Review Article

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

Edited by MORRIS, Paul, SHIMIZU, Naoko & VICKERS, Edward
London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2013

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What are “Others” and “Otherness”? — Educational, Cultural and Political Identity—

“Wars fought are...followed by a different kind of war..... a war over words. In the aftermath of war, the combatants attempt to re-interpret events, some hoping to wipe away the sting of defeat, others seeking to redefine the national purpose.....The battleground of this war over words shifts to popular culture and the educational system, whereby the weapons become films, literature and history textbooks.” (Sneider, 2011, p.246).

As if responding to the quote above, *Imagining Japan in Post-War East Asia* was published two years later in 2013. The key term is not the “war over words” but the “Images of Japan”. The book consists of four parts; (1) an introductory chapter, an overview of East Asian images of Japan, (2) “Japan” in popular culture and propaganda, (3) “Japan” in official discourse (the narratives in the history-text books from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines) and (4) an epilogue on Sino-Korea-Japan discussions about history text-books. The introductory chapter sets Japan as “the other” and “otherness” in four perspectives (normative, dominant, alternative and distant). These narratives show how and why “Japan and the Japanese” have been experienced, described and explained as enemy, model and alien by other Asians all at the same time. Chapters 2~6 offers readers an explanation of how “Japanese images” have been shaped and shared regionally throughout Asia in films, manga, and architecture historically and currently. The narrative, together with related illustrations is fascinating, intelligible, persuasive, and challenging. Most of this should be very new, if not strange, to most Japanese readers. The textbook discourses in part III are less exceptional in that they describe the state-centered intervention in story-telling about the past of each nation and the region. This section restates the argument on the grammar of modernity by Carol Gluck that established the case for textbooks and curriculum

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within the East Asian body politic. To this Japanese reviewer, a Japanese, it is also a reminder that current Japanese textbook screening process can be attuned to policy-trends as well.

The book categorizes four images of “other” or “otherness” with respect to Japan. The categories correspond to, in the historiographical sense, the developmental stages of universal and Japanese imperial capitalism: (1) classic imperialism (phase 1) and Japanese modernization—*normative image*, (2) classical imperialism (phase 2) and Japanese colonialism—*dominant image*, (3) cold-war period and American imperialism—*alternative image*, (4) post-Cold war era and new liberalism—*distant image*, (5) era of rising Chinese capitalism—*silence on Japan*. The historiographical discussions are subtle following the notion of *meta-history* by Hayden White (1973). Given a social scientific framework on economic development under the umbrella of globalization, the discussions could have been more dynamic and analytic (cf.: D. Rodrik; P. Wagner; H. Wirla).

In chapter 6, the author deals with the issues of “Space” and “Memory” touching Korean public culture suppressed by Japanese Colonialism. Juxtaposing this chapter with the chapter by Hsiao (Hsiao, 2011), readers may discern subtle differences in the representations of experiences people shared during colonial occupation by Japan. Colonial and war memories among ethnic and national groups may differ from each other but what can be commonly crucial is the consequences of retaining or losing memories embedded in place(s). Place(s) are the base(s) of personal and collective memories. When a nation-state institutionalizes “memories” into its textbooks with political intent, memories can be cut from the place(s) and alienated from “being human” (cf: “claiming spaces”, Chapter 9). Politically strategized memories codify linguistic power over a population. The author of chapter 6 closes this chapter with a reference to Pierre Nora’s phrase “*lieux de memoire*” (Nora, 1984-92) and those of chapter 11 refer to a “museum” (p. 213). The site of memory is defined as “a laboratory of memory, a site of historical and cultural exploration.” The sites where personal and collective memories intersect must be constructed consciously taking many forms of archives, monuments, specialist museum, eulogies, memoirs and dates. (Whelan & Baxter, 2003, p. 24, & p. 35). Whelan referred to the “phrase”, when she wrote of “The Other ‘98” on the Edict of Nantes (topics of tolerance) spanning 400 years and crossing France, Britain and Ireland. She argued that memory should be brought back for tolerance through trans-disciplinary communication. As her case suggests it is indispensable to collect interdisciplinary memories in order to revive the historical identity of a person, a village, a community or a nation. The book illustrates this with cases spanning the chapters. The history textbook issues must be recapitulated through sympathetic conjecture within such contexts. Otherwise it could be difficult for the contemporaries not only in Asia but outside to overcome hate and images of enemy: enemy in dichotomous, triangular, quadruple and multiple sensations against “Others” (cf.: Part III). Epilogue, in the book, may give the readers a hope though dim at present.

This book often refers to the internal conflicts over political hegemony between political, religious and ethnic groups, and it explains that the internal “Others” and “Otherness” can be visible. Looking historically back into Japanese socio-political and politico-cultural processes since the 1920s, it is possible to witness the rigid conflicts and struggles between “the dominant” and “the resistant” within the polity level, Japan had been haunted, from the 19th century on, by multiple sets of dichotomous duality of conflicts between inner “ours” and outer “others”. Raz (1992), in addition, pointed out that Japanese cultural frictions could be

visualized as diverse internal “Otherness” in Japan. Japan internally had multiple sets of “others” and “ours”. A Japanese triangulation of “ours”, “others” and others’ “Others” might have provided a far more comprehensive and generative framework for describing the Images of Japan, that “triangle” having been set out in the scheme of Four Images (cf., Hedetoft, & Hjort, 2002). The definition given to “Other” and “Otherness” in this book could be more international / global than “topoi”-centric (cf., Narangoa & Cribb 2003).

Despite these reservations, it is worthwhile for scholars, school-teachers, journalists and politicians to read this book. The manga-approach chosen may enliven contextualizing historical and political issues into an imaginative live-history even though “a manga” of Japanese history may seem to offer a higher degree of verisimilitude in historical representation. A discourse, combining graphic *trompe-l’oeil* with narrative, can “pose a peculiarly contemporary appeal that transcends the limitations imposed by the traditional approach to the study and teaching of history” (Rosenbaum, 2013, p. 2.) It is nonetheless worthwhile to attempt an alternative to the Euro-centric / US-centric discourse formation on people’s-selves (cf., Shi-Xu et al, 2005, Hedetoft & Hjort. op. cit.). The book can be recommended to the general reading public not only in Japan but world wide.

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