

## THE THREE PHASES OF JAPAN-CHINA JOINT-HISTORY RESEARCH: WHAT WAS THE CHALLENGE?\*

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*In 2006 the Japanese and Chinese governments initiated a joint historical project to promote mutual understanding of World War II history. The primary purpose was to depoliticize the issue of historical recognition, and to promote mutual understanding in the spirit of “agree to disagree.” It can be said that both sides ultimately succeeded in this point. Yet the project remains incomplete, since the third stage of the research requires both sides to discuss and release research findings to the public. The Chinese government has consistently avoided doing so. As an outside contributor to this joint research, the author introduces how this intergovernmental history project was created and implemented at three levels—that of historians, then governments, and finally the media. New problems were created because of gaps in understanding between the Chinese and Japanese sides as well as communication problems at all three levels. One conclusion is that intergovernmental joint research may harden the shells of both sides’ national histories in the end, making it necessary to encourage private institutions to conduct research on historical recognition in the future.*

**Key words:** historical reconciliation, Japan-China relations, media and government, judicial court and reconciliation

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\* Translated from Japanese by Haruna Minoura.

## Introduction

Japan's historical recognition of its war responsibilities has been a diplomatic and social issue for some time. Beginning with the anti-Japanese textbooks, these issues have a one hundred year history, dating back to the first decade of the 1900s.<sup>1</sup> In postwar Japan, these were domestic issues in the world of journalism and the media as well as international issues in Japan's relations with China and South Korea. However, when it came to the question of "resolution" of these issues, the debate centered on the judiciary, where fact-finding was conducted and "victory" or "defeat" determined final judgment.<sup>2</sup>

A turning point occurred with two judgments from the first and second petty benches of the Japanese Supreme Court on April 27, 2007.<sup>3</sup> The summaries of the judgments read:

With regard to the claims of citizens of the People's Republic of China against Japan or Japanese citizens or juridical persons arising in the course of prosecution of the Japan-China War, the competency of these claims in litigations should be deemed to have been lost by Para. 5 of the [1972] Joint Communiqué of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People's Republic of China.<sup>4</sup>

From the aspect of fact-finding, this judgment has a significant implication, since it acknowledges that the kidnapping and

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1. See Osato Hiroaki and Sunayama Yukio, eds., *Kindai Chūgoku, Kyōkasho To Nihon* (Modern China, Textbooks and Japan) (Tokyo: Kyuko Shoin, 2010).
  2. Okuda Yasuhiro, Kawashima Shin, Akiyam Yoshiaki, Shin Hebon, and Suzuki Ken, *Kyōdo Kenkyū, Chūgoku Sengo Hoshō—Rekishi, Hō, Saiban* (Joint Research, Postwar Compensation toward China: History, Law, and Trial) (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2000).
  3. For the case regarding comfort women, see 2005 (Ju) No. 1735 at [www.courts.go.jp/search/jhsp0030?action\\_id=dspDetail&hanreiSrchKbn=01&hanreiNo=34591&hanreiKbn=01](http://www.courts.go.jp/search/jhsp0030?action_id=dspDetail&hanreiSrchKbn=01&hanreiNo=34591&hanreiKbn=01) (in Japanese). For the case regarding forced labor, see 2004 (Ju) No. 1658 at [www.courts.go.jp/english/judgments/text/2007.04.27-2004.-Ju-.No..1658.html](http://www.courts.go.jp/english/judgments/text/2007.04.27-2004.-Ju-.No..1658.html) (in English).
  4. Ibid.

forced labor of Chinese workers was a state policy, and that Chinese women were imprisoned in bases of the Imperial Japanese Army, where they were repeatedly raped by multiple soldiers and were left with severe psychological aftershocks. However, the judgment's conclusion overturned past common knowledge about postwar compensation. It ruled that due to paragraph 5 of the joint communique cited by the court ("The Government of the People's Republic of China declares that in the interest of the friendship between the Chinese and the Japanese peoples, it renounces its demand for war reparation from Japan"), the individual rights of Chinese citizens to claim compensation were also abandoned.<sup>5</sup> The Supreme Court's judgment relied on the circumstances behind the treaty's negotiations rather than the interpretation of the treaty. The judgment considered that the joint communique for the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China was under the same framework as the San Francisco Peace Conference, and therefore it decided that neither the exclusion of the word "right" of compensation claim nor the exclusion of the individual right of compensation claim should be allowed.<sup>6</sup>

As a result of this judgment, efforts regarding postwar compensation issues in the judiciary, at least within the context of Japan-China relations, largely reduced their potentiality.<sup>7</sup> This

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5. The often-cited view that the 1972 Joint Communique of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People's Republic of China waives the right to seek compensation, including individual compensation claims, was not adopted in this judgment. Hence, it cannot be concluded that the treaty's application included mainland China.

6. Previously, regarding the issue of postwar compensation, while the judiciary considered that the right to claim state compensation was waived by the treaty, it concluded that individual compensation was not included here. Moreover, in the case of individual compensation, since state immunity and the limitation period would become obstacles, only cases in which a private institution rather than the state conducted illegal activities and those cases that cleared the limitation period problem were taken up. See Okuda, Kawashima et al., *Kyōdo Kenkyū, Chūgoku Sengo Hoshō* (Joint Research, Postwar Compensation toward China).

7. Incidentally, there are no Supreme Court judgments on Japan-South Korea relations, but there was a judgment made by a lower court on the

means that the judiciary itself indicated the limits of its capacity to resolve this issue; it cut the judiciary off from considering postwar compensation and historical recognition. Nor did the judiciary particularly mention possible resolution of the issue by the legislative body, which was suggested in past judgments. In the case regarding forced labor, the judgment stated: “we expect the appellant and other parties concerned to make efforts to give relief to the Victims,” and in the case regarding comfort women, the judgment went no further than to acknowledge their “tremendous mental and physical pain.”

Taking into account that the judiciary had fulfilled a certain role regarding the “resolution” and discussion of the issue of historical recognition, and that the Supreme Court itself had significantly reduced that role by making the judgments, let us examine other actors. To be sure, it was not that the executive and the legislative branches of government, society, or historians were indifferent to the issue of historical recognition. Postwar compensation was certainly the foundation of Japan’s postwar diplomacy in Asia, and the Murayama Statement made in 1995 was a settlement of the past on behalf of the Japanese government. For the time being, the Japanese government’s position on postwar compensation is that, with few exceptions, the political and diplomatic aspects of the issue have been settled.

Broadly speaking, postwar compensation is a subset of the historical recognition issue. In other words, Japanese society as a whole must address more than issues directly related to the war. It must also answer questions relating to colonial rule, occupational administration, past relations with neighboring countries, and any difference of perceptions that might prevent the development of current and future relations. This is closely related to postwar Japan’s “de-imperialization,” and is intricately related to domestic politics, diplomacy, society, law, and business activities.

Against this background, the Japan-China Joint History Research was established. This project was proposed at the

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1956 Japan-Korea Basic Treaty, which ruled that the issue including private compensation was resolved.

Japan-China foreign ministers' meeting on April 17, 2005. After the project was approved in 2006, it was completed at the beginning of 2010, and currently the project is in the process of checking the translation.<sup>8</sup> The timing of the proposal of this joint research is important: It came almost one month after the Tokyo High Court made the original judgment on March 18, 2005 in the comfort women case—the case that the Supreme Court decided on in 2007, as mentioned earlier.

How effective was the intergovernmental joint-history research in resolving problems of history? This should probably be seen from a long-term perspective. However, as an outside contributor who was directly involved in this project, I would like to state my personal opinion at this moment as the project has just been completed. The reason is because the circumstances and the problems of this joint research were not clearly understood by general society owing to insufficient disclosure of the joint research outcomes.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Phases of East Asia's Historical Perception Issue and the Aim of Joint Research**

#### *Interpreting "Historical Recognition"*

The issue of "historical recognition" between Japan and China is a collective term for issues of history, which includes all acts of "aggression" such as war crimes and the colonial occupation. Even territorial disputes are now included in "historical recognition," which suggests that the scope of the issue is

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8. I am guessing that the proposition of the Japan-China Joint History Research from the administrative side and the Supreme Court judgment ten days after from the judicial side are connected to a certain extent. I would like to conduct further research on this point.
  9. The Japanese side's supervisory institution has set guidelines for the release of information about Japan-China Joint History Research for scholars involved in the joint research. This article also follows these guidelines.

expanding. But interpretation of the issue varies greatly; in some cases the subjects are limited to war, colonization, and occupational administration, whereas in other cases the whole of modern and contemporary history is targeted.

However, it can be said that historical perception has been treated as a symbol of “resentment” between Japan and neighboring countries, and at the same time, it has been linked to each country’s historical recognition as a domestic issue. There are three contexts behind the historical recognition issue that are increasingly seen as problematic in East Asia since the 1980s and especially in the 1990s. The first is the conclusion of the Cold War. The “postwar settlement” was originally worked out between Japan and the countries in the liberal camp in the early days after the war, and reconciliation was based on the framework of the Cold War. In other words, resentments that were kept in check by the Cold War burst out in the post-Cold War period. Similarly, normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China occurred in 1972, against the backdrop of the two Chinas problem and the Sino-Soviet split.

The second context is the economic development and democratization of East Asian countries, particularly South Korea and Taiwan. In these countries, negotiations for peace with Japan and negotiations for compensation were conducted under a military dictatorship or an authoritarian regime in the 1950s and 1960s. As these countries underwent a process of democratization, the ways in which their governments dealt with the past have been criticized. There has been a redefinition of history because citizens are settling the past once again with their own hands through civil protest and the ability to vote. As a result, popular movements in Korea and Taiwan turned into demands for Japan to provide private compensation. The judiciary in Japan had to handle these demands.

The third context is the rise of China. A certain level of democratization has accompanied China’s rise. As China’s voice in the world increases, together with statements from overseas Chinese, East Asia’s historical recognition has spread around the world in a way that is critical of Japan.

### *Reconciliation through Joint Historical Research*

On the global stage, historical perception has come to be regarded as an important topic, and a non-Asian perspective has increasingly been applied to East Asia's historical recognition. One background factor is that as international relations transform, culture, emotions, and public diplomacy have gradually increased in importance alongside political and economic issues. Second, reconciliation in the region is recognized as an important part of the process of regional integration. Third, in post-conflict peace building, programs that bring future reconciliation into view are gaining increasing attention. The placement of Sino-Japanese and East Asian historical recognition within global historical case studies is also a recent trend.<sup>10</sup>

Why did Japan and China jointly decide to launch the history research project in 2006? As is widely known, it was because of the recognition that Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine had negatively affected not only political and diplomatic relations between Japan and China, but also their economic and social relations. To be sure, economic relations between the two countries further developed under the Koizumi administration, so it is not accurate to say that the visits to Yasukuni immediately led to their cooling. Nevertheless, there was a shared understanding that "history" was becoming an obstructive factor in the development of healthy relations and the joint research project was established to remove that obstacle.

The plan was first formulated in 2005 during the Koizumi administration under Foreign Minister Machimura Nobutaka. It

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10. See Kenmochi Hisaki, Kosuge Nobuko, and Lionel Babicz, eds., *Rekishi Ninshiki Kyōyū No Chihei: Doku Futsu Kyōtsū Kyōkasho To Nitchūkan No Kokoromi* (The Horizon of Shared Historical Recognition: French-German Common History Textbook and the Experiment in Japan, China and Korea) (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2009); Kosuge Nobuko, *Sengo Wakai: Nihon Wa "Kako" Kara Tokihanatareru Ka* (Postwar Reconciliation: Will Japan be Freed from the Past?) (Tokyo: Chikuma Shinsho, 2005); Kaneko Masaru, Yamaguchi Jiro, and Takahashi Tetsuya, *Gurōbarizēshon To Sensō Sekinin* (Globalization and War Responsibility) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2001).

was then approved during Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's visit to China in October 2006. Japanese Foreign Minister Aso Taro and the Chinese side established the implementation framework during an APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) meeting the following month. According to their agreement, the purpose of the joint research was for intellectuals from both countries "to conduct joint research on the 2000-year history of exchanges between Japan and China, their unfortunate history in modern times and the development of the Japan-China relationship in the sixty post-war years, and to deepen objective perception toward history through this research and promote mutual understanding."<sup>11</sup>

Joint research is a new method to deal with history at the governmental level between Japan and China. At least until the 1980s, slogans such as "returning good for evil" (*yi de bao yuan*) and "Sino-Japanese friendship" based on the doctrine of distinguishing between military personnel and civilians mitigated public outburst of resentment. In the 1990s, politically driven methods such as the Murayama Statement were used for the same purpose. However, joint research places historians at the center and appears to be a diplomatic action that segregates historical recognition from the political arena. Kitaoka Shinichi, chairman of the Japanese side, asserted that the aim of this joint research was the depoliticization of the historical recognition issue, promotion of mutual understanding in the spirit of *agree to disagree*, and agreeing to compromise where possible.<sup>12</sup> The pur-

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11. During former Prime Minister Abe's visit to China in October 2006, at the Japan-China summit meeting, both sides agreed to launch a joint history research project by intellectuals from Japan and China by the end of the year. In November of that year, at the Japan-China foreign ministers' meeting on the sidelines of the APEC ministerial meeting, both sides agreed on the implementation framework of the joint history research. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, [www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/kaidan/g\\_aso/apec\\_06/kaidan\\_jc\\_rekishi.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/kaidan/g_aso/apec_06/kaidan_jc_rekishi.html). The English translation is based on the Summary of the First Meeting of the Japan-China Joint History Research Committee, at [www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/meet0612.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/meet0612.html).

12. Shinichi Kitaoka, "Nitchū Rekishi Kyōdō Kenkyū No Shuppatsu: Jijitsu

pose was not to correct the other side's interpretation of history. Scholars from the Chinese side mostly shared this last point.

There are a few points to keep in mind. First, the goals of the project are not to decide on winners and losers, as in a court's judgment. Second, the historians who participated in the joint research did not assume that there is one correct interpretation of history or any way of distinguishing right and wrong. This is not to say it is not possible to narrow the range of interpretation by gathering empirical proof via historical sources that pass criticism in proper and multiple ways. Nevertheless, there are many ways to depict history, and the study of history allows for that diversity.

Therefore, this joint research does not aim to create uniformity between the Japanese and Chinese views; rather, the aim is to compromise where possible through empirical proof, while understanding and respecting the other side's position. The overriding purpose was to prevent, if ever so slightly, the perception of history that is hindering mutual exchange in the political, economic, and cultural arenas. I stress this goal because I want to call attention to whether this goal was understood by society from the start of the joint research, and when the "outcome" of the joint research was released, whether anyone, including the government and the media, evaluated it by returning to this starting point.

### **Each Side's Joint History Research**

Historians have their own subject of study and conduct empirical research based on primary sources. Through the accumulation of primary sources and sharing of previous studies, the range of description is narrowed, producing an interpretation that is called an established theory. Still, the description

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No Tankyū Ni Motozuite" (Start of the Japan-China Joint History Research: Based on the Search for the Truth), *Gaiko Forum*, vol. 20, No. 5 (May, 2007), pp. 14-20.

method varies, and an established theory can change with the emergence of a new source or revelation. General history is written by connecting together established theories and making a narrative. There is diversity in general history and thus for historians, history is basically *a history or histories*.

When it comes to official discourse concerning national history, especially in textbooks, it becomes a different matter. In this case, it is assumed that history is the *correct* history, and the narrative about citizens for the training of citizens. Of course, in the case of multiple textbooks under the textbook authorization system, it becomes *the histories*, the plural form. This presumes the existence of “the correct history,” and differs from the history that historians write as studies.

When historians conduct joint research projects, whether domestic or international, they are conscious of *a history or histories*. They offer each other sources and viewpoints, and share previous research. Through this process, they narrow the range of interpretation, and feed back the experience to their various studies. Joint research sometimes establishes theories; at other times it creates more multipolarity. In East Asia, scholars tend to be trained in their respective countries and represent the perspectives of their nations. Nevertheless, many theories and interpretations exist within each country, so it is not unusual that there are alternative theories with historical evidence. Finally, new theories are established and trendy theories emerge on a regular basis.

In East Asia, there are many regional joint history research projects, and any intergovernmental “joint research” of history is of itself not particularly groundbreaking, contrary to popular perceptions. When I have talked to people from the media, I have come across a number of cases where they misunderstood that the joint research itself was groundbreaking.

There are two main types of private joint-history research. The vast majority does not address the historical recognition issue, and these usually are academic joint research projects on historical events and individual subjects of study.<sup>13</sup> The other

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13. The author participates in a variety of international joint history

less common type of joint-research projects addresses the issue of historical recognition; they are conducted by private institutions.<sup>14</sup> A considerable number of joint-research projects of this type already exist.

When categorizing privately conducted joint research projects over the historical recognition issue, the first question is whether they aim to meld the different *histories* into one history. If the answer is “yes,” this involves combining *the history* of each East Asian country into *the new history*, which is conducive for promoting the concept of an East Asian Community. Invariably, when attempting to create *the new history*, historians in these countries end up debating which of *the histories* is correct and subjectively support their nationalistic historical narrative and interpretation of regional history. These historians come back to the point where they debate which country’s national history should be used for which specific topic. In reality, Japanese history + Chinese history + Korean history + Taiwanese history does not make East Asian history.

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research projects, including research on Chinese diplomatic history, media history, Jinmen Island history, and the life of Chiang Kai-shek.

14. In fact, the majority of historians tend to distance themselves from the issue of historical recognition. It is said that the historical recognition issue and the study of history are practically unrelated; that historians should not become involved in political and social issues; or that writings on this subject will not yield much fruit. Actually, as a historian, it is difficult to say “yes” if someone asks if getting involved in this issue would become an advantage for my own research. However, there are also a number of scholars who are conscious that so long as historians produce historical narratives, they cannot be outsiders to the historical recognition issue, or consider that at least they should not be indifferent to this issue. Just as there is a wide variety of history written by historians, how historians recognized and became involved in the historical recognition issue also varied. For this reason, joint research on historical recognition conducted by historians, and numerous international conferences, also took a wide variety of forms. For example, there are those that study other countries’ historical narratives as knowledge and only hold dialogue, which can be called the limited-involvement type; and there are others that actually attempt to resolve this issue, which can be called the proactive-involvement type. Needless to say, the latter type is in the minority.

If the answer to the above question is “no,” these countries’ historians write their own histories, but also understand the other side and hold dialogues. Afterwards they may make changes if there are points that they feel compelled to revise. This position is known as *agreeing to disagree*. The historians who took part in the intergovernmental Japan-China joint history research approached their task in this spirit.

The next question is whether the product of a joint research on the historical recognition issue should be given back to society. Those scholars who support the idea of giving back to society have edited a common textbook. One leading example is *History to Open Up the Future: Joint Edition by Japan, China, and Korea—The Three East Asian Countries’ Modern and Contemporary History*, by the Japan-China-Korea Trilateral Common History Education Material Committee.<sup>15</sup> This effort aims for reconciliation while simultaneously attempting to create *the history* of East China. A second example is *Historical Understanding that Transcends National Boundaries* by Mitani Hiroshi, Liu Jie, and Yang Daqing,<sup>16</sup> in which a history or histories is set as a premise. The study focuses on the causes and background of the differences in Japan’s and China’s historical narratives, as well as the differences in their interpretations. When the difference in history is targeted as the subject of study, one becomes aware that within the historical narrative, there are elements of a distinctive “national history.”

On the other hand, some take the position that the outcome of the joint research does not necessarily need to be given back to society. This position is taken by those who argue that research should be kept as knowledge among historians, or that the

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15. Nitchūkan San Goku Kyōtsū Rekishi Kyōzai Iinkai (Japan-China-Korea Trilateral Common History Education Material Committee), *Mirai Wo Hiraku Rekishi: Nihon, Chūgoku, Kankoku= Kyōdō Henshū Higashi Ajia 3 Goku No Kingendaishi* (History to Open Up the Future: Joint Edition by Japan, China, and Korea—The Three East Asian Countries’ Modern and Contemporary History) (Tokyo: Koubunken, 2005).

16. Mitani Hiroshi, Liu Jie, and Yang Daqing, *Kokkyō Wo Koeru Rekishi Ninshiki* (Historical Understanding that Transcends National Boundaries) (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2005).

process of joint research is meaningful without producing something concrete for social consumption.

### **The Placement of Intergovernmental Joint History Research**

When all the Japan-China joint history research conducted by private institutions are scrutinized, it can be said that these take the position of a *history or histories* and do not aim to make plural histories into a singular history. Based on the spirit of *agreeing to disagree* and having in mind mutual understanding, respect, and a degree of compromise, these researchers attain in part the noble goal of depoliticizing the historical recognition issue. Besides this, what other characteristics are evident in the method of the intergovernmental Japan-China joint history research?

First, rather than stepping into each country's framework of national history, the subject of research was the history of Japan-China relations. In this way, both sides could avoid clashing over the root of historical recognition while increasing dialogue, since each side could attain superiority with regard to its own national history in the two states' relationship.

Second, the research covered the general history between Japan and China from ancient times up to the present. There are many privately-based joint-research projects on the history of Japan-China relations, but very few of them target general history. It is remarkable that ultimately each side co-wrote a general history of Japan-China relations that spans ancient times to the present. The historians were able to avoid debate over micro-level details by focusing on the macro history. Also, by adding the contemporary period, there were expectations that Japan's assistance to China and Japan's status as a peaceful state would be included.

Third, while each chapter set up keywords that shaped the narrative, the research also accepted a variety of narratives from both sides. Fourth, like the previously mentioned work, *Historical Understanding that Transcends National Boundaries*, the joint

research includes a chapter that confronts historical recognition. Fifth, by having discussions on each chapter, the scholars wrote comments on the other side, and wrote about the results of compromises and the limits of joint research. Worldwide, this method is often adopted, but it is not generally adopted in private joint-history research projects. Sixth, the joint research was conducted on the premise that the outcome would be publicly available (at least in Japan), since it was tax-funded and government-sponsored.

Finally, and most importantly, besides the scholars, the government also directly took part in this project. This proved counterproductive as it politicized the outcome. Often when joint research is conducted with a grant from a foundation, the intent of the foundation might be reflected in the joint research. But it is unthinkable that the foundation would also step into the content of the research. These characteristics of the intergovernmental Japan-China joint-history research project distinguish it from the joint research conducted by private institutions. For this reason, the author thinks that the intergovernmental joint research showed an interesting development.

### **The Three Phases of the Japan-China Joint-History Research Project**

#### *Differences Over Distribution*

The outcome of the Japan-China joint-history research was released at the end of January 2010. However, the original research was not distributed, for reasons explained in more detail below. No journalist seemed to notice and report this point. The Japanese side's chairman, Kitaoka Shinichi, wrote about the circumstances right before the release.<sup>17</sup> The research

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17. Kitaoka Shinichi, "Nitchū Rekishi Kyōdō Kenkyū Wo Furikaeru" (Reflecting on the Japan-China Joint History Research), *Gaiko Forum*, vol. 261 (April, 2010), pp. 62-70.

was supposed to be made public in 2008, the year of the thirtieth anniversary of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and China, but it was postponed due to Chinese requests.

After the Japan-China joint-history research was released, I read newspaper articles that analyzed the content. The author experienced a surreal feeling, as if this was not the joint research that I had participated in. The “focus” of the article and the hot issues in the research field were different. However, this was not surprising. The comments historians made to each other—which were originally supposed to be made public—were not released due to the Chinese side’s requests. This is unfortunate because third parties will not understand what was discussed, to what extent the two sides compromised, and what challenges remained. In that event, the only way is to read and compare both sides’ papers and smoke out the differences. Furthermore, if the third party does not recognize in the first place that this joint research does not aim to make different historical narratives identical, it is all the more likely that the third party will compare such narratives and focus on the differences.

When faced with the huge disparity between the research process and the media reports, the author realized that this intergovernmental joint-history research contained three stages. The first was the joint research conducted at the scholars’ level, the second was the intergovernmental negotiations, and the third was the media’s reporting. These three stages at times overlapped but generally occurred in succession.<sup>18</sup>

Reflecting on the joint research at the level of joint scholarship, again, both sides did not envisage making their histories conform and were able to hold empirical discussions based on historical sources and the outcomes of each side’s previous studies. Of course, there were times when the discussions took an emotional tone, but these were not about the war between Japan

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18. With regard to these three phases, the author has made a presentation titled “*Rekishi Ninshiki Mondai To Rekishi Kyōdō Kenkyū Ni Tsuite*” (Regarding the Issue of Historical Recognition and Joint History Research) at the PHP Research Institute, February 9, 2010. The summary is available at <http://research.php.co.jp/etc/054/>.

and China or the Nanjing massacre.<sup>19</sup> In fact, in the field of modern history, international conferences have been held very frequently in the past twenty years, so that both sides understood each other's argument. It is common practice to include the other country's works when conducting extensive literature research.

Of course, since this Japan-China joint-history research centered on the history between Japan and China, this mutual understanding was encouraged. Nevertheless, the section covering the postwar period faced great difficulties. This could be that the contemporary period has yet to become history, but also probably because exchanges of views between Japan and China covering contemporary history had not been conducted as frequently as they have been for modern history.

### *Three Stages of the Process*

After the completion of the joint scholarship, including all general remarks, all the chapters, and the comments in response to those chapters, it was discovered the final product was more academic than originally anticipated. The expectations of the participants, including the author, might have increased slightly. Of course, Chinese-style arguments could be seen everywhere, but by no means were excessive political rants heard in many places.

In the second stage, after the papers were submitted and intergovernmental negotiations began in earnest, the Chinese side started to make new requests, which were not discussed in the first stage. It was explained that these new "considerations" were for China's domestic public opinion. Saying "these cannot be made public," the Chinese side requested that the Japanese side revise the wording and content of the Japanese side's

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19. I have heard that also in the joint-history research conducted between Germany and Poland under the auspices of UNESCO, the discussion of World War II did not run into difficulties. The joint-history research between Japan and China was the same.

papers. Moreover, the comments could not be released, and in the end, the third section was kept from the Chinese public. Regarding the general remarks, a revised version was released.

As a result of this second-stage process, the grand achievements of the joint-history research conducted by scholars in the first stage were watered down by political considerations on the Chinese side. It was now no longer possible to understand what each side discussed and revised, and what remained unsettled. If the ultimate goal of this joint research is only to depoliticize the issue of historical recognition, it does not matter how the outcome is released, but the author felt it was regrettable that many parts were closed to the public. This was because I expected the final product to reach a level of achievement that was commensurate with the first stage.

The third stage of media reporting was based on the watered down product of the second stage. For this reason, it was nearly impossible to convey to the public the atmosphere of understanding and fairness present in the first stage. Still, it is questionable how many journalists were aware of the fact that the comments historians made to each other were not made public, or took into consideration that the joint research did not aim to take the perspective of *the history*, and above all did not aim to create an identical narrative of history. Most reporting was based on the misperception that the ultimate goal was for the two sides' narratives to converge. Therefore, didn't the media find out the differences in the narratives and point of views, write about them, and see them as remaining challenges?

As a participant in the first stage, I had predicted a government intervention in the second stage, and carefully considered the media and domestic reaction in the third stage. However, I learned a lesson: When the unpublicized parts of the joint research increased during the second stage, I should have predicted in advance that misunderstanding would arise in the third stage. Within my limited capacity, I should have taken measures to explain in some way the situation in the first stage, including the purpose of the joint research. Those of us on the Japanese side who took part in the first and second stages

should have taken preventive measures such as informally explaining the situation to the media.

## **Asymmetry between Japan and China over the Joint-History Research**

### *Differences among Historians*

Naturally, the joint-history research by the governments of Japan and China was conscious of the asymmetry between the two countries. This was evident in all three stages. In Kosuge Nobuko's *Postwar Reconciliation: Will Japan Be Freed from the Past?* reconciliation over history occurs between democratically developed countries. Thus, the Japan-China joint-history research project was a test for joint-history research, because it was conducted between a democratic country and a non-democratic country in which freedom of speech is only gradually becoming ensured.

However, as the research by Elazar Barkan at Columbia University shows, there is also a perspective that sees historical reconciliation as part of peace building. It could also be said that East Asia's historical recognition issue is occurring because after the end of the Sino-Japanese war and occupation, East Asia has neglected or put a lid on historical reconciliation from the perspective of peace building. In this sense, it was clear that something different from historical reconciliation between democratized developed countries would occur.

East Asia's historical recognition issue has several characteristics. To name a few, war and colonial occupation are often clearly distinguished in Europe; but in East Asia, these are combined into Japan's wartime aggression. Just as Japan's and China's modern nation building was accompanied by the compilation of textbooks that portrayed the other negatively, which led to the historical recognition issue in the prewar era, the current issue of historical recognition is also occurring under a historical perspective that is entwined with each country's own identity.

Furthermore, with the democratization of South Korea and Taiwan as well as China's cautious expansion of limited speech freedoms, the historical recognition issue has surfaced as both a regional and domestic phenomenon. Finally, China is a giant non-democratic country, and one that sees history as part of the party's political and moral legitimacy.

These considerations form the background of the asymmetry between Japan and China. More specifically, the following asymmetry could be observed. In the first stage, discussions among historians took place in an academic atmosphere; nevertheless, the differences in perception were salient. In the case of modern and contemporary history, the biggest differences are summed up in the following three points.

First, the Chinese side took a results-oriented position. In other words, they depicted the road that ultimately led to the Sino-Japanese war, with explanations for each period interpreted as part of a path toward war. This approach is supported by, in essence, necessarianism, which sees, for example, that Japan's aggression in the surrounding countries was inevitable because Japan, a resource-scarce country, had been modernizing since the Meiji Restoration. Regarding each event, this narrow view does not allow for the possibility of avoiding war or confrontation. It argues that the conflict between Japan and China in the 1920s and 1930s was part of the process of Japan's increasing aggression and that there was no change in Japan's essence of aggressiveness. On the other hand, the Japanese side valued process over results, and took the position that while there were many possibilities for each individual event, particular decisions were made under various conditions, and those individual results weaved a pattern, creating the course of history. Therefore, the Japanese side does not adopt necessarianism.

Second, while the Chinese side distinguishes between the military and civilians, the Japanese side does not. This distinction attributes Japan's aggression and war to a faction of militarists; it sees ordinary citizens as victims like the Chinese, and thus the source of the Japan-China friendship movement. Since China tracks the starting point of Japan's aggression against

China as far back as possible, it depicts history by distinguishing one portion of militarists who are responsible for the aggression, and ordinary citizens who are the subject of friendship between Japan and China. Therefore, China highly values Chinese students who go to Japan to study.

The third point is the boundary between the past and the present. In academic circles, Chinese history during the 1950 and 1960s is gradually becoming the subject of historical study; but even in the first stage of the joint-history research, the period after 1949 was clearly the “present.” In other words, history is recognized as connected to the current administration’s basis of legitimacy and foreign policy. Narratives on the Tokyo Tribunal and the Taiwan issue, as well as those regarding China’s internal affairs such as the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen incident, were clearly based on the Chinese government’s official position, and the Japanese side was also requested to accept such narratives. The requests made to the Japanese side concerning the contemporary period were more passionate than for the modern period, and this was probably related to historicization.

### *Other Differences*

Next, we consider the asymmetry between Japan and China on the governmental level. The parent organizations for this joint-history research were the Japan Institute of International Affairs, and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences’ Institute of Modern History. But the project was actually supervised by the China division of the Japanese ministry of foreign affairs and the Japan division of China’s foreign affairs ministry. (Of course the Chinese Communist Party was probably involved, but the situation is unclear.) While there was a difference in the two sides’ jurisdiction—the authority of the Japanese foreign ministry’s China division was much larger than its Chinese counterpart—the more important distinction is how they were involved in the content of the joint research.

On the Japanese side, there may have been some discussion between the Japanese foreign ministry and the chairman, but the

ministry never directly demanded that revisions be made to the papers. Requests for revising the papers on the Chinese side should also have been handled by scholars. However, in reality, after the final draft was completed by the scholars, and when it was handed over to both governments, as previously mentioned, the Chinese foreign ministry (the government and the party via the foreign ministry) made requests to the Japanese side to revise the content of the papers. In other words, the final draft written by scholars did not become the final draft.

I am not at liberty to write what the Chinese government requested, and what was revised. Suffice it to say that a perspective other than that of the scholars permeated the final outcome of the joint research. Although the joint research was carried out with the principle to disclose the content, the Chinese government reneged and “suggested” non-disclosure on the Japanese side. The Chinese side also demanded that the Japanese side revise papers containing problems. Since these were papers from the Japanese side, it would not seem to be problematic. But the Chinese government will not show papers that offer a non-Chinese perspective to Chinese citizens.

So what did the Chinese government expect from this joint research? As for the Japanese government, while it presupposed that there would be differences in the two sides’ papers, it probably had in mind the objective of depoliticizing the historical recognition issue through this joint research. The Chinese side, however, probably supposed that the objective was to correct the Japanese side’s historical perception, or at least make the Japanese side revise its views. It is likely that for this reason, the Chinese side argued that each side’s comments to the other side’s papers also had to be off-limits to the public.

The significant delay in releasing the outcome of the joint research is also due to Chinese requests. At one point, Chinese scholars had already made flight arrangements to visit Japan to report the outcome of the joint research, but the meeting was abruptly postponed by the Chinese foreign ministry. Finally, considering the actions taken by the Chinese scholars when the outcome was released in January 2010, the Chinese side’s extreme-

ly sensitive attitude toward this joint research was evident.<sup>20</sup> In hindsight, when starting this joint research, the two sides should have developed a common recognition about the purpose and meaning of the project, not only between the scholars, but also between the governments. Still, even if both sides had agreed on these points beforehand, there is no guarantee that these agreements would have been kept.

Lastly, there is the Japan-China asymmetry in the media. It is clear that independence and freedom of the press differ between the Japanese and Chinese media. Ironically, there was a wider variety of reporting on the Chinese side, whereas reporting on the Japanese side tended to list the differences between the two countries' viewpoints and depict them as remaining challenges or issues. In China, media perspectives ranged from those that saw significance in the implementation of the joint research itself, to those that criticized the Japanese side's papers. Moreover, one article even reported that public disclosure was delayed due to the Chinese side's complaints, and another article went further to report that the non-disclosed parts increased or reprinted Japanese articles. Further, after a spell, a portion of the Chinese scholars who participated in the joint research became nationalistic spokesmen and criticized the Japanese side. The Japanese side was unprepared for this propaganda.

By examining the asymmetries in the three stages, one becomes aware that the problems of the Japan-China joint-history research are not only about the content of history itself. Since this was research supported by two governments, there was a wide variety of stakeholders to whom explanations had to be made. And there were multiple roles the scholars had to fulfill. It is important to recognize that effort toward a historical reconciliation between democratic and non-democratic countries such as the one described in this article will have complex elements.

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20. Kitaoka, "Nitchū Rekishi Kyōdō Kenkyū Wo Furikaeru."

### **Conclusion: Evaluation and Final Thoughts**

Reflecting on the Japan-China joint-history research, one might conclude that the aim to depoliticize the historical recognition issue was accomplished. Since 2006, there have been very few instances where that issue obstructed Japan-China political and economic relations. Of course, whether there is a direct causal relationship between this finding and the joint-history research is unclear. Also, in the discussion among scholars, the notion of agreeing to disagree was realized to a certain extent.

However, many challenges remained. It was especially regrettable that various misunderstandings resulted from the non-release of the comments made; we were unable to convey even a trace of the discussion. There was also the gap between society's expectations and the objectives set by the scholars. Since it was not impossible to predict these results, this project prompted me to ponder the role of historians who participate in any intergovernmental joint-history research. The greatest benefit from this project was that it clearly indicated the asymmetry between Japan and China. If there ever is a second round of joint research, we must anticipate the issues in the three stages discussed in this article, and take a cautious and preventative approach.

Finally, I would like to offer my thoughts on one point. Could this joint history research have possibly provoked or reinforced the history of both Japan and China? Intergovernmental joint research may harden the shells of both sides' national histories in the end, especially if joint research is limited to diplomatic significance. Therefore, along with intergovernmental joint research, there needs to be joint research conducted by private institutions, including an effort to write comprehensive overviews and textbooks addressing historical recognition.

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