces (fire-bombing cities, atom bombs, Soviet mistreatments), and alongside an account of the Nazi Holocaust of Jews (while identifying heroic deeds of two Japanese – Kiichiro Higuchi and Chiune Sugihara – who helped Jews to escape). Comfort women are ignored.

Should a middle school textbook discuss war atrocities and comfort women? I guess it depends. I don’t think they should be swept under the rug. I don’t think that just because the *hinomaru* is raised and *kimigayo* is sung that textbooks should repeat the claims of the wartime state. Contemporary values such as expressed in the UN Declaration on Human Rights inevitably influence how we view the achievements and mistakes of the past. Increased attention to crimes against women is inevitably part of the process for securing their equal rights, and allowing them a voice in assessing the past. Moreover, it is clear to me that there is not one single Japanese point of view – and one that’s chauvinist – as presumed by the New History Textbook. The narrative approach adopted by that textbook presents only heroic Japanese and justifies every single state action, conflating a commemoration of Japanese leaders and war dead with an honest review of historical issues. However, narratives can just as easily represent diverse, multi-vocal Japanese points of view and encourage students to develop their own interpretations of the past. Acknowledging the diversity of historical experience would expose students to the fundamental dilemma we all confront in constructing arguments from conflicting, partial and even maddening historical evidence. This, I suggest, would better prepare young Japanese for an increasingly globalized world.

So what should be taught?

The histories by John Dower and Herbert Bix offer much food for thought. I would suggest that their revisions to orthodox accounts deserve to be incorporated into the Japanese curriculum. But the fact of the matter is that the current Japanese system requires that school textbooks receive official approval. While it may be possible to pierce the myth of the Emperor as a life-long pacifist and depict his role as a war leader, it is unlikely that Herbert Bix’s other critical judgments would see the light of day. However, you never know. Things change, often abruptly. At the very least it reminds us that the process of screening – the composition of the textbook examination council and its relationship to independent professional historians – should become part of the public debate over the content of history education.

John Dower’s portrait of ordinary Japanese chaotically, but consciously, embracing new values – peace and democracy – rejecting the brutality and alienation of autocratic state-regimentation may be more fundamental in recasting the way Japan’s history is taught.

There’s something of a parallel in the recent revisions in the approach of American textbooks. American textbooks of WWII have become more multicultural and critical of past US racism. Racial segregation in the US military, the contributions of women on the home front, the internment of Japanese-Americans into concentrations camps are common topics for middle school curriculum, and reflect a critical appraisal of the American past. However, American multiculturalism has not, generally, led to greater

internationalism. American actions abroad, even atrocities against civilians, fail to receive much critical scrutiny in textbooks; American government policies are measured in terms of their impact on American nationals. So the selective amnesia that slights the brutality and true costs of war borne by other peoples is not simply a Japanese problem, but something to be struggled against around the world.

I am more sanguine about the prospects for depicting the diversity of Japanese experience and, in particular, in conveying how the majority of Japanese came to embrace the values of democracy and peace. This will require an honest discussion not only of the past, but also of the kind of future to which the Japanese people wish to contribute. I've no doubt that the majority of Japanese would want that future to be democratic, peaceful, tolerant and just. There is much to be gained in providing a truthful education for younger generations, and in helping them to build with us a new global community based on those values.

Bibliography

Herbert P. Bix. 2000. *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*. NY: HarperCollins.

John Dower. 1999. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. NY: W.W.Norton.

My reading of the textbook controversy was shaped by the contributions (notably, Gerow, Hein and Selden, McCormack, Nozaki and Hiromitsu) to the special issue of the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 30(2), 1998, that was reprinted as:

Laura Hein and Mark Selden (eds). 2000. *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany and the United States*. Armonk: M.E.Sharpe.

Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform. 1998. *The Restoration of a National History*. Tokyo: JSHTR.

Nozaki Yoshiko, Richard Minear and Mark Selden. July 2001. Information Concerning New History Textbook. <<http://www.acp.org/JWRC/Center/English/appeal2.htm>>

Kathleen Krauth. 2001. Interview with Herbert P. Bix on *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*. *Education About Asia* Winter 2001, 6(3):7-13; Book Review, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 64-65.