

# Introduction

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How much do we, the people of Asia, know about the kinds of education we have received in world history? As it turns out, we know very little about world history education in our own countries. One of the most important reasons for this is found in our modern pasts, when the Asian peoples were divided by the colonial rule of the West as well as that of Japan in some cases. As a result, we do not have common systems, concepts, and ways of thinking about world history; and the tendency has been such that we still formulate our world images and our images of our nations under the strong influence of world history education imposed by each country's earlier colonizer or occupier. Without knowing the approaches to world history education in other countries, we may not be able to understand the issues about which we share common interests.

It is for this reason that we came to believe it important to investigate and compare the histories and the present teaching of world history in Asian countries. In this volume, we will compare the evolution of world history education; the institutions, systems, textbooks, and teachers; the role of governments in relation to world history teaching; and finally, the definition of what we mean by world history.

There are many ways of understanding world history in Asian countries, and the definitions change according to the times. Generally speaking, in most Asian countries, world history teaching is equated with the teaching of foreign history, as opposed to national history. With the development of historical investigation that tries to establish unified world histories, however, attempts are being made to teach these integrated world histories in some places, including Shanghai, Korea, and India.

## The History of World History Teaching

In general, Asian countries started to teach world history after the Second World War, between the end of the 1940s and the first half of the 1950s. At first, world history teaching, as well as the educational systems in general, were influenced by the new post-war political realities, as well as pre-war colonial legacies. At that time, roughly speaking, India and Singapore were under British influence, Indonesia was under Dutch influence, the Philippines was under both US and earlier Spanish (European) influence, South Korea was under US influence, and China, North Korea, and Vietnam were under Soviet influence. While Japan was under the political influence of the United States, ideologically it was influenced by Marxism.

Most world history education in Asian countries was strongly Eurocentric (Marxism also was Eurocentric) and consisted of presenting students with a collection of national histories. Although there were some early reforms starting in the 1960s, for example in Korea, Japan, and Indonesia (starting in 1975), the post-war characteristics of world history teaching were not fundamentally challenged. (Singapore started teaching world history only in 1965 and was, therefore, a little late in reforming it).

It was in the 1990s that a new wave appeared in world history teaching in many Asian countries. In Korea and Japan, efforts were made to overcome Eurocentrism in world history education; in Shanghai, the thematic approach was introduced; India started to find a way to teach integrated world history some years later, starting in 2005; and a variety of efforts were made to find new relationships between their own histories and the broader world in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore. The details will be explored in the following chapters.

In this book, we have not dealt with the teaching of world history in the region prior to World War II, when most Asian countries were under the direct colonial influence of European powers or imperial Japan. Nor have we investigated the views of world history before modern world history was introduced into our countries. These are topics for future investigations.

### **Governmental Leadership: Guidelines and Textbooks**

It is a common characteristic in Asian countries that the role of government is decisive in history education, including the teaching of world history. The governments set guidelines or standards for teaching history, which should be reflected in the history textbooks. In Indonesia, even national history textbooks are censored.

Governments play important roles in preparing world history textbooks. In China and India, textbooks are written by special teams organized by the government; in Indonesia, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan, textbooks are written by teachers and researchers who are invited to do so by the publishers, but the textbooks must be written following governmental guidelines and they must then be approved by the government. In Singapore, secondary school textbooks are governmental, while at the junior college level, no official textbooks are required. The Philippines is exceptional in that all of its textbooks are commercial rather than governmental. In most Asian countries, the central government administers nationwide tests of history or world history.

Some Asian countries suffer from the lack of qualified world history teachers. Usually, teachers are trained at the universities, and they must pass governmental examinations. But the teachers of world history are not necessarily specialists in that field and may have studied geography, linguistics, or national history.

### **The Composition of World History as It Is Taught Now**

In order to clarify the differences in the composition or structure of world history as it is presently taught in Asian countries, we compared the contents of the world history textbooks currently used in each country.

In Vietnam, world history is structured according to Marxist concepts, with the focus starting with primitive communal society, then continuing through feudal

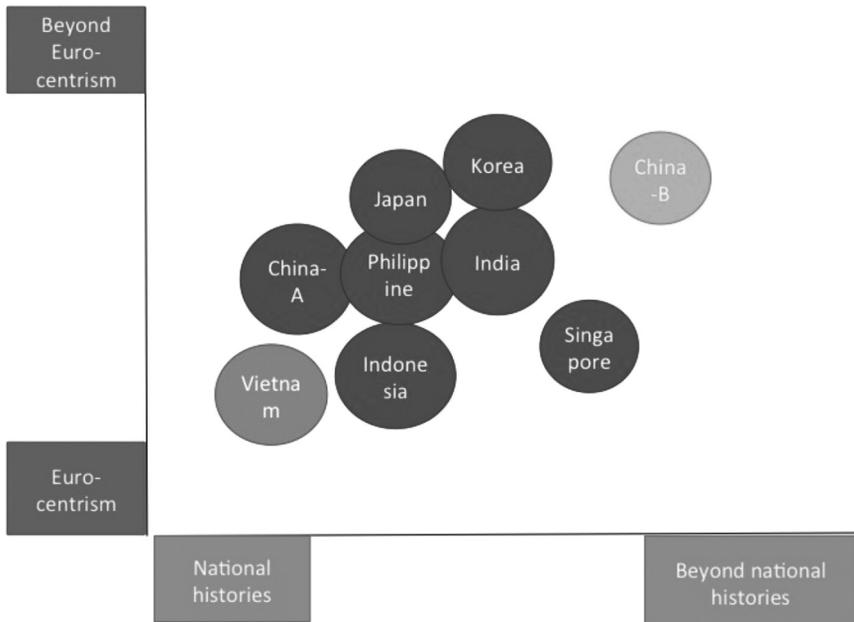
society and capitalist society to arrive at socialism. This maintains a Eurocentric view and is based on the stages of development of each nation-state. Nevertheless, it can be said that an effort has begun to develop a new approach to world history in Vietnam.

China has two curricula for world history; one takes an orthodox approach (China A), and the other, a Shanghai approach (China B). China A maintains some Marxist concepts: it follows the progression from feudal society, through the bourgeois revolution and the Industrial Revolution, and then to capitalism and monopoly capitalism, leading finally to socialism. In this sense, it follows the Marxist stages of development, while it adds several peculiarities of Asian developments to that basically Eurocentric approach.

Japan, which was strongly affected by Marxism, has been trying to remove that influence, and the present world history texts adopt a mixture of Marxist and Western concepts. At the same time, educators are also trying to eliminate the Eurocentric view of world history. They do not apply the three stages of ancient, middle, and modern development, nor those of ancient, feudal, and capitalist development. They put more emphasis on Asian histories, sometimes starting the discussion of an age from the perspective of Asia. But the entire structure is based on the histories of nation-states that are separate from Japanese history.

Korea is more advanced in overcoming Eurocentrism and spanning the division into national and world histories. The present curriculum adopts such non-national notions as civilization and the regional world, and it inserts Korean history into worldwide history.

The world history concept in the Philippines roughly follows the Western concept, dividing history into ancient, medieval (transition), and modern, and starting



from events in Europe. Almost the same could be said of the model of world history in Singapore. But both countries are trying hard to find ways to integrate their nation's history into broader world history that is based on the Western pattern.

Indonesians are trying to deal with world history starting with their own national past. They put the history of Indonesia first and then try to expand the scope of history as widely as possible toward Asia and Europe.

Unlike these approaches, an interesting experiment commenced in Shanghai in the early 2000s. A world history program proposed in 2002 adopted the civilization and humanity approach, which, while relying on the thematic approach, eschewed the national history approach for longer waves of human history, rejecting divisions of ancient, medieval, and modern periods.

Asian countries are therefore advancing toward world history education along their own paths, and by varied methods overcoming both Eurocentrism and the national history approach. If we identify the tendencies in world history teaching in each Asian country participating in this project, progress can be seen in the following diagram that shows the degree of Eurocentrism and the weight of national histories.

## The Opium War

In order to see the extent to which our understanding of world history is shared, we thought it would be useful to compare the descriptions of important historical events in the world history textbooks used in Asian countries. For example, if we were to focus on the nineteenth century, the events could include French Revolution of 1789, the Opium War, the American Civil War, the Indian Mutiny, the Meiji Restoration, the Boxer Rebellion, and so on.

We decided on the Opium War (1840–42) and chose to compare the descriptions of this event in middle-school textbooks. We found that the war is described in detail, along with its background, in the textbooks of China and India, countries that were directly involved. It is also described rather extensively in Korean textbooks that stress the impending Western impact upon Asia. Japanese texts, too, describe the war in detail, since Japan learned many lessons from that conflict, while textbooks in the Philippines focus serious attention on the war from the viewpoint of the Catholic Church. In contrast, textbooks in Vietnam, Indonesia, and Singapore either disregard or show little interest in that war.

The question is why the Opium War is not discussed in the textbooks of all the Asian countries. Of course, it is understandable that the war would not be described in the same way and with the same content, but we should be able to investigate the effects of the war on each of the countries in Asia from various perspectives, not only that of political relations, but also effects on the economy, culture, etc.

In any case, the Opium War is but one example. We can compare the descriptions of other historical events to further our understanding of the present state of world history teaching in Asian countries.

The following chapters describe and analyze the evolution and the present status of world history education, principally as it is taught in the middle schools of each country. And, as an addendum, we compared the descriptions of the Opium War in the textbooks used in those Asian countries that include the war in their curriculums.