

## NATIONALISM IN THE AGE OF "GLOBALIZATION": CONTROVERSIES OVER THE WRITING AND TEACHING OF HISTORY IN THE UNITED STATES AND JAPAN<sup>1</sup>

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### I

As the English sociologist Anthony D. Smith has observed, modern nations need "a measure of common culture and a civic ideology, a set of common understandings and aspirations, sentiments and ideas, that bind the population together in their homeland." "The task of ensuring a common public, mass culture," Smith continues, "has been handed over to the agencies of popular socialization, notably the public system of education and the mass media."<sup>2</sup> Though the role of the mass media in this process of national identification has become increasingly important as a result of the revolution in communication technologies, I would like to focus here on education, particularly history education, which is currently the object of heated debate in several countries.

The writing and teaching of history has been inseparable from the process of nation building in the modern era. In many contemporary societies, it is through the teaching of national history, both in public and private institutions, that individuals are socialized into the existing order, namely the nation-state. Of course, for a national history to be taught in a classroom, it must be written first. The process of writing a national history usually begins with the finding and gathering of facts and events from the past, which are then conflated within the theoretical and geographical framework of the existing nation, and finally presented as a self-constituted national narrative. During this process, the "nation" is treated, whether consciously or unconsciously, as a fixed and primordial "given." National history thus presupposes the existence of the nation as an entity, which, when taught in schools or read through textbooks, is internalized by students as part of the identity they receive through the educational system.

### II

Recently, the teaching of history has become a topic of controversy in two major industrialized societies, the United States and Japan. In the United States, the academic canon and its antithesis, the multicultural curriculum, have been alternatively praised and maligned

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was originally presented at the 1997 Annual Meeting of the Japanese Association for American Studies, held at Aichi University of Education in June 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Penguin Books, 1991), p.11.

as part of the widely publicized debate over multiculturalism. Proponents of multiculturalism argue that the traditional history curriculum, which neglects and degrades the role of oppressed minorities, must be transformed into a more inclusive, diverse, and therefore multicultural curriculum. Opponents, by contrast, warn that such an attempt would "Balkanize" the history of America, fracturing its unity along racial and ethnic lines.<sup>3</sup>

These positions are familiar to all followers of the multicultural debate, but what is less commonly recognized is the complicit relation between the two seemingly opposing views. What is lacking from the debate over multiculturalism, in other words, is an awareness that behind the opposition lies a shared belief in national identity, or in nationalism in a broader sense. Conservative critics like Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. and Diane Ravitch believe in a shared "American" identity, and claim that this would be jeopardized if the ethnic enclaves extolled by multiculturalists prevail. Proponents of multiculturalism, meanwhile, urge that all segments of the population be included in an attempt to reshape, and consequently "strengthen," the existing national identity.<sup>4</sup>

One of the key authors among the opponents of multiculturalism is immigration historian John Higham. Higham's work illustrates how the writing of history may intersect with the craving for a traditional national identity. In his article "The Future of American History," Higham strongly urges scholars to go back to writing a national history, since "the nation-state will remain for a long time the strongest political structure in the world." Since a large and complicated society like the nation-state needs "one or more centers" to hold it together, he asserts, the task of historians is to identify those centers from which "the margins of a culture" can also be located. Apparently, Higham is against the "pluralist paradigm" offered by multiculturalists, since he says that such a paradigm neither allows any "space for consolidation except as repression," nor encourages to ask "whether some kinds of consolidation can engender diversity, and whether some kinds of diversity can mask consolidation."<sup>5</sup>

Finally, Higham proposes several "research priorities" in order to "regain a national focus" in American historiography. Among others, these priorities include the recognition of assimilation as a "legitimate," "desirable," and "inescapable" pathway to a cohesive culture, and the investigation of "Americanness" as a powerful "national awareness." Here one can easily detect the notion that the United States can and should thrive on "Americanness," that is, on a firmly established national identity.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, multiculturalist historians like Ronald Takaki have attempted to incorporate the experience of minorities and stress their historical role in the nation's past, so that "Americanness" does not simply represent the life of the rich, white, and male population. In a review of Takaki's *A Different Mirror*, the African American historian Vincent G.

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<sup>3</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (Whittle Books, 1991); Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: History of Multicultural America* (Little, Brown and Company, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this paper, I will use the term "nationalism" rather loosely, whose meaning covers from a general sense of belonging to a nation-state, a national sentiment, an exclusive feeling of being the member of a nation, to an extreme chauvinism.

<sup>5</sup> John Higham, "The Future of American History," *The Journal of American History*, vol. 80, no. 4, March 1994, pp.1289-1307.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.1306-1307.

Harding praises Takaki for his brave attempt to write a "multicultural national sampler." Takaki's work, for Harding, is an "act of faith in our capacities as a nation to continue the great tradition of reinventing ourselves." While using the terms like "our national narrative," "a new master narrative," "the American story," "the nation's history," and "the reconstruction of our common history", Harding himself looks for a "truthful, healing account of our persistently emerging life as a nation."<sup>7</sup>

I do not by any means argue against the attempt to incorporate different social groups, or to grant them their rightful place within a re-created historical narrative. However, I think it is worth raising some questions within this general context. For example, are the goals of multiculturalism best accomplished within a national framework? Is it possible to think of nations and nationhood in a more relative way? Hierarchical and discriminatory social orders exist within each and every nation-state, and the entire contemporary world itself is a hierarchical composite of many such nation-states. This being the case, how are oppressed minority groups in powerful nations related to the global structure of oppression and inequality?

This is not the place to pursue these points in detail. However, in reviewing the debate over multiculturalism from this more global perspective, one cannot help but conclude that the familiar opposition between the "pros" and "cons" masks a more fundamental similarity: Both sides rest their arguments on the same premise, namely that the United States as a nation is the only theoretical and practical framework through which to view today's world.

As Paul Piccone correctly points out, American multiculturalism operates "entirely within the context of the post-modern liberal state." The same point has been made by Homi K. Bhabha, who states that "simply saying that the 'nation's cement' is inherently sexist or racist ... ironically provides the 'common culture' argument it needs." Bhabha continues:

The dangers inherent in the concept of a contemporaneous "common culture" are not limited to politically conservative discourses. There is a pervasive, even persuasive, presence of such a paradigm in the popular rhetoric of multiculturalism. A range of "nation-centered" cultural discourses (on a wide axis from right to left) readily intone the mantra of the minorities--race, class, gender.

Bhabha's argument becomes even more convincing when we note that those on the left who accuse the "nation's cement" of being sexist and racist are at the same time seeking a higher, "true common culture," which is centered around the nation. The key issue for both sides is on what terms the country should unite in a changing global situation. The

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<sup>7</sup> Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror*; Vincent G. Harding, "Healing at the Razor's Edge: Reflections on a History of Multicultural America," *The Journal of American History*, vol. 81, no. 2, September 1994, pp.571-584. See also Makoto Tsujiuchi, "Hihyo Riron toshiteno Tabunka-shugi(Multiculturalism as a Critical Theory)," in Department of Social Studies at Hitotsubashi University, ed., *Chiiki Shakai no Kokusaika (Internationalization of Local Societies)*, (Tokyo, 1996), pp.45-58; Ken Chujo, "Amerikashi-kenkyu to Tabunka-shugi(Multiculturalism and the Studies of American History)," in Masako Nakamura, ed., *Amerika Tegenbunka-shakai ni okeru Kokumin-togo to Kyoiku ni kansuru Shiteki Kenkyu (Historical Studies of the Education and National Integration in Multicultural America)*, (Tokyo, 1996), pp.48-64.

United States as a nation is an unquestioned premise, and the persistent influence of nationalism or national identity is rarely perceived, much less discussed.<sup>8</sup>

### III

Now, let me turn to what is going on in Japan. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Japan embarked upon a crash program of nation-building. Part and parcel of this process was the establishment of a highly centralized system of education, which continues to influence Japan's public schools even today. Authority to determine school curricula and approve school textbooks was (and is) exercised at the national level. As for history education, its ultimate goal was to generate loyal Japanese citizens who would literally die for their country. Here too, the instruction of national history was an indispensable part of the process of fostering nationalism.

After the defeat of Japan in World War II and the consequent social and political reforms, an avidly nationalistic and expansionist tone disappeared from the writing and teaching of Japanese history. Moreover, public discussions of Japanese nationalism usually limited their focus to that of the prewar period, thus emphasizing and condemning its idiosyncrasy. In so doing, they carefully diverted people's attention from the fact that nationalism and the sense of nationality continued to permeate Japanese society after the war. Now, instead of aggressive nationalism, the postwar public schools began to instill youth with the idea that Japan's strength lay in the (allegedly) homogeneous nature of the society to which they belonged.<sup>9</sup>

More recently, however, provocative demands have been heard for the revitalization of education through a "revised" national history. Nobukatsu Fujioka, a professor at the University of Tokyo, wrote a series of books in which he appeals to the public to reunite around Japan's distinct national interests. Fujioka and his followers place a heavy load of blame on the history textbooks currently in use in the schools. According to Fujioka, "Japan will sooner or later degenerate, perish, melt, or disunite, if it continues to provide children with such [anti-national] textbooks. Transforming the population into a nation is first and foremost dependent upon the way in which modern national history is taught. Unless the people share a common history they can be proud of, the undertaking will never be successful."<sup>10</sup>

In July 1995, the Association for a Liberal Historical Perspective (Jiyu-shugi Shikan

<sup>8</sup> Paul Piccone, *Telos* (Summer, 1994), p.15; Homi K. Bhabha, "A Good Judge of Character: Men, Metaphors, and the Common Culture," in Toni Morrison, ed., *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (Pantheon Books, 1992), pp.234. See also Chicago Cultural Studies Group, "Critical Multiculturalism," in David Theo Goldberg, ed., *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader* (Blackwell, 1994), pp.114-139; E. San Juan, Jr., "Multiculturalism and the Challenge of World Cultural Studies," in *Hegemony and Strategies of Transgression: Essays in Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature* (State University of New York Press, 1995), pp.219-257.

<sup>9</sup> For the myth of "Japanese homogeneity" as the postwar invention, Eiji Oguma, *Tanitsu Minzoku Shinwa no Kigen: "Nihon-jin" no Jigazo no Keihu (The Origin of the Myth of the Homogeneous Nation: Genealogy of the Self-portrait of "Japanese People")* (Shinyosha, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Nobukatsu Fujioka, *Ojoku no Kingendaishi: Kokuhuku no Toki (Modern History Filled with Disgrace: Time to Overcome)*, (Tokuma, 1996), p.30. Translation by author.

Kenkyukai) was organized, with Fujioka as its representative. The declared purpose of the association is to "boldly revise written history from a liberal, free-from-ideology perspective." Representing the viewpoint of the group, Fujioka claims that Japan's military activities in Asia have been simplistically interpreted by Marxist radicals and ultra-conservatives, respectively, as imperialist aggression or as legitimate and necessary actions taken in the national interest. Members of the association attempt to replace these views with their own "liberal" notion that Japanese imperialist policies had multifarious goals which included not merely the exploitation of Asian countries, but also the attempt to liberate them and to defend Japan itself from European colonialism. According to the association, there is nothing unnatural or shameful about Japan placing its priorities first, since "every nation and its people have a right to think about the prosperity and security of their own country." Out of this argument has emerged the notion of "healthy nationalism," allegedly the main buttress of contemporary Japan.<sup>11</sup>

In December 1996, Fujioka and others established another group, the Association for New History Textbooks. The statement issued by its six founders, consisting of college professors, writers, and a cartoonist, says that "we strongly urge everyone to be aware of the necessity for recovering our nation's true history, something which every single nation possesses," and that the Association's goal is to offer a "good" history textbook which can be proudly handed over to posterity. Nearly two hundred people, many of them executives in major Japanese corporations, endorsed this statement.<sup>12</sup>

The nationalist movement initiated by these groups may be losing some of its initial steam as it leans more and more, often at the expense of academic standards, toward a traditionally conservative view of Japanese history. However, it is important to point out that Fujioka's argument has found a certain number of followers, not only among the old conservatives within the academic and business communities, but also among the younger generations of secondary school teachers and college students. The latter seem to align themselves with Fujioka because his emphasis on avid nationalism gives them a feeling of "excitement" and "satisfaction" which is ironically absent from their materially abundant daily lives. Moreover, the above-mentioned lack of open and honest discussion about the persistence of nationalism in postwar Japan has resulted in a sense of frustration among those who wonder why talking about nationalism should be taboo in spite of Japan's "miraculous" economic recovery and success. Young Japanese people born after the country's period of high-speed growth tend to regard the nation simply as something "good", which they should be proud of for its role in guaranteeing them material comfort. All in all, resurgent nationalism, within the context of Japanese postwar economic success, has provided Japanese people with a new sense of national pride, as well as an outlet for some of their psychological frustrations.

The Japanese government seems to be rather ambivalent toward this wave of new nationalism. To begin with, there is a split within the government over the issue of whether Japan should admit and apologize for its past military aggression in Asia. Those who look for a new economic relationship with Asian countries do not mind apologizing

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<sup>11</sup> Fujioka, *Kingendaishi*, p.135.

<sup>12</sup> The Association for New textbooks, "Sosetsu ni atatteno Seimi (A Founding Statement)," (December, 1996) quoted in *Jokyo*, vol.8, no.3, April 1997, pp.85-87.

to them as a matter of “foreign policy,” so long as this results in new economic opportunities within the region. Meanwhile, old-type nationalists remain adamant about the need to reject such “humiliating” actions.

During the last several years, various public remarks made by Japanese prime ministers have demonstrated that the country’s diplomatic policy has turned toward the former, conciliatory, policy. Within this context, the new nationalist movement is permissible, so long as it does not exacerbate Japan’s bad reputation in Asia. Interestingly enough, Fujioka and his followers, in spite of the highly nationalistic tone they adopt in discussing Japan’s past activities in Asia, keep strangely silent on the topic of Japan’s sometimes thorny relations with the United States. This silence is symbolic of their own ambivalence with respect to U.S.-Japan relations, since they grudgingly acknowledge that Japan’s political and economic ties to the United States are too important to lose for the sake of “healthy nationalism.”<sup>13</sup>

#### IV

So far, I have argued that, both in the United States and Japan, nationalism is the key issue in the debate over history education. My argument is based on the notion that the main function of history education, or of public schooling in general, has been precisely to establish and disseminate nationalism among the populace. The ideology of nationalism purports that a nation-state is a primordial entity, to which every single person should and does belong, though the status and treatment of each member may drastically differ. Here, I would like to go further to argue that the recent debate over the writing and teaching of history is really about how to redefine the substance of the nation-state ideology in the context of a changing global environment.

It is true, as so many experts and commentators often emphasize, that the continuous flow of capital, information, and labor across national borders tends to weaken the capacities of the state, thereby “globalizing” and “liquidizing” our nationally divided world. This may seem, on the surface, to suggest that the nation-state as a socio-political unit is waning and losing its *raison d’être*. “Privatization” and “deregulation” are currently popular slogans in Japan, just as they are in the United States.

In the United States, the federal and local governments are now steadily withdrawing from public schooling in favor of the private sector. For example, Whittle Communications, a group of giant industries including Time-Warner, has created Channel One, a cable channel prepared for classrooms. According to Henry A. Giroux, Whittle Communications has quickly capitalized on recent federal and state education budget cuts by giving “free” electronic equipment such as VCRs and TVs to financially insecure schools, in exchange for rights to broadcast Channel One during school hours. Programming on the channel consists of news clips with standardized tutorial materials

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<sup>13</sup> For the “ambivalent” attitude of Fujioka and his followers toward the United States, see Yutaka Yoshida, “Heisoku suru Nashonarizumu (Nationalism with No Place to Go),” *Sekai*, vol. 633, April 1997, pp.74-82. See also the other articles in the above-mentioned issue of *Sekai* for the critical assessment of this new nationalist movement.

attached for teachers, together with extravagant and sophisticated commercials by major companies. Furthermore, Whittle Communications is now planning to establish its own schools throughout the country in order to fully take advantage of this type of "automated learning." In the words of Janice Shamon, "Public education is being privatized."<sup>14</sup>

Even in Japan, where the educational system has been highly centralized, the state's gradual "withdrawal" from schooling, in the name of "deregulation," has recently become apparent. Although the Japanese government strengthened the nationalist content of its educational policy in the 1980s by requiring flag-raising and anthem-singing at school ceremonies and by tightening its control over textbook inspection, the shift in public educational policy was only formally enshrined in 1996 in a landmark report issued by the Central Council for Education. Along with a new emphasis on fostering individuality among children, the report recommended that the role of public schooling be gradually lessened and that the local community, the private business sector, and the family should cooperate to accomplish this "slimming down of public schools." Behind this recommendation lies a strong pressure from the business community, which is trying to adjust to a "globalized" world where the traditionally group-minded attitude of the Japanese is no longer desirable, either in international business or in politics.<sup>15</sup>

These cases seem to show, again on the surface, that the nation-state no longer regards public schooling as an indispensable instrument of social control either in Japan or in the United States. However, we must not forget that what we are witnessing in these two countries is not a simple decline in the capacities of the state, but rather a new collaboration between the state and the business community in public educational policy. It might be added that this new collaborative undertaking depends in no small way on the existence of nationalism for its success.

This is why multiculturalism in the United States always runs the risk of falling into what the Chicago Cultural Studies Group has called "corporate multiculturalism." It is the multiculturalism of multinational corporations which is essentially a "profitable means of commodification" and a way to "maintain labor peace in an increasingly diversified society."<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, in Japan, the term "internationalization ('kokusaika')" has served a similar purpose. This term, in fact, refers to the growing consumption of foreign culture, as in "ethnic food" and "world music" (the terms "ethnic" and "world" are almost synonymous with "Third World" in this case). Paradoxically, however, it has also been

<sup>14</sup> Henry A. Giroux, *Disturbing Pleasures: Learning Popular Cultures* (Routledge, 1994); Janice Simon, "Buying Low: Schools for Sale," *Z Magazine*, May 1992, p.63, quoted in Giroux, *Disturbing Pleasures*, p.52. Although almost 12,000 schools with more than 8 million students participated in this Channel One deal, Whittle Communications got into a financial trouble because of its hasty expansion of business activities. After closing many parts of his media business, Chris Whittle, the founder, finally sold the much-debated Channel One service to Seventeen magazine owner, K-III Communications Co., in 1994. The Edison Project, a plan for establishing a network of model private schools was barely kept alive by Philips Electronic and the British publisher Associated Newspapers, with less than ten schools expected to be opened. David Lieberman, "Whittling a Media Empire," *USA Today*, August 11, 1994.

<sup>15</sup> For the recent shift in Japanese public educational policy, see Chapter IV, Section IV in Shintaro Nakanishi, et al., *Nihon-shakai no Sai-hensei to Mujun (The Reorganization and Contradiction of Japanese Society)*, (Ohtsuki, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> David Theo Goldberg, "Introduction: Multicultural Conditions," in Goldberg, ed., *Multiculturalism* (Blackwell, 1994), p.8.

linked to an increasing emphasis on national identity, since to be “internationalized,” one has to be properly “nationalized” first. In both the American and Japanese cases, the problematic of the nation-state ideology is rarely brought into focus, since people consume and enjoy the “diversity” of cultures within relatively unchanging national economic boundaries.

Observing this similarity between Japan and the United States, it may be necessary to reframe the discussion in terms of the larger world order. Specifically, we must ask how to interpret the seemingly contradictory nature of the capitalist world order, where, on the one hand, capital, information, commodities, and labor easily and incessantly cross national borders, while on the other hand, the everyday life of human beings is deeply divided and differentiated by those same borders. Perhaps, what we need to emphasize is that the modern world consists of nation-states bound together in a rigidly hierarchical international order--the order which remains constant despite the unceasing transborderflows.<sup>17</sup>

Looking at the cases of highly-industrialized and “developed” countries such as the United States and Japan, where people enjoy an unsurpassed material standard of living, one finds that the nation-state, through nationalism, still captivates its members with a powerful and lasting social identity. Today’s clarion calls for the appreciation of diversity, whether in the name of multiculturalism or internationalization, do not polemicize the national framework as such. All of these trends can be ascribed to the fact that these two countries represent privileged positions within the hierarchical world order, allowing them to take full advantage of the recent trend toward economic “globalization.”

In sum, any discussion of public education must take into account the existing structure of power relations, in which public education itself plays a significant role. If the historical role of public education has been to shape and reshape ideologies and identities based upon the nation-state, then it is all the more necessary to take a critical look at how power is exercised--particularly with regard to the politics of nationality--within and without the public schools. Is public education, as an instrument of political and economic purpose, capable of providing a critical analysis of the structural imbalance of power, both within the nation and between nations? Is it capable of bringing into focus the material conditions which cause gross inequality in our daily lives? These questions may necessarily lead us to drastically rethink some of our most cherished ideas about the role of public education.

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<sup>17</sup> Craig Calhoun, “Nationalism and Civil Society: Democracy, Diversity and Self-Determination,” in Calhoun, ed., *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (Blackwell, 1994), pp.305-314.