

Building Identity from WWII: A Study on Japanese History

Textbooks

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《Abstract》

This study examines to what extent the Japanese history textbooks shape the collective identity in Japan. Japanese history textbooks have been the subject of debate over the recent years. Since school textbooks could serve as a critical factor in the construction of collective identity (i.e. sense of belonging to one distinct community), this study, by reviewing the controversial WWII descriptions, maps the correlation between identity and textbook content.

After defining key components of Japanese identity, using reference works such as *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* by Ruth Benedict, the authors examine how WWII is presented in mainstream history textbooks in today's secondary education in Japan. Our method includes reviewing the story line, giving particular attention to the beginning and end of war as well as key events such as Pearl-Harbor, Nanking Massacre, and Atomic bombing. Our study also follows but is not limited to a few guiding questions regarding the responsibility of Japan in WWII, its interaction with involved countries, and the more general lessons of war. We also consider what supportive illustrations are used, what perspectives are taken (or omitted), and what messages are communicated. In the examination process, manifest and latent Japanese values are highlighted.

In the last section, the authors conclude by relating their findings on textbooks to the popular representations of Japanese identity. It is expected that history textbooks participate in contemporary self-image construction of unique "Japaneseness". It however seems that the school textbooks could represent WWII more as a mix of heterogeneous and contradictory memories which would encourage children to appreciate the multiple facets of history. Considering the complexity of the subject, the study invites more inter-disciplinary work on Japanese collective identity constitution with regard to history understanding.

Keywords: WWII, Japan, textbook, and Japanese identity

Introduction

The early stages of personal identity definition occur during teenagers' days and sense of identity is redefined over time, influenced by social interaction and cultural representations. History school education textbooks provide a highly politicized version of history. It is an ideological weapon that shapes the thinking of mass. However do they really found the pupils' national identity? In this study we analyze the case of Japan's performance in WWII and try to compare the general Japanese national identity traits with the content of two textbooks.

Definition of national identity is particularly important for Japanese and there is a flourishing literature that tries to describe and explain what makes Japanese "uniquely" unique¹. This literature, generically called *nihonjiron*², places the notion of group as the fundamental differentiator of Japanese identity. In a first section, our study will show that while differences between texts exist, the reviewed textbooks do enforce the importance of group identity.

However, Japanese history textbooks content has been, since WWII, a political battle field between two visions of Japan. The right wing party wants to use national history to invigorate pride into Japanese identity and a "leftist's" vision of WWII which aims at teaching pupils the "worse side of rightist militarism"³. Though similar Japanese traits are fostered in both right and left wing textbooks, particular values are pushed and emphasized through texts. We therefore choose one textbook from each side to show how political oriented views impact identity definition. In this second section we will review how the right wing textbook builds on ancestral warrior values to define Japaneseness while the leftist textbook incorporates Japanese identity in an internationalist and pacifist vision.

Method of analysis

Since many argue that history textbooks are taken as a political battle field, we have selected the following two textbooks, both approved for use in Japanese junior high schools for analysis. *Chugako Shakai – Rekishi – Mirai o Mitsumete* from Kyoiku Shuppan (Middle School Social Studies: History - Looking toward the Future), hereafter called TB1, is one of the eight best sellers' textbook in Junior high school in Japan⁴. *Atarashii Rekishi Kyokasho* from Jiyusha, called TB2 further on, is

¹ Befu, p 66.

² For details, see a full study of Japanese identity discourse in Befu.

³ For a description of the Textbook battle, refer to Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt - Memories of War in Germany and Japan*, p 177.

⁴ Lin Lin, Appendix B.

proposing a “prouder” view of Japan during the war. TB2’s author is Fujioka Nobukatsu, the founder of the *Atarashii Rekishi Kyokasho o Tsukuru Kai*, or Society for Making the New History Textbooks¹.

We choose junior high school textbooks because they represent history in a summarized and caricatured way, making the key identity items more salient. In Japan, the Ministry of Education is the censor body that makes the final decision of acceptance, rejection or modification of textbook contents². Yet since the high school entrance exam is mandatory for all junior high pupils wanting to pursue higher education and the test content is based exclusively on textbooks, variation from textbook to textbook is not expected. Nevertheless, the presentation of the story line is different and reflects a different vision of Japan or identity.

Then we set out to define the most representative traits of Japanese identity highlighted in major literatures. During WWII and especially during the Japanese economic boom of the 80’s, abundant western literature tried to understand Japan’s social and cultural specificities. Anthropologists Ruth Benedict as well as historian Edwin O. Reischauer defined how Japanese see themselves. Following their steps, contemporary anthropologist Harumi Befu of Stanford University worked on a recent condensed review of the Japanese literature that focuses on what it means to be Japanese. Befu gathers the anthropological denominators of Japaneseness in his treatise *The Hegemony of Homogeneity*.

Once we extract the major identity traits from the above literature, our textbook analysis will be twofold: First a “top down” analysis consisting in cross referencing the selected identity traits with history textbooks. This analysis will confirm to what degree the history textbook participate into building the traits of Japaneseness salient in literature. Then a “bottom up” analysis will start from the textbook themselves and determine how the authors’ political affiliations contribute to the building of extremely differentiated Japanese identity.

Detailed pictorial and textual analyses are conducted in examining the textbooks. Identity traits can reveal themselves by direct explicit comparison with out-groups, point of reference with which identity is constructed. To that regard, WWII offers a wide range of options, including enemies (America, Great Britain and Australia), allies (Germany, Italy), invaded countries (China, South-East Asia) and colonies (Korea, Taiwan). Since the two textbooks do not choose to present / emphasize the

¹ For more details see Jeans, “Victim or Victimizers? Museum, Textbooks, and the War debate in Contemporary Japan”. Jeans provides an historic and political perspective of the “Atarashii Rekishi Kyokasho o Tsukuru Kai”.

² In Japan textbook authors will prepare their manuscripts following the Fundamental Law of Education and the School Education Law. The publisher will have to submit them to Ministry of Education for Official review and acceptance and while the Ministry maintains a Textbook Authorization and Research Council consisting of individuals from the academic world which functions as an advisory institution, the Ministry of Education will make the final decision. For additional details about the Textbook selection process, see Duke, “The Pacific War in Japanese and American High Schools: A comparison of the Textbook Teaching”.

same significant other, a review will be conducted on out-group's negative prototypes¹ and Japanese positive prototypic attitudes or values.

Japaneseness: a definition

In *Hegemony of Homogeneity*, Befu reviews *nihonjiron* literature. Befu claims that, based on the Nishinomiya Survey², 41% of the Japanese population is familiar with the most important *nihonjiron* writers, and 10% have read the best sellers. He concludes that this literature does represent the main Japanese identity characteristics. Befu also suggests there is no credible alternative to describe Japaneseness³. The key differentiators of *nihonjiron* include vulnerability of the nation subject to calamities and lack of resources⁴, the social need for consensus, conformity and cooperation⁵ and the group orientation or "groupism"⁶. In specific, Mouer and Sugimoto⁷ note that *nihonjiron* discourse has two central tenets: Japanese society as "uniquely" unique and group orientation as the dominant cultural behavior pattern.

Other scholars have contributed to different reading of Japaneseness. *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* by Benedict (1946)⁸ written just after WWII recognizes social group values such as hierarchy and respect for authority. She spends a chapter explaining the importance of a "proper station" or status in society⁹. The other major identity traits she mentioned refer to warrior qualities including dedication, toughness of mind¹⁰ and honor¹¹. This older version of Japaneseness was not specifically underscored in Reischauer's work in 1977¹². Reischauer focuses on the "typhoon mentality"¹³ of Japanese and relates the sense of vulnerability to natural catastrophes and challenges from stronger nations. Other key identity patterns include the group¹⁴, with its corollaries of harmony, homogeneity and solidarity.

¹ Prototype is defined as beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of a social category, which is actively constructed from relevant social information. See Fiske, T Susan and Shelley E Taylor.

² Befu, p 52.

³ Befu, p 117.

⁴ Befu, p 17.

⁵ Befu, p 3, p 19.

⁶ Befu, p 20.

⁷ Mouer, Ross and Yoshio Sugimoto, *Images of Japanese Society: A Study on the Structure of Social Reality*.

⁸ First edition in 1946

⁹ Benedict, p 63.

¹⁰ Benedict, p 24.

¹¹ Benedict, p 145.

¹² First Edition in 1977

¹³ Reishauer, p 14.

¹⁴ Reishauer, p 128.

Overall, the major identity found in our literature review is the Japanese tendency to emphasize the group rather than the individual, contrasting Japanese social values with individualistic America. Japanese act in group, dress the same way, behave the same way. While westerners tend to put emphasis on independence and originality, Japanese identify to their company, social group and class. The phenomena can be concluded in the common saying “the nails that sticks out gets banged down”. Group values are often associated with social homogeneity and conformity, re-enforcing each other to form a differentiated identity. Two additional recurrent themes in both *nihonjiron* and western literature are the idea of nation vulnerability (“typhoon mentality”), and the hardworking / perseverance spirit that defines Japaneseness. It is with special note that Japaneseness in *nihonjiron* literature is largely defined versus America and only differences between America and Japan are critical to identity definition. Since the Meiji period, the west (initially European countries, and then America) replaced China as the model for development. To that regard *nihonjiron* represents a trunked Japaneseness focused on differences with America¹.

Our next section cross reference these traits within the selected textbooks to define to what regard the textbook are participating in building a similar identity.

Representation of *nihonjiron* identity in history textbooks

We begin with a simple pictorial analysis of textbooks that demonstrates groupism and perseverance as major Japanese identity traits.

TB1 dwells on the suffering of the Japanese people during the war. Many pictures which include people gathering to get food, practicing firefighting, or building bomb shelters represent Japanese as a hard working group. Pictures of pupils and students parading in army uniforms and of children evacuating during bombing also encourage junior high school pupils to identify themselves with wartime cooperative children. Groupism and perseverance are the most repetitive messages conveyed through this pictorial content.

As usually during war times, we also expected textbooks to present individual war heroes for their exemplary actions. Aside from politicians the only Japanese individual depicted as a hero is Sugihara Chiune (Figure 1), an opponent to the holocaust activities in Europe. As shown in Table 1 Japanese individuals are much less shown than groups. Cooperation and hardship are the messages delivered through Figures 2 and 3.

¹ Befu, p 6.



Figure 1
 Sugihara Chiune



Figure 2
 Children building shelters



Figure 3
 Eating after evacuation

	Pictures of Individuals	Pictures of Groups
TB1	2	11
TB2	4	10

The case of Sugihara is interesting to study further because he not only serves as a heroic figure but also is an example of opposition to conformity. The latter assumption calls into question the basic tenets of Japanese-ness: uniformity and conformity. TB2 explains in a full page insert that Sugihara was given orders not to provide visas by the foreign Ministry of Japan. Struggling with his consciousness, Sugihara finally considered the potentially tragic faith of the visa applicants, disobeyed orders, and granted visas “days and nights” saving lives of 6000 Jews. It is explained that Sugihara, upon his return to Japan after the war, was dismissed for not following government orders. TB2 recalls the same story with less details but adding that Sugihara received an award from Israel for his upright behavior.

Pupils trying to learn the lessons of this heroic story in WWII would certainly understand that Japanese who oppose to the holocaust did exist. Though the story line in TB1 suggested that ignoring orders may be acceptable, depending on the teacher’s presentation, pupils may also understand that the unfortunate consequence of disobedience may well be the loss of one’s job and social status. While this example seems to criticize conformity and blind obedience, it is important to note that Sugihara was not living within the Japanese society. It is as if the distance separating Lithuania and Japan allowed for such behavior. Other individual heroes such as Noguchi Kiichiro cited in TB2 and Kawatakumi Asa from TB1 lived respectively in Manchuria and Korea, both far away from Japan. It could be understood that Sugihara opposes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan, a distant country which had less control over the political atmosphere in Lithuania. It is further surprising to note that while Sugihara has been praised for his stray behavior, major political opponents to militarist government who lived in Japan, were persecuted¹ and were not portrayed with the same heroic status in textbooks. This leads us to conclude that conformity is presented a value in both textbooks.

¹ To that regard, *Le Peuple Japonais et la Guerre*, written Robert Guillain a French journalist living in Japan during the war, gives a vivid account of the opposition to the progressive grip of the militarists during the war.

Another trait common in *nihonjiron* and the two textbooks is the reference to vulnerability. TB2 is clearer to that regard, showing a 1930 world map where colonial Japan (including Manchuria, Korea and Taiwan) is compared to broader French, British and American colonial territories. This enforces the image of a vulnerable Japan, struggling to compete with much bigger countries. Descriptive wording also supports the same idea. One example among others is the difficulty of obtaining outside resources: “Japan surrounded by the ABCD powers (America, British, China, Dutch) could not receive the necessary [industrial] raw materials...”

In addition to the lack of raw material, TB2 also insists on the vulnerability of Japan in negotiation with the west, a significant rival. Texts and pictures especially in TB2 present Japan bargaining with European and American powers to take its share of Chinese territory. While Japan is called by the author a “Great World Power” (*rekkyoushokoku*), Japan is not allowed its full rights with the west. In TB2 one example describes the extremely unfair decision of the League of Nation in not approving Japanese territorial expansion in Manchuria:

“Even though the “Sir Litton Survey report”¹ appointed by The League of Nations acknowledged the fact that the safety of Japanese living in Manchuria and the Japanese rights over the Manchu railway were endangered, [by the Chinese military activities...], the League still asked Japanese Army to evacuate Manchuria and cede it to International management.”

The impression given by both TB1 and TB2 is of a Japanese nation struggling in unity. While TB1 stresses that the Japanese population was manipulated through extremist political propaganda and individual resistance was therefore difficult, the overall content conveys “conformism” in war times. The ultimate hero to emulate is not a single individual but the Japanese people itself, as a unified group. Finally, it is interesting to note that while unfair treatment by the west causes Japanese vulnerability, groupism of Japan versus individualism of the west is not obvious. Contrast is only implied through the repetitive representation of Japanese in groups. The values fostered by the two textbooks, though to some extent coheres with *nihonjiron* literature is suggestive of certain political orientation. This leads us to the next section of our research.

A pacifist and constitutional identity built by TB1

The two textbooks, one from right wing and one from left explicitly foster two different visions

¹ In 1933, the League of Nations, to which Japan is member, appointed Sir Litton to Survey the situation in Manchuria after the invasion by the Japanese army. For Japanese right wing historians, Japanese rights in Manchuria were endangered by Chinese military activities in the region, which was recognized by the Litton survey team. However the Leagues of Nation ignored these conclusions and requested Japanese Army to withdraw from Manchuria which was seen as unfair treatment.

of Japan, as a consequence of their political divide. For TB1, WWII offers an opportunity to criticize militarism as a cause of war and to promote respect of the Japanese constitution, world peace and human rights.

First of all, it is important to note that TB1 prefers to describe Japanese suffering and the lessons of war rather than the war itself. Major dates and actors in war are described in a minimal 2 pages while suffering of Japanese takes up 8 pages. The gesture, as explained by a teacher of Sugunami School¹, is an attempt to de-emphasize the war, mitigating its negative and vicious effects. Portraying the outbreak of Pacific War, the example below proves that TB1 follows this trend and purposely avoid details of war happenings. TB1: *“On December 8th 1941, The Japanese infantry lands on the Malay Peninsula and the Marine launches a surprise attack to Pearl-harbor in Hawaii, starting the Pacific War.”* The sentence in TB1 contrasts sharply with the descriptive narration in TB2:

TB2: *“On December 8th 1941 (Showa 16th), The Japanese Marine surprises the American base of Pearl-harbor in Hawaii and afflicts to the American fleet and the Infantry air-force a nearly fatal blow. This strategy aimed at destroying the American Air carrier fleet in order to gain the sea supremacy. The same day, the Japanese infantry lands on the Malay Peninsula, destroys the British army and move toward Singapore”.*

Not only TB2 offers a story-like narrative, it also uses emotional words (surprises, afflicts, fatal etc...). TB1 remains with bare facts and depicts the war and the Japanese territorial expansions as military aggressions. In TB1, China, South-East Asian countries, Korea and Taiwan are presented in alignment with Japan as victims of warfare. The liberation of Asian countries by Japanese militarists (as in TB2) is not expressed in TB1 and therefore Japanese and other Asian countries are treated on equal rights.

Besides providing pupils with the dates and events they should learn for their exams, it seemed the focus of WWII in TB1 centers on three fundamentals of modern Japanese identity: postwar constitution, respect of human rights and renouncement to war.

The 3 tenets of the new Japanese constitution—People sovereign power, Respect of basic civil rights, and Renouncement to war—are explained and complemented with pictures of children in groups. For reasons presented in the next section, TB2’s priority, on the other hand, is to reduce credibility of the Japanese constitution insisting that *“it was drafted by the American occupant in only one week”* and that *“it was forced to the Japanese government, who could not oppose without putting the Emperor at stake”*.

Again the contrast between the textbooks is obvious. The other key difference between the two textbooks is the importance of peace. TB1 offers one full page titled “the peace wished by all the people” to present monuments in memory of victims of Hiroshima, Nagasaki and the American

¹ Duke, p 80.

hydrogen bomb test in the Pacific. The text also supports the argument that Japan, as a unique victim of the Atomic bomb, has a critical and nearly religious role to support world peace¹.

The treatment of war enemies and victims of Japanese expansion presented in the previous paragraph echoes human right values. Also noticeable are references to discriminated *buraku* (outcast group) and Ainu people (original people living in Hokkaido), assuming that Japan is not a homogenous country as it is often stated in *nihonjiron* literature². The pictures in the textbooks (mostly of children) help pupils to endorse these values, which should therefore become part of their own identity as citizens.

The last 4 pages of the textbook summarize the “value mix” promoted by TB1: “Thinking the living environment”, “Respecting human rights”, and “Constructing peace”. The values are exemplified with pictures and stories of children of various sex, races, religions, skin color and physical capabilities.

In correlating the content of TB1 with identity traits in *nihonjiron* literature, we find that Japanese constitution, its universality and its peaceful component are not often cited in *nihonjiron* literature. While it is understandable, as *nihonjiron* does not try to analyze characteristics shared with the West, this could be a shortcoming of *nihonjiron* theory. Naoko Shimazu³ made a review of media representations of past Japan after WWII. She suggests that “Atomic bomb stories” as a symbol of peace is a literature sub-genre complementing the textbooks in building a pacifist identity trait. The particular relation Japanese have with peace was also noted by Buruma⁴. For Buruma, the two building blocks of this “love for peace” are the Japanese constitution which forbids Japan to engage in future war and the identification of Japanese people to the nuclear bomb victims in Hiroshima. It is therefore probable that *nihonjiron* literature, by trying to explain Japanese identity in reference to the west and by searching mostly ancestral and anthropological roots, misses the “love for peace” as a key characteristic of Japaneseness.

TB2, a nationalist and ancestral identity for Japan

We first noted that TB2 spends 19 pages (with smaller fonts) on WWII. TB1 uses only 16 pages. Obviously, TB2 considers WWII as an important subject that needs to be treated with adequate details. TB2 spends seven long pages to describe the war in China and Manchuria, six more on the Pacific War and two to explain the co-prosperity ideals. Only 2 pages deal with domestic Japanese

¹ Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt - Memories of War in Germany and Japan*, p104

² Befu, p 68.

³ Shimazu, p 110.

⁴ Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt - Memories of War in Germany and Japan*, p104

issues. As already presented in examples, TB2 uses a novel-like narrative. With Japan as a central character, TB2 is more descriptive and prefers emotional vocabularies. This is comparatively attractive to many pupils who see history lessons as a boring list of dates and events to memorize. For those who care about the high school entrance exam, TB1 is certainly a better choice.

As Japan is described as one of the “Great World Power” that did not enjoyed full rights compared to American counterparts, TB2 implies in several occasions that American and Chinese opponents fight Japan immorally.

Regarding China:

A broken bridge picture captions says: *“Bridge destroyed by Chinese army. Chiang Kai Shek’s army destroyed bridges and train lines on its retreat against Japanese Army, withdrawing further in remote area”*. And also *“In the night of the 7th of July 1937, in the suburbs of Beijing, several shots were fired at the Japanese army at training”*.

Regarding America:

In TB2: *“In April, the American Army lands in Okinawa and the battle on Japanese soil starts. After a battle which left a death toll of 94,000 soldiers, about 94,000 civilians, and lasted 2 months, the allied occupied Okinawa”*. The description of the Okinawa battle implies that the American army is responsible for the death of civilians in Okinawa, which TB1 avoids to do. In TB1: *“In March 1945¹, American Army lands in Okinawa. In Okinawa, many children and women got enrolled in garrisons and involved in the battle. Out of a population of 600,000, Okinawa lost 120,000 people.”*

The stereotype that seem to separate Japan from America (and to a lesser extent China) is not only the strength of American economy and its spacious territory but also its unfair ways. By enforcing negative values of the out-group, TB2 implies moral fighting values of Japanese troops and civilians. The identity trait referred here is relevant to *bushido*, the samurai set of values. The *bushido* moral ethics promoted by TB2 is a reminiscence of the feudal ethic code². Comparatively with Europe, feudal culture is still recent and its impact on Japan ethics is real. These values, once vanished, reappeared during the economic boom of the 80’s and “it became common among Japanese intellectuals and politicians to attribute economic success to ancient Japanese virtues – obedience, self-sacrifice and hard work”³. By implying *bushido* as part of Japanese identity TB2’s implied values match Benedict analysis of Japaneseness⁴.

¹ TB1 and TB2 do not propose the same date for the beginning of the Okinawa battle.

² Nitobe, p 151. Japan officially abandoned feudalism and its ethical code *bushido* (the way of the warrior) at the beginning of the Meiji period, 120 years ago. By comparison, Chivalry in Europe was formally abolished nearly 500 years ago, in 1559 when Henry II of France was slain in a tournament.

³ Buruma, *Inventing Japan* p 162.

⁴ Benedict, p 24.

Even though they represent two different political visions, TB1 and TB2 are both government censored. Do they then share a common vision of the Japanese constitution and the pacifist identity for the country? Surprisingly, they do not.

TB2 not only questions the Japanese constitution but also claims the right to engage in wars and to possess an army. One example of this political positioning is the treatment of the Tokyo Trial. In TB2, two pages were given to demonstrate the unfairness of judging Japan as a guilty nation in launching WWII. *“The Tokyo Trial condemned the Japanese top leaders on the legal ground that they fought an aggressive war; however, that jurisdiction was created after the war”*. And also, *“The only international lawyer present at the trial, Mister Radhabinod Pal from India criticized the conclusions of the trial but was forbidden to speak”*.

Another major difference is Japan’s relation to other countries during the war. TB2 pictures South-East Asian countries invaded by the Japanese army as invariably benefitting from Japanese presence. Benefits include liberation from colonial powers, confidence in nation-building, modern medicine and modern technologies. Several pictures show South-East Asians in groups under the leadership and guidance of Japanese doctors, engineers and teachers. Further pictures of the co-prosperity sphere leaders who assembled in Tokyo around Tojo Hideki in November 1943 complement the message. Opposition to Japan within the invaded countries (called guerilla), imposed learning of the Japanese language, and ruthless use of local manpower in mining industries are mentioned but are not supported by pictures. This section leads us to the conclusion that TB2 supports the idea of a hierarchy of countries headed by Japan. This also is one of the identity traits detected by Benedict¹.

Whereas Befu’s review of *nihonjiron* encompasses modern literature and Reishauer’s work dates much later in 1977, the identity traits proposed by TB2 often echo Benedict’s definition of Japaneseness which was edited just after WWII in 1946. That right wing authors promote traditional *bushido* ethics, right to fight war and a hierarchical vision of nation is not surprising. However, since TB2 labels China and America negatively and South-East Asian countries as underdeveloped, we see these moral judgment as encouragement of prejudices. To that regard, Sherif’s Summer Camp Studies² proved that cooperation with out-group and accentuation of similarities with out-group reduces prejudices. It seems that TB1 does a better job at neutralizing differences with out-groups, thus avoiding a spread of prejudices among junior high school pupils.

¹ Benedict, p 63.

² Crisp, Richard J and Rhiannon N. Turner, p 170, p 173.

Conclusion: Correlation between identity and textbooks

As we conduct our “top down” study, three typical Japanese characteristic traits as described in modern literature are presented: groupism, vulnerability and perseverance. This leads us to conclude that textbooks to some extent do take part in Japanese identity building. Nevertheless, values other than those mentioned above are seen to shape textbooks. For example, TB1, a textbook fostered by leftists, deciphers Japan as a unique nation that underwent atomic bombing in WWII and as a nation that thereof promotes world peace.

Our “bottom up” analysis shows that the textbooks’ promotion of differentiated views of Japanese identity echoes with the political affiliations or background of the authors. TB2 refers to ancestral *bushido* values and glorifies the fighting spirit of the nation. The highlight on warrior spirit coheres with Benedicts’ *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* which was written in 1946. This characteristic is re-enforced until the end of the WWII. TB2 questions the validity of the Japanese constitution, laying the doubt on sovereignty of the people, world peace and human rights as founding values of modern Japan.

While TB2 adopts a rather antagonistic view toward WWII, TB1 opts for a more optimistic outlook on the lessons of war. TB1 reduces the WWII chapter to the minimum required content for passing the nation-wide entrance exam. It applied an internationalist narrative that cares about rights of other nations, reducing antagonism and prejudices, developing the base for peaceful values in the world. By opposing each other on most accounts, it seems that both textbooks define their identity in reference to their political affiliation rather than to a common view of what it is to be Japanese.

By allowing widely opposing reading of national history, the Japanese government certainly shows a democratic stance in education. Today, textbook selection is made by the schools themselves and only few schools have selected TB2, reflecting the Teachers’ Union impact in education. However, both TB1 and TB2 carry the imprimatur of the state, bearing the official stamp of the truth. Allowing both visions to cohabit in Japanese classrooms raises several comments.

Can a liberal democratic country such as Japan endorse a history that respectively promote nationalism and internationalism, *bushido* and peace, human rights and a hierarchical vision of nations at the same time? Is it not the role of the government to promote what it trusts to be the right path? By leaving that decision to teachers and schools, does the government elude responsibility?

Finally, while the minimum group paradigm¹ shows that discrimination appears as soon as

¹ Crisp, Richard J and Rhiannon N. Turner, p 170.

group is formed, Sherif's Summer Camp Studies show that labeling groups promotes hostility toward out-group. Therefore, allowing pupils to read TB2's stereotyping of other nations as untrustworthy, is surprising. TB2's questioning of the Japanese constitution is beyond domestic political tug-of-war. More critical reading of TB2 would even suggest that today's values such as respect for human rights are not worth of respecting and could be sacrificed. Japanese government officials that endorse textbooks such as TB2 will certainly keep attracting opposition and controversy.

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