SINCE THE BEGINNING of the 1980s, the Japanese colonial and wartime past has often soured the diplomatic relations between Japan, South Korea, and China. Descriptions in Japanese history textbooks; the prime minister’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine where the war dead, including Class-A war criminals, are enshrined; and compensations and official apology for the victims of the Asia-Pacific War, particularly comfort women (ianfu), drafted workers (chōyōkō), and forced labor (kyōsei rōdōsha) have become a media sensation and posed political challenges.¹ They have at the same time roused scholars’ avid interest. These issues have conventionally been discussed as a critique of the conservative government, politicians, and pundits in Japan—some of whom are called “revisionists” or “neo-nationalists” today—or, more specifically, the nationalist orientation and inability to “come to terms with” Japan’s pre-1945 past. Memory studies of twentieth-century Japan, however, have been extended to the socio-cultural realms of postwar Japan. Instead of criticizing the state’s policies and the “nationalist” populist trend, scholars have explored cultural representations in various media such as museums, movies, dramas, and literature showing a diversity of
viewpoints. Combined with developments in history and memory studies of South Korea and China, it is now acknowledged that Japan’s “history problem” is an “internationalized” issue involving all these East Asian countries, significantly complicated by nationalisms and politics not only in Japan, but also in South Korea and China. Reconciliation, therefore, requires peoples in these countries to understand the multinational nature of the historical disputes, hone their ability to see problems in each country, and try to develop mutual understanding, transcending their national boundaries.

In fact, efforts have been made among scholars from Japan, South Korea, and China since the 1980s—on both private and state initiatives—to narrow the gaps in their historiographies and to cultivate mutual understanding. For example, the Study Group of Comparative History and Comparative History Education (Hikakushi hikaku rekishi kyōiku kenkyūkai) was established in 1982 and has held an international Symposium on History Education in East Asia every five years since 1984. Such academic effort at reconciliation rapidly grew in the 1990s, continuing to the twenty-first century. At the request of the Science Council of Japan (Nihon gakujutsu kaigi), an independent organization under the jurisdiction of the prime minister, and under the leadership of the Japanese Historical Council (Nihon rekishigaku kyōkai), a Conference of Japanese and Korean Historians (Nikkan rekishika kaigi) has been organized every year since 2001. At the same time, the Japanese Historical Council has also played a major role in hosting the Symposium on History Education (Rekishi kyōiku shinpojiumu) and provided a place for Japanese, Korean, and Chinese researchers to share their studies and opinions. Between Japan and China, a Japan-China Intellectual Community (Nicchū chi no kyōdōtai) was inaugurated in 1997 to promote a dialogue between Japanese and Chinese intellectuals and continued until 2002. A year before, a younger generation of scholars in both countries established their own study group, the Forum of Young Historians of Japan and China (Nicchū wakate rekishi kenkyūsha kaigi). These efforts have turned out in public in the form of papers, books, and textbooks. The open and cooperative work of the Forum of Young Historians of Japan and China was crystalized in the book, Kokkyō o koeru rekishi ninshiki, published in 2006 (whose English translation, Toward a History beyond Borders, was released in 2012).
Joint historical research projects have been launched by governmental cooperation, too. Based on mutual consent between Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Jun’ichirō (in office 2001-2006) and South Korean President Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003), a Japan-Korea Joint History Research Committee (Nikkan rekishi kyōdō kenkyū iinkai) was set up in 2002, working until 2005. The second round of research began two years later and was closed in 2010. The establishment of Japan-China Joint History Research (Nicchū rekishi kyōdō kenkyū), originally proposed in 2005, was agreed upon during the visit to Beijing in the fall of 2006 by Japan’s following Prime Minister Abe Shinzō (2006-2007, 2012-2020) and materialized by the end of the year. The reports of these activities have been released online and/or in book form. Those who participated in collaborative work voice both hardship and disappointment, and a certain level of satisfaction and hope. Government involvement appears to have limited the freedom of academics’ work at times. Differences in scholarly approaches and perspectives made it all the more difficult for them to narrow their views. However, these official projects helped establish additional venues for intellectual interaction and nurture mutual understanding among scholars, despite the slow pace. Given the achievement of these aims, the effort was a success, even if it remains to be seen if there will be any visible impact on Japanese-Korean or Japanese-Chinese relations in the political realm.

Interpersonal interaction is not occurring exclusively in the professional domain. People travel all the time to experience foreign cultures and study abroad. The number of foreign visitors to Japan has increased. So has the number of international students studying in Japan. In fact, universities are a globally open space, and there are many international students at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS), from one-year exchange students to regular students enrolled in graduate programs. At TUFS, a Japanese national university devoted to area and global studies, out of 4,414 registered students in 2019, 796 were foreign nationals. A large number—46%—of them came from China and South Korea, 268 from the former, and 100 from the latter. I teach several courses on Japanese history and Japanese foreign relations every semester in English or in Japanese, but a majority of my students are international students. Among these students were lower-level Japanese language and Japan area studies majors in 2018-2019. Over a quarter of those in the first
and second years were Japanese nationals, while about 70% were international students, mostly from South Korea and China, who had native-level Japanese skills. Teaching them, I realized that they are more open and intellectually curious than is normally portrayed in the mass media, and they can discuss history-related issues with less contention than we would expect. This finding encouraged me to believe in the possibility for intercultural understanding among younger generations and inspired me to develop the course, “A Student Project of Writing a Common History Textbook.”

This article offers an extensive discussion of this history project, which I incorporated in a multinational class environment in the Spring 2019 semester. I will first explain how I developed the conceptual framework and organized and managed the class. Then, I will introduce some of the history teaching materials that the students created. Finally, I will examine what the students actually learned from this exercise and working with their group members, based on their journals and answers to the project survey. I would argue that this was a success in promoting mutual understanding among students by having them learn history together from various points of view, as the goal was not a complete reconciliation of their historical viewpoints. Young people from different countries, even those from the countries embroiled in politico-historical controversies, are able to learn from one another to create more complex historical narratives that look beyond competing nationalisms. The results of my course confirm the value of teaching history from a global standpoint and hold promise that if adopted widely, it might have a long-term and larger, positive effect on society and even on international relations by producing globally competent future generations.

**Backgrounds**

The idea to have students engage in a project to produce “common history” texts originated in the course that I taught in Spring 2018, “Critical Analysis of Knowledge of Modern Japanese History.” This was a required course open to Japanese language and Japan area studies majors in their first and second years. Of the forty-three enrolled students, who were all freshmen, only ten of them were Japanese and the rest were international students, most of whom came from South Korea and China. As the course title suggests, the
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overall aim was to help students develop their skills in identifying the sources of their historical knowledge—such as history textbooks, newspapers, scholarly works, documentaries, movies, dramas, museums, and family stories—and in critically analyzing such representations. Although the subject was geographically limited to Japan, the skills learned here could be readily applied to the histories of other countries. I expected both Japanese and international students to learn about Japan from a Japanese perspective, as well as start examining similar issues in the other countries, thus broadening their intellectual horizons.

This course, combining lecture and seminar, dealt ultimately with issues on history and collective memories in Japan. In lecture, I started with the approaches to this subject and then discussed various topics on Japanese war memories such as narratives in history textbooks, the Yasukuni issue, contents and language of the prime minister’s addresses, discourses in the mass media, and memories of the wartime and postwar generations. We also reconsidered the Japanese identity dilemma as victimizer, victim, and hero, and critically rethought Japanese pacifism. Learning about these topics was valuable for both Japanese and non-Japanese students, especially for those who misunderstood Japanese history textbooks as all right-wing; Japanese prime ministers have never expressed apologies for Japan’s imperialism and wars, and Japanese people do not know that atrocities were committed by the Japanese military at all. Students thus first learned that the popular image is inaccurate and that contemporary Japanese society presents a wide spectrum of opinions.

For their research project, I asked them to analyze the narratives of key events of modern Japanese history in textual or visual sources. It was also my goal to facilitate comparative analysis and intercultural communication, so with over forty students, I made ten groups, each composed of one Japanese and three or four non-Japanese students. I prepared ten chronological topics related to Japanese history since the mid-nineteenth century: (1) the end of the Tokugawa period to the Meiji Restoration; (2) the Sino- and Russo-Japanese Wars; (3) the annexation of Korea; (4) Taishō Democracy; (5) the Manchurian Incident and the second Sino-Japanese War; (6) the road to the Pacific War; (7) wartime Japan; (8) the end of war; (9) the Occupation; and (10) the postwar period. I asked each group to pick one topic of its own interest and research it using twelve to fifteen sources of three
different kinds. This encouraged several groups to collect materials of multiple countries for comparative study. For example, some groups investigated history textbooks in different countries and discovered that descriptions are not identical in terms of coverage, perspective, and tone. Through this project, students learned that, depending on sources and authors, descriptions and interpretations of Japanese history differ. They found out that the ways that people see history are different from country to country and that even in the same country, there are different historical views among different generations, and among themselves as well.

The exercise proved to be beneficial in several respects. Students not only recognized the differences in their historical perceptions, but also were intrigued to grapple with them. I also found that they could freely and openly share their opinions and experiences without a clash of nationalist sentiments. This contradicted assumptions that nationalism prevents them from understanding each other and that “Asian” students are not good at discussion. Contrary to those stereotypical images, students uttered criticisms of their own government’s policies while they could take into considerations political and historical conditions peculiar to each country. Their learning attitudes and the class environment remained good throughout the semester.

About a half of these students participated in one of my fall classes for their required credits. As I observed them continuously carry open, perceptive, and stimulating discussion, I became increasingly interested to see if they could learn history from one another, resolve the disagreements in their historical views, and find a common ground. At the same time, I developed my conviction that open dialogue and collaborative work would foster mutual understanding among students of different nationalities. Out of curiosity and optimism, I drew up a plan for my new course.

“A Student Project of Writing a Common History Textbook”: Exploring the Possibility of Intercultural Understanding and Historical Reconciliation

One of the courses that I taught in Spring 2019 was a mandatory sophomore course for Japanese students who major in Japanese language or Japan area studies, and for international students only
in the latter. It was for this class that I created “A Student Project of Writing a Common History Textbook.” Thirty-two students—fifteen Japanese and seventeen international students—were enrolled in this course, and all except three Japanese students participated in my class in Spring 2018 and/or in Fall 2019. In other words, the students and I not simply had known one another, but a majority of the students were acquainted with me pedagogically and were already equipped with analytical skills and perspectives necessary to start a history textbook-writing project.

I used a seminar-style method and combined it with in-class group activities. At TUFS, each regular term is thirteen weeks long, and most courses run ninety minutes and meet only once per week. After the first week, I spared four weeks for class discussion, five weeks for group activities, and three weeks for presentations. For the initial four weeks, we read seven articles to discuss the complex causes of the history disputes encompassing East Asia, comparisons between the Japanese and German cases, types and developments of history textbooks worldwide, and examples of joint history research— including its history, difficulties, and “attitudes” assumed for such tasks. After the students acquired the knowledge essential to later activities, they started group research about the topic of their choice. They spent five weeks reading sources, drafting, and editing their text.

With thirty-two students, I made eight multinational groups of four. All the groups were composed of a combination of Japanese and Korean, Chinese, and/or European students. I originally entertained the idea of assigning a chronologically different topic to each group like in my Spring 2018 course so that the class as a whole would make one common history textbook. I decided to prioritize students’ interest, however, and let each group freely select its own topic. Most exercised their choice to select controversial topics. Two groups decided to work on the Sino-Japanese War of 1894; another two groups chose to research comfort women; and each of the other four groups picked the Sino-Japanese War of 1937, wartime livelihood, the dropping of the Atomic Bomb, and the “development” of Korea under Japanese colonial rule, respectively.

On the students’ starting up their group projects, I provided instructions to guide them from beginning to end. Their first task was to decide on the type of their textbook, its target, and its aim. They had already learned about various kinds of history textbooks
and narratives in the previous weeks. They could decide whether they would write content for an “orthodox” history textbook, make the text more graphic with quotes from primary documents, sum up a controversial issue and offer related academic arguments, or compile primary sources with annotations and analytical questions. The students could make their own combination of any of these types. They also needed to decide on their intended audience—elementary school students, middle schoolers, college students, or the general public—and what knowledge and skills they would like learners to acquire from their material.

The following task was to start research. I advised them to first look at history textbooks published in various countries in order to find a variety of interpretations and unfamiliar facts. Next was to read the entries in authoritative encyclopedias, and last to move on to academic works on their topics. The groups that would need primary sources would find them after these steps. According to the division of tasks and a rough work schedule agreed upon in each group, the students read one source, wrote a summary of it, and reported their findings to their group members every week, thus building up knowledge together. With this, they could control their shared knowledge and make sure that they were on the same page, a sine qua non for productive discussion.

Once the students finished all these tasks, they began drafting their text. The requirements for the draft were simple: the length should be between three and six pages—or 3,500 to 7,000 letters in Japanese—with an 11- or 12-point font and single-spacing, including images, figures, or a study guide. These conditions needed to be flexible enough to accommodate all forms of history text that the students would produce. To successfully complete their term project, they edited and revised their entire text, added imagery and explanatory notes, and made a study guide and discussion questions, following their own plan.

The final task assigned to them was to give an oral presentation. Taking about twenty minutes, each group explained its own “history narrative” in detail. I asked the students to clarify which type of text they chose to create and why, what the target readership and set aim would be, and how they determined their topic. Besides the contents, they also needed to explain what they cared about in choosing words and expressions, how they selected pictures, and how
they made study questions. They had to reflect on the whole project and assess what they could learn, the challenges that they had faced, and new problems that arose in their course of collaborative work. The presentations were accompanied by Q&As for further discussion.

Along with their study, I assigned journal writing. I made it obligatory to take notes of key points and to put down personal thoughts on the reading assignments during the first four weeks. They needed to write comments about class discussions and, when group activity started, record the run of group talks and their reflections on them. They were expected to eventually respond to the course objectives in question: whether or not making a common history textbook is possible under what conditions; and whether the activities that they had engaged in could foster mutual understanding of history issues among their group members of different nationalities. To encourage them to write freely and honestly, I ensured them that grading would be determined not by their historical views, but by meeting the above requirements.21

Journal keeping was not only to serve students as a learning tool, but also to leave qualitative data for my later analysis. To supplement this source, I made a questionnaire for quantitative analysis as well. Significant to note, the students signed a letter of consent, if they agreed, to allow me to use their materials under two conditions: only their sex, nationality, and initials would be revealed, and I would use quotation marks for direct quotes.22 As a later section shows, their journals and survey answers offer useful sources to examine how their intellectual activities and emotional struggles actually went.

**Student-Made “Common History” Texts**

Of eight samples of a “common history” text that my students created, the themes that they chose—the Sino-Japanese Wars of 1894 and of 1937, Japanese colonial rule of Korea, wartime life, comfort women, and the dropping of the Atomic Bomb—are all controversial ones of varying degrees, despite the fact that they were given the choice to select a politically neutral topic. Yet they managed to set their own goals and put materials together. Group 1 (as I number here for the sake of convenience) wove three national histories into a concise account of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 in the form of a traditional history textbook. Groups 2, 3, and 4 wrote more academic texts on
the first Sino-Japanese War, the use of the Atomic Bomb, and comfort women from a transnational perspective. Unlike these groups, Groups 5 and 6, working on the comfort women issue and the Sino-Japanese War of 1937, prepared materials for class discussion. They show different interpretations by nationality, instead of trying to reconcile them, in order to make learners themselves think. The remaining two groups diverged from politico-military history. Group 7 narrated the wartime livelihood of ordinary people in Japan, Korea, China, and Manchuria, and Group 8 discussed Korea under Japanese rule during the 1910s and 1920s, focusing on socio-economic policies and their effects. These groups were all successful in examining their topics from multinational standpoints in their own ways, but below, I will introduce the texts of Group 1, Group 3, Group 4, and Group 6. Group 1 offers an example of a concise, orthodox history account integrating three countries' perspectives; Group 3 and Group 4 show examples of internationalizing history controversies; and Group 6 demonstrates an example of material created for active learning activities.23

**Group 1's History Text: The Sino-Japanese War of 1894**

Group 1 described the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 in the most conventional form of a history textbook for high school students. In three and a half pages, the students provided a concise description of political, military, and diplomatic history, along with maps and statistics and key terms in bold letters as in normal textbooks. Composed of one Chinese, one Korean, and two Japanese students, the group used history textbooks, encyclopedias, and scholarly books published in their countries as references and successfully knitted one narrative from multinational sources.24

Covering the period between 1876 and 1895, from the conclusion of the Japan-Korea Treaty of Amity to the end of the Sino-Japanese War, the text explained the backgrounds, developments, and results of the war. The group described the war as the “conflict fought between Qing that sought to strengthen its master-servant relationship with Korea and Japan that aimed to secure a foothold in the continent by placing Korea under its yoke, with the Gabo Peasant War (Donghak Rebellion) that broke out in 1894 as its beginning.”25 China’s lack of modernization, its military unpreparedness, factious fights in Korea, as well as Japanese ambitions, determined the course of the event.
The students concluded the account with the significance of Japan’s victory: the collapse of the Sino-centric order in East Asia and the spread of modernization reforms in Asia.26 For this text to be usable not only in Japan, but also in South Korea and China, the student authors watched their language. They paid attention to the various naming conventions in these countries and included this information where an event is labeled differently, as with the Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty, which is known as the “Treaty of Shimonoseki” in Japan and as the “Treaty of Maguan” in China. As they made it plain in their presentation, they strived for “neutrality,” avoiding “emotional” expressions and concentrating on “facts,” which keeps the tone of the narrative rather objective without sensational words. The group members noticed that although there were few disagreements over “facts” described in their sources, interpretations could vary: for example, viewing Japan’s “surprise attack” in launching the Sino-Japanese War as a “success” or as a “sneaky strike.” The students’ sensitivity to the connotations of words differed, too. While Chinese student H. Z. grew perplexed at writing an emotionless, “objective” history, she also assessed that group work was relatively harmonious because the Sino-Japanese War was so far removed as a historical event. The members felt distanced from the war, which took place more than a century ago, so they did not react to it personally as they would to more recent events.27 Thus, Group 1 could have smooth and constructive discussions, and this enabled them to beautifully summarize the Sino-Japanese War not as a nationalized history, but as an “East Asian” history, maintaining balance in content and perspective.

Group 3’s History Text: The Atomic Bomb against Japan

Although also writing to a high-school audience, Group 3 created a history that was more academic than many conventional textbooks. This group was made of two Japanese, one Korean, and one Greek student, so they looked for a topic that would interest readers outside East Asia and eventually decided to research about the use of the Atomic Bomb against Japan. Since the Greek student was better in English than the other members, they investigated the subject from Japanese, Korean, and American points of view, leaving to him the task of reading English sources. Following the project guidelines, the
members referred to history textbooks used in Japan, South Korea, and America; Japanese and Korean encyclopedias; and academic and journalistic works published in these three countries.\textsuperscript{28} They also checked the official websites of Hiroshima City and Nagasaki City.

Group 3’s text was a well-organized internationalized history of the Atomic Bomb dropped on these two cities, consisting of four sections and supplemented with images. Starting with general descriptions about the invention, use, and effects of nuclear weapons developed under the Manhattan Project, the draft first summarized the destruction of the cities, casualties, and a series of relief acts for survivors (\textit{hibakusha}) in Japan. It then introduced survivors living outside Japan and the eligibility for relief that has been expanded to them. Developing this, the third part discussed how the Korean government has dealt with \textit{hibakusha} and how they have fought against the governments in Japan in court. This section also brought up the issue of the U.S. government’s responsibility for aid and mentioned the lack of information about the Atomic Bomb in Korean history textbooks. There was only a simple statement that the bomb quickened the end of the war, as the Korean textbooks tend to “stress how the Korean people (\textit{waga minzoku}) have been devoted to modernization and the fight for independence and to describe Axis-aligned Japan, which had annexed the Korean peninsula, as evil, thus omitting its opposite image as a victim.”\textsuperscript{29} The final section was spared to discuss the reasons why the United States used the nuclear bombs, how the targets were chosen, and how American researchers conducted investigations into physical injury to survivors. The text ended with a passage on the criminality of the dropping of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a potential “crime against humanity,” to lead the reader to think about it.

Group 3 wrote an international history of the Atomic Bomb and its victims not in an overly moralistic or accusing manner toward any party. The highest importance was placed on breaking the binary lens of victor and victim along national borders and on making the reader rethink governmental responsibility to provide special aid to \textit{hibakusha}, which does not exclude the United States. The text was informative and educational, and the group’s restrained moral messages could have an effective appeal by reducing offensiveness that some people might feel and helping redirect their readers’ attention to redress for \textit{hibakusha}. 
Group 4’s History Text: The Comfort Women Issue

Group 4 selected comfort women as their research topic and, as Group 3 did, summarized this intricate subject academically with the aim to elevate it to a transnational “human rights” issue. Two Japanese, one Korean, and one Georgian student worked together to create supplementary teaching material on comfort women for high school students and the general reader. Their sources were mostly academic books, activists’ books, and the websites of the Asian Women’s Fund (set up by the Japanese government in 1995 and run with official funding and donations until 2007) and the Women’s Active Museum on War and Peace (established by the Women’s Fund for Peace and Human Rights non-profit).

Group 4’s draft was divided into four sections. The introductory part briefly described the purposes of setting up comfort stations, the “recruitment” of women, their life during and after the war, and the beginning and present state of the “comfort women problem.” The following section used selected oral testimonies that open a window on comfort women’s experiences. The third part explained the Japanese government’s basic stance toward compensations—such issues were settled in conformity with the 1965 Agreement on the Settlement of Problems concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Cooperation between Japan and the Republic of Korea—and actual measures taken to apologize and atone for the sufferings of former comfort women, including the establishment of the Asian Women’s Fund.

The text so far simply digested the controversy over comfort women, but what this group wanted to say most is condensed in the last part: “Thinking of the ‘Comfort Women Issue’ as a Women’s Problem.” This section was essentially a column that presented the writer’s feminist view of the controversy. I. M., a Japanese member of the group, suggested approaching the comfort women problem that “has become complicated as historical, ethnic, political, and diplomatic problems are tangled together” as a “human rights issue” (jinken mondai). She claimed that comfort stations originated from the Japanese institution of public prostitution in combination with the highly patriarchal society of Korea and that sexual violence in war is itself an outgrowth of male-dominated social orders. The other point made here was that, regardless of nationality, supporters
of former comfort women’s redress movement make similar demands, the foremost of which is the Japanese government’s acknowledgment of not only moral, but also “legal” responsibility. As taken up in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 1996, the comfort women issue has been identified internationally as a case of violations of human rights. Thus, similar to Group 3, Group 4 tried to move beyond the confines of nationalist discourse, and recommended seeing this question as a universal matter of human rights in order to resolve it and to heal the suffering of former comfort women.

Group 6’s History Text: The Sino-Japanese War of 1937

Group 6 chose the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937 for their research project and came up with a type of history text very different from the previous groups: it put together material for class discussion in high school. The members of this group—two Japanese, one Korean, and one Chinese student—concluded that it was too challenging to reconcile established historical interpretations in different countries, so they should take a different approach. They determined to recreate descriptions of the second Sino-Japanese War typical in history textbooks used in Japan, South Korea, and China, and to let students examine those accounts themselves. The group’s set goals of study included learning how history narratives can differ among different countries and, as this whole project aimed, thinking about how this knowledge could affect intercultural understanding.

To facilitate a successful discussion, Group 6 provided a fair amount of information and intentionally emphasized characteristics of each country’s textbook. A Chinese version of the Sino-Japanese War is a military history account that praises Chinese patriotism and emphasizes Japanese aggression and cruelty, as symbolized in the Nanjing Atrocity. Finding no description about the war in a Korean history textbook used in the standard curriculum, the Korean student, by referring to a history textbook on East Asia instead, portrayed Japan as the merciless aggressor like the Chinese text does—while also mentioning some Japanese who defected from the army to oppose the war. The student discovered that, despite the fact that Korea was part of Japan, the Korean history
text portrayed Korea as a party uninterested in the conflict, and the Koreans who appear in this story are only those in China who joined the Sino-Japanese War on the Chinese side. Since the consequences of the expanded armed conflict had a great impact on many Korean lives on the peninsula, he briefly described a national mobilization, which included cultural assimilation policy. One of the Japanese students explained how the Sino-Japanese War broke out, based mainly on a Japanese high school textbook, but supplemented with a scholarly book. Compared to the Chinese narrative, this was a diplomatic-political history that followed how the policies that Japan took to deal with the developments in China gradually led to war. Her text did not presuppose Japan’s “scheme” to invade entire China, and it intentionally did not use the word “invasion,” either. Likewise, although she did not shy away from the Nanjing Atrocity, she did not mention casualty estimates, while the Chinese text stated that over 300,000 soldiers and civilians were killed or injured. Users of this group’s material were expected to compare and contrast these three descriptions of the second Sino-Japanese War.

In the final section, the other Japanese student prepared meticulous instructions for teachers. He clearly explained the purpose and anticipated positive effects of the exercises, summarized noticeable features of the above three descriptions of the war, and noted the points that instructors should bear in mind in leading discussion. He cautioned that they should make sure that students would not dogmatically take one view as “correct” as it is. It is a teacher’s role to create an environment conducive to discussion, so he suggested assisting shy students to express their opinions and not denying what students say. Inspired by one of the course readings, Group 6 stated that discussion activities should be handled on the “principle of ‘agreeing to disagree’”—that is, “taking for granted the existence of different historical views and ways of thinking, and mutually modifying them through a dialogue wherever appropriate, without believing only in one’s own as absolutely right,” with this attitude not necessarily requiring concessions over anything. In this way, this group crafted course materials to teach differences in Japanese, Korean, and Chinese history textbooks, to develop intercultural communication skills, and to train instructors’ abilities as discussion facilitator.
As summarized above, my students produced different types of history text on different topics. Group 1 wrote a brief “East Asian” history of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894. Group 3 addressed the atomic bombing of Japan and its aftermath, shedding light on relief for survivors inside and outside Japan. Group 4 took up comfort women as an international concern of women’s rights. Group 6 recreated typical Japanese, Korean, and Chinese narratives of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937 for class discussion. These texts are “transnational” history in themselves, and writing them required the students to get themselves out of their familiar national context and achieve a certain degree of mutual understanding. Their products thus show success of this project, which was designed to promote mutual understanding among students from different countries by making them write a common history text.

But, through this project, what did the students actually learn? As their texts suggest, it does seem possible for people from countries that have historiographical controversies to make a common history textbook, but did the students themselves think it attainable? If so, under what conditions? Lastly, did this course project help foster mutual understanding among them?

This class set making a common history text as a goal, and all the groups created their own accounts by interweaving in one way or another multiple countries’ histories and perspectives. Here, based on the students’ journals and questionnaires, I will discuss their learning experiences and look for some factors in the overall success of the project.

Writing Multinational Histories

By the end of the term, some students reached a conclusion that writing a multinational history is realizable under certain conditions. The aforementioned H. Z., a Chinese student in Group 1, for example, provided four conditions for successfully writing a common history textbook of East Asia: (1) to get rid of government interference as much as possible; (2) to try to free yourself from your prejudices; (3) to make a multinational group or put members with different opinions together; and (4) to seek cooperation from multiple disciplines
other than history. The first point clearly refers to the Japan-China Joint History Research project, whose research results were not released due to the intervention of the Chinese government. The second condition comes from the student’s awareness that many historical issues such as comfort women are too politicized, which could hamper scholarly investigation. She indirectly warned both researchers and ordinary people to distance themselves from their own political stances or ideologies. The third suggestion is about a technical condition: like in this class, people should first be given the opportunity to learn different perspectives and be able to lead open discussion. With the last point, the student rightly noted the importance of a multidisciplinary approach in re-examining hypotheses and evidence. Of these four conditions, the second and third are most relevant to this class, and I. M., the Japanese leader in Group 4, agreed with H. Z. on the second. She attributed her group’s success in writing about comfort women as an international humanitarian issue to their ability to set it as their common goal and to discuss it objectively. She concluded that making a common history textbook would be possible on the condition that “political intensions and nationalism should be abandoned.” Considering the difficulty to free ourselves from our own values, it deserves our attention that many students tried to distance themselves from an established belief, listened to others, and could write a common history text of their own.

Fostering Intercultural Understanding

The other objective of this course was to see if group work would foster intercultural understanding. According to the student questionnaire, they evaluated that they “learned well” from their work, with the average rate of 4.06 in the five-point scale. They commented that they could learn facts, histories of their own countries and others, differences in interpretations, and historical approaches. N. D., a Korean student in Group 1, for example, wrote that it would be a “great learning experience” (hijō ni benkyō ni naru) “to visually recognize the structure of nationalistic historical narratives in each country and to ‘relativize’ our own historical views.” Regarding “explaining or thinking about an incident,” he continued, “[he has] become able to approach it not only from one aspect but from various angles and to project a thing multi-dimensionally.”
Students made many other interesting discoveries while working on their textbook project. Japanese student N. M. in Group 5 noticed preconceived ideas inside of her. Unlike our general assumption, she had believed it possible to reach a common understanding of a historical issue, as there is active interaction among youth today, but she found it unexpectedly challenging in her group. Her initial optimism “disappeared” in the end and, at the same time, she “felt sad to find in [herself] this unconscious presumption” in some form. This realization was painful for her, but she took it as part of learning.

Another student’s findings are also intriguing and even enlightening. T. Y., a Japanese student in Group 7, found “discussing with international students, that whatever the contents of education, they do not necessarily form the students’ ideologies and thoughts.” In other words, people of the same nationality do not share the same opinions, and neither does history education create one mind. We should see the other nation not as one whole with a single view, but as a community of individuals who may or may not take the mainstream stance. The student also found a gap between the “hostile” language that the Korean member used and his historical view: he unconsciously used the language that he had learned in school, but did not carry ill feelings toward Japan for its colonial rule. This must have been a good discovery for both students and a reminder that we have to carefully analyze what “text” actually represents.

The students’ positive learning experiences likely resulted in their favorable evaluation of the course’s effect on the degree of mutual understanding. To the question of mutual understanding, two-thirds of the students responded that it has been “extremely deepened” or “deepened,” giving an average of 3.75 with 5 as the highest. Learning about differences is the first step toward understanding each other, and the fruit of class activities was exactly the cultivated ability to understand how people in other countries think about the same historical events. The aforementioned N. D. marked a level of 4, that “mutual understanding has been deepened,” and assessed that he was “able to learn how new thoughts and opinions would emerge when looking at an incident, apart from a national stance and point of view, even if it does not necessarily lead to a perfect understanding” of others. His answers to the previous questions on learning also show how well he understood and accomplished the significance of this project.
While many gave a high score to the degree of mutual understanding, why did those who chose below 4 rate their experience that way? One factor of low evaluation is related closely to the structure of their text and theme of their research. T. Y. in Group 7 was the only student who marked 2, the lowest score replied, on this question. Mutual understanding was “not deepened much” because her group made sections on Japan, Korea, China, and Manchuria, each of which was assigned to a single member, so they “did not talk much about their historical perceptions.” She “regrets a little missing the opportunity” (sukoshi mottainai koto o shita).49

G. A., a Japanese student from Group 8, attributed her ambivalence to her group’s research topic due to it being a topic that Japanese students barely learn in high school: Japanese colonial rule in Korea. She “learned extremely well,” particularly from the Korean leader H. G. who was knowledgeable about the subject—and was critical about Korean ethnic nationalism in history education and scholarship. Yet she could not decide “if what she did as a Japanese was ‘mutual understanding’ or ‘digestion of a Korean point of view’.” For this reason, she marked both 4 and 3, an affirmative and a neutral answer to this question.50

Additionally, students seem not to acknowledge any strong impact of group activities on mutual understanding when little effort was needed. The student from the Republic of Georgia in Group 4 explained that his reason for marking 3 on this question was the “absence of narrow-minded students” (kangae kata ga semai hito wa inai). The group was relatively open-minded from the start, and so everyone listened to and understood other students’ opinions.51 Similarly, a Japanese student from Group 3, Y. K., wrote, “there was a common perception about [the Atomic Bomb] to a great degree among the members, so [he] did not feel their mutual understanding was particularly deepened.”52

Thus, a large majority of the class felt that mutual understanding was deepened, but under specific circumstances, some did not perceive substantial effect of group work on intercultural understanding. How students organized their text, how they assigned tasks to their group members, and if they were equally familiar with their research topic informed their judgment about the degree to which mutual understanding had been fostered in their groups. A consensus of opinion and smooth discussion ironically led some students to
conclude “mutual understanding has been deepened no more than usual.” We can think of the strength of preconceptions, commitment to the class, and attitudes toward discussion as factors in some students’ low-key judgment. Yet the overall positive results of the survey attest to good effects of group activities on mutual understanding.

Encountering Unfamiliar Views

In discussing controversial historical topics, did students develop a strong feeling of resistance to unfamiliar views and facts? On this question, nearly half—fourteen out of thirty responses—indicated that they “felt little resistance when they encountered the viewpoints different from the established ones and unfamiliar facts,” and three “had no antipathy at all.” Eight students “harbored a feeling of resistance,” and one “felt strong resistance,” which gives 30% combined. Four judged it “hard to say if they felt resistance or not.”53 Of the eight students who were disconcerted at different perspectives, two are Japanese, five are Korean, and one is Chinese; the only student who met with a strong feeling of antipathy is Japanese. K. R., a Japanese student in Group 5, for example, expressed his bafflement at the “opinions far more critical to Japan than he had thought.” He wrote honestly that “because the comfort women issue that [he] watches on the news feels little to do with [him, he] felt a bit startled by a strong tone of censure uttered by one that is deeply involved in it.”54 A Korean student in the same group was confronted with another kind of dilemma. M. M. confessed that he “felt resistance somewhat to thinking from a perspective tabooed in [his] country.”55 As N. D. in Group 1 nicely summarized his emotional conflict, it is natural that some “[could not] help but feel resistance to the orthodox or stereotypical history inside of [them] being overturned,” even if they know that it is a healthy intellectual development.56 When a deep gap in standpoints and emotional commitment exists, feeling discomfort is quite a normal reaction.

More unexpected is the fact that many others did not have much trouble with encountering mainstream views in other countries. Of the fourteen students who answered as such (equally divided between Japanese and international students) and the three who had no problem at all (two Japanese and one Chinese), many give their reasons. Those reasons include taking differences in their views for
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granted and detaching themselves from the past; understanding the state’s intention to create nationalist historical narratives; favorably taking the opportunity to learn from different viewpoints; and having no orthodox historical view. Positively interpreted, these comments suggest that students could objectively see their history, already equipped with the skills of historical inquiry, and could distance themselves from the politicized and sensitive historical disputes. As the last reason indicates, some, however, were simply not so interested in history or familiar enough with their topics to have a particular historical view. For example, K. M., a Japanese student from Group 8 that worked on the Japanese colonial period of Korean history, wrote that she did not develop a noticeable feeling of resistance to learning unfamiliar facts or views because she “had no fixed or established views in the first place.” Besides, history is not her favorite subject, so she was not so much enthusiastic about the class, nor could she enjoy the reading assignments. Aside from students’ abilities, lack of knowledge and indifference explains why some students did not undergo emotional turmoil during group work.

Cooperating as a Team

While it was not a conflict-free task for those with different historical views to discuss controversial issues, many students did not find it so difficult and cooperatively worked together. Many rated that their “teamwork was good.” The mean score of the question on cooperation among group members was 3.96, with nine rating it as 5 (“extremely good”), thirteen as 4 (“good”), six as 3 (“average”), and two as 2 (“not so good”). Observing their activities, group work generally looked favorable and constructive. Many students shared what they learned from their readings and discussed differences in description and interpretation. They assumed good learning attitudes to one another and learned quite well.

To conclude, the students’ self-evaluations and journals show that group activities confirm general success of “A Student Project of Writing a Common History Textbook,” aimed to facilitate intercultural understanding in a multinational class environment. Students of different nationalities could learn from one another for the goal of making a common history text, and their learning influenced their views of history. Besides that, students had
already known one another by taking many classes together, and it probably had good effect on their group activities that many students found them fun. About two-thirds answered that they “enjoyed [group work] very much” or “enjoyed” it. Enjoyment, as well as friendship, likely contributed to constructive and smooth group work. It may also indicate that for youth—or educated youth—the “history issue” is not so much a “taboo” as generally believed, if freedom is given and ensured. This leaves us hope that similar projects could be tried in other classrooms as well, providing many more opportunities for students to learn from one another and to enhance their mutual understanding.

Conclusion

I have explained the experimental seminar-style classes that I taught at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, particularly the “Student Project of Writing a Common History Textbook” course that I created for Japanese language and Japanese area studies major sophomore students in Spring 2019. With a student body mixed with Japanese and international students: from South Korea, China, and Europe, the project was successful in that, when put in multinational groups, the students could create a common history teaching material of their own about controversial topics in modern Japanese history. Group work for the goal exposed them to new historical facts and narratives, enabled them to see their “orthodoxy” objectively, and helped them learn from one another. Overall, open dialogue and cooperative work seemed to assist them in achieving these objectives.

What was interesting is that—against our expectations—Japanese and international students, particularly those from South Korea and China, could positively work together for achieving some kind of historical reconciliation. They were not completely free from the orthodox narrative in their home countries, but the ways in which it occupied their minds varied. The students were not uncritical of the established narrative, had diverse opinions, and were able to learn new perspectives from others. With this particular case, I should take it into consideration that having already opted to study in Japanese higher education, the international students in my class are a self-selected group of people with relatively minimal nationalist bias and relatively favorable views of Japan. Studying
abroad itself also gives them plenty of opportunity to rethink their “national” identity and critically examine their state and society, as well as learn about Japan. These likely contributed to the success of my project. The results demonstrate that instructors should not assume that all the people from a particular country approach the past monolithically, but instead display a multiplicity of historical viewpoints. Such assumptions could possibly reinforce a national divide and hinder developing students’ critical thinking abilities and intercultural understanding.

There is a stereotypical view that “Asian” students are passive learners and are therefore not good at active learning, but this was not the case in my class at all. Class discussions were active. Most students volunteered to share their opinions or attentively listened to others. The same students often spoke, but about a half of the class contributed to class discussion, which included all nationalities. Many students comprehended the intended purposes of their assignments, too. They understood the value of the “knowledge building-up process” that required them to read one source, report it to their group members, and discuss all the readings together every week. They also found journal writing very effective to review what they learned and to organize their thoughts. It is true that students at TUFS, which is one of the distinguished national universities in Japan, are more apt to be active learners, and therefore made a success of completing the course project. Still, this proves wrong the general assumption that “Asians” are not good at student-centered learning, and shows that teachers can always assist such learning.

Notwithstanding students’ original abilities, the instructors’ role of managing class is crucial in developing them further. In order to create a good learning environment, I first gave students the freedom to choose their topics. For those who do not like history or those who are not comfortable discussing politically sensitive issues, allowing a free choice is a way to engage interest and not discourage learning. Also, I made sure that there is no single, “right” history narrative and it was instead their task to construct their own. If my students dared to tackle a debated topic, I reminded them that, as we read in class, it is difficult even for scholars to discuss and reconcile their views, so they should find out by themselves how their group work would go. About grading, I read their drafts as an academic paper: I looked at the consistency of objectives, structure, balance, and clarity
of contents rather than their historical views. In class discussions, I tried to be a good facilitator to promote active participation. I introduced provocative questions, listened to students with great interest, and accepted every remark and opinion as a valuable one. By bringing out various views from students, good discussion can help widen their perspectives and stimulate their critical thinking. During group work, I basically played the same role: I checked how each group was doing and helped students organize and develop their ideas through discussion. In my self-evaluation, all the strategies worked in my favor to keep the class an open learning space for students from different countries.

In brief, this course project proved successful in helping promote mutual understanding among students of different nationalities, and many students demonstrated their abilities in re-examining historical topics, transcending national borders. The long-term effect of this learning on the participant students is actually hard to measure, as is its social and political impact. Living in a global age, however, the skills to objectify national history and analyze various histories from a comparative perspective are obviously more in demand than in the past. If similar projects are adopted in many other classrooms and people with a global outlook increase, we might be able to expect a tangible effect in a wider scale in the future. Understanding that my class cannot necessarily be applied as it is, I would like other instructors to freely modify and develop it into a form suited to their institutes’ curricula and their own interests. They could make it a truly global and comparative history course taking on many history issues in the world; they could enrich it by teaching historians’ jobs, approaches, and a variety of narratives—from the great man theory to post-modernist history. Due to the general success with my class, and out of my conviction that education for intercultural understanding should be developed even more, I would hope that many others will explore the possibilities offered by the collective construction of multinational narratives.
Notes

1. The first history textbook controversy began in 1982 with the Japanese media report (which is now known as inaccurate) that the Ministry of Education had publishers change words, such as Japan’s “invasion” into “advance,” in high school textbooks. In response to the protests from the Chinese and Korean governments, the Japanese government had the Guidelines for Textbook Authorization revised so that the neighboring countries’ concerns would be taken into consideration in history textbook writing. The Yasukuni Shrine, which was originally established in 1869 and renamed as such in 1879, enshrines the dead of the civil wars and external wars between 1853 and 1945. The prime minister’s visit on August 15, 1975, coinciding with the day when the emperor’s announcement of his decision to accept the Potsdam Declaration went on the air in 1945, became a political issue. In relation to the enshrinement of the Class-A war criminals in 1978, it developed into a diplomatic problem in 1985. According to the Asian Women’s Fund, “comfort women” are “those who were taken to former Japanese military installations, such as comfort stations, for a certain period during wartime in the past and forced to provide sexual services to officers and soldiers,” and they included Japanese women, women from Japanese colonies, and women in areas under Japanese military occupation. In the early 1990s, the redress movement began in South Korea, and in 1993, the Japanese government acknowledged the military’s involvement. In 1995, the Japanese government established the Asian Women’s Fund, and through the Fund, paid “atonement” money, which came from donations, provided financial aid, and sent an official letter of apology to former (non-Japanese) comfort women. Concerning compensations for Chinese laborers, in 2007, the Japanese Supreme Court ruled that the San Francisco Peace Treaty (1951) and the Japan-China Joint Communiqué (1972) had settled Chinese individuals’ claims for compensation from Japan, Japanese nationals, or juridical persons. With Koreans, the Japanese government maintains that the issue was solved with the conclusion of the Agreement on the Settlement of Problems concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Co-operation between Japan and the Republic of Korea (1965), while the Korean Supreme Court judged otherwise in 2012. In 2014, the Korean government and corporations set up a fund to support former wartime workers and their bereaved families. For details, see articles in the following books: Daqing Yang, Jie Liu, Hiroshi Mitani, and Andrew Gordon, eds., Toward a History beyond Borders: Contentious Issues in Sino-Japanese Relations (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 240-266, 340-371, 372-410; Hatano Sumio, ed., Nihon no gaikō dai 2 kan: Gaikōshi sengo-hen [Diplomacy of Japan, Vol. 2: A Diplomatic History of the Postwar Period] (Tokyo, Japan: Iwanami shoten, 2013), 19-44; Kimiya Tadashi and Lee Won-Deog, eds., Nikkan kankeishi 1965-2015: I. seiji [A History of Japan-South Korea Relations: Vol. 1 Politics] (Tokyo, Japan: Tōkyō Daigaku shuppankai, 2015), 299-322, 323-348, 371-395; Takahara Akio and Hattori Ryūji, eds., Nicchū kankeishi 1972-2012: I. seiji [A History of Japan-China Relations: Vol. 1 Politics] (Tokyo, Japan: Tōkyō Daigaku shuppankai, 2012), 133-165, 167-96. The names of Japanese, Korean, and Chinese authors, when they write Japanese books, follow the traditional order: a family name followed by a given name without a comma.


5. As binational attempts, scholarly organizations and academics in Japan and South Korea have formed symposiums, conferences, and study groups, representative of which include the “Japan-Korea Joint Study Group on History Textbooks” (Nikkan gōdō rekishi kyōkasho kenkyūkai) (1991-1992) and the “Symposium on Japanese and Korean History Textbooks” (Nikkan rekishi kyōkasho shinpōjūmu) (1997-2005). See Kazuhiko, Nikkan rekishi kyōkasho no kiseki, 24-28.

7. Not only have Korean and Chinese history textbooks have been translated into Japanese, but researchers from these countries have produced “common history textbooks” such as Nikkan kōryū no rekishi [A History of Japanese-Korean Interactions] (2007) and two volumes of Atarashii Higashi-Ajia no kingendaishi [A New History of Modern East Asia] (2012). Akashi shoten has published Japanese translations of other countries’ history textbooks, including Korean and Chinese history textbooks, and published the Japanese version of A History of Japanese-Korean Interactions. Atarashii Higashi-Ajia no kingendaishi was a renewed attempt to write a common history of modern East Asia. The original Mirai o hiraku rekishi: Higashi-Ajia sangoku no kingendaishi [A History to Open the Future: A History of Modern History of Three Countries in East Asia] (Tokyo, Japan: Kōbunken, 2005) was criticized for its failure to overcome “national” history, focus on criticizing only Japan, and factual and typographical errors; see Kimijima, Nikkan rekishi kyōkasho no kiseki, 34-38; and Nicchūkan sangoku kyōtsū rekishi kyōzai iinkai (Committee on Japan-China-Korea Trilateral Common History Teaching Materials), ed., Atarashii Higashi-Ajia no kingendaishi jō/ ge [A New History of Modern East Asia 2 vols.] (Tokyo, Japan: Nihon hyōronsha, 2012), i.

8. For Japanese, Korean, and Chinese names, I follow the traditional order.


10. The Japan-Korea Cultural Foundation website offers electronic copies of the reports on Japan-Korea Joint History Research: <https://www.jkcf.or.jp/projects/2005/18003/> and <https://www.jkcf.or.jp/projects/2010/17283/>. The reports on Japan-China Joint History Research are available on the above MOFA website, but were also published by Bensei shuppan in 2014: Kitaoka Shin’ichi and Bu Ping, eds., “Nicchū rekishi kyōdō kenkyū” hōkokusho: Kingendaishi-hen [The Reports on Japan-China Joint History Research: The Volume of Modern History] (Tokyo, Japan: Bensei shuppan, 2014).
11. Regarding how the joint history research projects went and the participants’ reflections, see the reports available on the above websites; also see Kimijima, *Nikkun rekishi kyōkasho no kiseki*, 54-80; Kimura, *Nikkun rekishi ninshiki mondati to wa nani ka*, 245-250; and Kasahara, *Senso wo shiranai kokumin no tame no Nicchu rekishi ninshiki*.

12. According to Nihon Seifu kankō-kyoku (Japan National Tourist Organization, or JNTO), the number of foreign visitors to Japan was over 31 million in 2018, which is about a quintuple increase since 2004. Nearly 86% of them were from Asian countries; about 27% visited from China, 24% from South Korea, 15% from Taiwan, and 7% from Hong Kong. See *Kokuseki/mokuteki-betsu hōnichi gaikyaku sū* (2004-nen-2020-nen) [The Numbers of Foreign Visitors to Japan by Nationality and by Purpose (2004-2020)], <https://www.jnto.go.jp/jpn/statistics/tourists_2020df.pdf>.

13. As to international students studying in Japan, there were almost 300,000 in the institutions of higher education and of Japanese language as of May 2018. The number had doubled during the past eight years, and tripled since 2002. As many as 93% came from Asia; about 38% of the total number are Chinese, 24% Vietnamese, 8% Nepalese, and slightly less than 6% Korean students. See Nihon gakusei shien kikō (Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO)), *Heisei-30-nendo gaikokujin ryūgakusei zaiseki jōkyō chōsa kekka* [The Report on Registered International Students for the 2018 Academic Year], <https://www.studyinjapan.go.jp/ja/statistics/zaiseki/data/2018.html> and <https://www.studyinjapan.go.jp/ja/_mt/2020/08/date2018z.pdf>, 3-4.


15. TUFS uses a quarter system, but since it is virtually a semester system in which students take classes in the spring and fall terms (each of them spanning thirteen weeks), yet are required to do extra assignments to make up for two weeks, I use “semester” in this article.

16. As of May 1, 2019, counting those in all grades, there were forty-five Japanese students (who are identified as “J1”) and fifty-four international students (“J2”) who major in Japanese language; eighteen J1 and fifty-three J2 students major in Japan area studies; “Gakubu zaisekisha (2019-nen 5-gatsu 1-tachi genzai)” [Students Registered in the Undergraduate Programs (as of May 1, 2019)], in the above “Gaiyō dēta 2019,” 5-6. I do not count “J3” students, or international students who, unlike J2 students, were not required to have native-level Japanese language skills when entering TUFS, because, for this reason, they did not take the courses that J1 and J2 students took together.

17. In Japan, the academic year starts in April and ends in March.


19. See note 15.
20. As mentioned in the main text, in Japanese universities, there is normally only one ninety-minute class meeting a week per course, and students take roughly ten to fifteen subject courses a week. Therefore, the weekly workload should be limited to a couple of hours per subject, and I judged reading forty to fifty pages a week manageable. The readings that I assigned in this class are as follows: Motegi, “Higashi-Ajia ni okeru wakai no mosaku,” 397-421; Kondō Takahiro, “Yōroppa no kokusai rekishi kyōkasho kenkyū to katari” [A Study of International History Textbooks and Narratives in Europe], in Jojutsu no sutairu to rekishi kyōiku: Kyōjuhō to kyōkasho no kokusai hikaku [Writing Styles and History Education: International Comparisons of History Pedagogies and Textbooks], ed. Watanabe Masako (Tokyo, Japan: Sangensha, 2003), 16-40; Okamoto Tomochika, “Nichi-Bei kyōkasho to gurōbaru jidai no rekishi jojutsu” [Japanese and American Textbooks and History Writings in the Global Era], in ibid., 216-246; Saitō Kazuharu, “Hōkokusho no yomikata” [How to Read the Report], in Sensō o shiranai kokumin no tame no Nicchū rekishi ninshiki, 27-52; Kawashima, “Nicchū rekishi kyōdō no kenkyū no mitsū no isō,” in ibid., 73-92; Shōji Jun’ichirō, “Nicchū to Doitsu-Pōrando ni okeru rekishi to ‘wakai’: Sono kyōtsūten to sōiten o chūshin to shite” [History and “Reconciliation” between Japan and China and between Germany and Poland: Focusing on Commonalities and Differences], in Rekishi to wakai, 232-261; Kenmochi Hisaki, “Rekishi ninshiki kyōgyū no jikken: Futsu-Doku kyōtsū rekishi kyōkasho o megutte” [An Experiment of Sharing a Historical Consciousness: Over the Franco-German Common History Textbook], in ibid., 209-229.

21. The grading scale was as follows: 20 points for excellent, 15 for good, 10 for satisfactory, 5 for failing, and 0 for no submission.

22. All the students signed the letter of consent; but one student agreed to let me use his materials except his journal.

23. Following are the drafts submitted by Groups 2, 5, 7, and 8: Group 2, “Nisshin sensō ni itatta haikei to boppatsu no gen’in” [The Backgrounds and Causes of the Sino-Japanese War] (paper submitted, June 21, 2019, and presented in class, July 5, 2019); Group 5, “Ianfu mondai” [The Comfort Women Problem] (paper submitted, June 21, 2019, and presented in class, June 28, 2019); Group 7, “Nicchū sensō-ka no shimin seikatsu: Nicchūkan sorezore no shiten kara” [Citizens’ Lives in the Sino-Japanese War: From Japanese, Chinese, and Korean Viewpoints] (paper submitted, June 21, 2019, and presented in class, June 28, 2019); and Group 8, “Nikkan heigō’ to ryōkokoku no bunka/keizai” [Japan’s Annexation of Korea and Their Cultures and Economies] (paper submitted, June 21, 2019, and presented in class, July 5, 2019). Composed of students from three East Asian countries, including one Japanese, one Chinese, and two Korean students, Group 2 chose to work on the first Sino-Japanese War. The group’s main interest was in clarifying “The Backgrounds and Causes of the Sino-Japanese War” as the text title indicates. For a college-level audience, the members wrote a longer and more particular account than Group 1 of a series of events that led to armed conflict between China and Japan over the Korean peninsula. This group dated the origins of the war back to the year 1869, instead of 1876, when the Korean court refused to accept the diplomatic document sent from the new Meiji government
that showed breaches of the traditional diplomatic norms and language in East Asia. The Meiji government intended to inform the Korean government about restoration of imperial rule through the feudal lord of Tsushima domain. The diplomatic document included such words as the “imperial” household and the “imperial decree” and used a new seal, which were not acceptable to the Korean government. Thus, the Korean side refused to receive the letter. Focusing on the political and diplomatic developments thereafter, Group 2’s description of the Sino-Japanese War and its aftermath was quite brief. Group 5 wrote a long column on comfort women, intended for junior high school students to discuss it as a current affairs topic yet to be resolved. The column focused on the 2015 agreements on the issue of comfort women reached between the Abe Shinzō and the Park Geun-hye (2013-2017) governments that, contrary to their aim, have failed to solve it “finally and irreversibly.” Using Japanese scholars’ books, Japanese and South Korean newspaper articles, and public opinion polls, the text showed the stances of the Japanese government and the Korean government under President Moon Jae-in (2017-present); the major newspapers’ reports; and public opinions on the 2015 agreements and on the ways to settle the comfort women problem in both countries. With this information, Group 5 directed learners to exchange their opinions and propose solutions. The group, made of two Japanese and two Korean students, had difficulty narrowing the divide in their views of the comfort women controversy. They agreed to accept their irreconcilability and, from their own experience, found value in teaching students how they should approach the debate. About the agreements between Japan and Korea, see Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Announcement by Foreign Ministers of Japan and the Republic of Korea at the Joint Press Occasion,” December 28, 2015, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kr/page4e_000364.html>. Group 7 picked the Sino-Japanese War of 1937 as its research topic, and the primary interest was in telling stories of “ordinary people.” They made a primary source-based text with many images and charts for high school students and anyone who wants to study history once again. Their draft was divided into four sections, each of which described people’s lives in Korea; in a city in Japanese-occupied Shanxi, China; in Japan; and in Manchuria. Two Japanese students worked on Japan and Manchuria, and the other two researched the wartime conditions in their own countries, respectively. The Korean part, after a typical narrative of Korean history textbooks, introduced the shifts in Japanese colonial policy during the 1930s and cultural assimilation programs. It was followed by a case study of the economic conditions in China under Japanese occupation using data on consumer prices, workers’ wages, and living expenses. The section about Japan, which met the goal of this group best, recounted how frugally ordinary people lived, portraying them as “participants of war.” The last section introduced Japanese immigrants in Manchuria and their experiences near and after Japan’s defeat. The contents and approaches were not consistent, yet it is of value that the group wrote a socio-economic history, making good use of primary sources to draw readers’ attention. Group 8, composed of two Japanese and two Korean students, related Korea under Japanese rule during the 1910s and 1920s, focusing on socio-economic policies and their effects. The title of the text is “Japan’s Annexation of Korea and Their Cultures and Economies,”
but the main theme is “developments” in Korea, and only a couple of columns were inserted to explain what was happening in Japan then. The draft was text-based, intended for use in high schools. The narrative was apparently different from that in standard Korean history textbooks that portray Korean history of this period as Korea’s national struggle against Japanese tyranny and exploitation. Although Group 8 remarked that Japanese colonial rule was particularly high-handed during the first decade restricting Koreans’ freedoms and rights and suppressing opposition movement, it positively evaluated Japan’s policy shift from “military rule” (budan tōchi) to “cultural rule” (bunka tōchi) and a series of measures that in the group’s view contributed to Korea’s modernization in the legal, administrative, and socio-economic systems. The reason behind such a relatively favorable view of Japanese colonial rule was the leadership of Korean student H. G., who took the colonial modernity (or “New Right”) thesis. There might have been some disagreements between the Korean students, but the Japanese students who knew little about Japanese colonial policies for Korea had few to make objection to. H. G. appeared to have enjoyed the freedom to write a Korean history text apart from the orthodox nationalist discourse; see H. G., questionnaire submitted in class, July 5, 2019. To protect students’ privacy, I put only their initials in this paper.

24. Group 1’s sources included Yamakawa shuppansha’s Shōsetsu sekaishi B [A Detailed History of the World B] (2015) and Shōsetsu Nihonshi B [A Detailed History of Japan B] (2012). This publishing company’s world history and Japanese history B textbooks are the most used textbooks in Japan. According to “17-nendo kōkō kyōkasho saitaku jōkyō: Monkashō matome” [The Situation of the Adoption of High School Textbooks for the 2017 Academic Year: Compiled by the Ministry of Education], in Naigai kyōiku: Dēta de yomu kyōiku: Chōsa tōkei kaisetsushū 2016-2017 [Education Inside and Outside: Education Analyzed with Data: Commentaries on Surveys and Statistics in 2016-2017], ed. Naigai kyōiku henshūbu (Tokyo, Japan: Jiji tsūshinsha, 2017), 55; Yamakawa’s Shōsetsu sekaishi B, a revision, and the previous editions combined occupied a share of 52.3% of all adopted sekaishi B textbooks, and Shōsetsu Nihonshi B, 63.6% of all adopted Nihonshi B textbooks. The group also utilized the Japanese translations of Korean and Chinese history textbooks published by Akashi shoten, such as Higashi-Ajia no rekishi [A History of East Asia] (2015), Kenteiban Kankoku no rekishi kyōkasho [An Authorized Textbook of South Korean History] (2013), and Chūgoku no rekishi [A History of China] (2004), originally written by the People’s Education Press. These are all for high school education.

25. Group 1, “Nisshin sensō” [The Sino-Japanese War] (paper submitted and presented in class, June 21, 2019), 1. For the title, the group wrote the Chinese and Korean names of the war in parentheses.


27. H. Z., journal submitted in class, July 5, 2019. This analysis seemed to be shared by the group members.

28. The Japanese-language books that Group 3 read are Ubuki Satoru, Hiroshima sengoshi: Hibaku taiken wa dō uketomerarete-kīta ka [A Postwar History of Hiroshima: How the Experiences of Hibakusha Have Been Taken] (Tokyo, Japan: Iwanami shoten, 2014); and Okuda Hiroko, Genbaku no kioku: Hiroshima/


32. The student used the same translated Chinese history textbook as Group 1; see note 24.

33. The student referred to Kyohak publishing company’s A History of East Asia (2009) and Akashi shoten’s Kankoku no rekishi [A History of South Korea] (2003), originally a state-approved textbook for high school students.

34. Depending on publishing companies, the tones of descriptions of the Sino-Japanese War vary. Here, the student modeled her explanation on Yamakawa shuppansha’s Shōsetsu Nihonshi B (2016); about this textbook, see note 24.

35. Group 6, “Rokōkyō jiken: Nicchū sensō no boppatsu” [The Marco Polo Bridge Incident: The Outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War] (paper submitted and presented in class, June 21, 2019), 1, 3-5. The Chinese explanation of the Sino-Japanese War also mentioned that at the Tokyo Trials, over 200,000 deaths of Chinese civilians and prisoners of war were acknowledged.

36. Group 6, “Rokōkyō jiken,” 4. The phrase “agree to disagree” is drawn from p. 80 of the Kawashima paper; see note 9.


38. Kawashima, “Nicchū rekishi kyōdō kenkyū no mittsu no isō,” 84, 88-89. For additional sources, also see notes 9 through 11.


40. For the question on learning (Q.4), the average rate was 4.06. 5 is for “learned extremely well,” 4 “learned well,” 3 “learned as much as usual,” 2 “could not learn well,” and 1 “could not learn at all.” Out of thirty responses that I could collect, nine students chose 5, fifteen chose 4, five chose 3, and one chose 2.

41. N. D., questionnaire submitted in class, July 5, 2019. He put 5 on this question.

42. N. D., questionnaire submitted in class. This comment is from the next question (Q.5), whether group work influenced his way of thinking. He chose 5 “had great influence,” while 4 is “had influence,” 3 “neither yes nor no,” 2 “had little influence,” and 1 “had no influence at all.”
43. N. M., questionnaire submitted in class, July 5, 2019. She rated her experience as 5 “learned extremely well.”

44. N. M., questionnaire submitted in class. This comment is on Q.5. She chose 5: group work “had great influence” on her way of thinking.

45. T. Y., questionnaire submitted in class, July 5, 2019. For Q.4 on learning, she selected 4 “learned well.”


47. For Q.10, a rating of 5 is mutual understanding was “extremely deepened,” 4 “deepened,” 3 “not more than usual,” 2 “not deepened much,” and 1 “not deepened at all.” Three students chose 5, seventeen chose 4, eight chose 3, one chose 2, and none chose 1. One student’s self-evaluation is between 4 and 3; see note 50 as well.

48. N. D., questionnaire submitted in class, July 5, 2019. Also see notes 41 and 42.

49. T. Y., questionnaire submitted in class, July 5, 2019. She left a similar comment for Q.5, which asked about the degree of influence of group work on her way of thinking, and chose 2 here, too.

50. G. A., questionnaire submitted in class, July 5, 2019. She wrote the same reflection in her journal submitted on the same day. About Group 8 and the leader, also see note 23.


52. Y. K., questionnaire submitted in class, July 5, 2019.

53. For Q.6, a rating of 5 is that there was a “strong feeling of resistance” to unfamiliar viewpoints and facts; 4 is a “feeling of resistance”; 3 is “hard to say if there was or not”; 2 is “little feeling of resistance”; and 1 is “no resistance at all.” Given these answers, the average rate is 2.66.

54. K. R., questionnaire submitted in class, July 5, 2019. He also wrote down his reflection on group discussion in his journal submitted on the same day.


56. N. D., questionnaire submitted in class, July 5, 2019.

57. K. M., questionnaire submitted in class, July 5, 2019. These are her answers to Q.1 (on students’ motivation), Q.3 (whether they enjoyed the study), and Q.6.

58. Group 5 obviously had more difficulty than the other groups in working together, and the two who judged that teamwork was “not so good” are from this group. Not only the topic—comfort women—but lack of commitment of some members seems to have deterred productive work; see K. R., journal and questionnaire submitted in class, July 5, 2019.

59. For Q.3, a rating of 5 is “enjoyed [group work] very much,” 4 “enjoyed,” 3 “neutral,” 2 “did not enjoy it so much,” and 1 “did not enjoy at all.” Five students chose 5, seventeen chose 4, three chose 3, five chose 2, and none chose 1, which gives us the average score of 3.73.
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