
Global History Education in the Era of Free-Market Asia: “Experiential Activities of a Historian” as Basic Elements of History Learning

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Abstract

In Japan, making “Japanese history” a mandatory subject in high schools is being considered. The basis of proponents’ argument is that it is critical for education to “nurture identity in students as Japanese people.”¹ In this country of advancing economic globalization, teaching students their identity as Japanese people is being sought. This role is being expected of history education. How, then, is history education related to economic globalization? In this paper, informed by awareness of this issue, I describe the role of the history learning² in a global society and the basic elements of its practice. The conclusion I draw is that in the era of free-market Asia, the “experiential activities of a historian,” by which children and students themselves interpret history and write history, are critical for learning history.

Content of History Learning in a Global Society

In recent years, as globalization advances, the approach of treating history that has gained the most attention is considered to be “global history.”³ It has the following five characteristics:⁴

- (1) The time period of a topic being covered is long.
- (2) Its target themes and space (regions) are broad.
- (3) It seeks to relativize the European world.
- (4) Relationships between different regions are emphasized.
- (5) It deals with many themes not covered by previous studies of history.

For example, concerning point (5), the primary themes of conventional studies of history include wars and politics, economic activities, religions,

and cultures. In contrast, global history considers themes intimately related to everyday life, such as epidemics, the environment, populations, and living standards, as well as questions related to overall historical trends. In other words, “history” in a global society is depicted in a different manner from history as conventionally portrayed from a national perspective. It also has a perspective different from either a political or economic perspective.⁵ However, topics handled by global history do not necessarily require a wide geographic scope. In the case of point (1), by which a subject is studied over a long period of time, a single location may be subjected to fixed observation. For example, the history-themed picture book *A Street Through Time* presents changes to a street in a town over a period of 12,000 years.⁶ This book is a children’s history book that uses the approach of global history. It uses the method of illustration to portray the “history” of a fictional town in England.

Global history transforms on a grand scale the contents that had been covered by conventional history. Unlike conventional historical researchers, writers of global history do not need to survey in detail a particular place, system, phenomenon, or people. Because of this freedom, tellers of global history may also include economists, sociologists, political scientists, natural scientists, and even science fiction writers such as H. G. Wells. In other words, conventional historiographical methods are not absolute requirements for global historiographical methods. On the other hand, besides having knowledge of previous historical research, practitioners of global history must read academic works as highly critical readers. They must evaluate information as to whether it is highly reliable or not and conduct investigations while comparing a hypothesis to other hypotheses. In this respect, conventional historians and global historians are similar. Pamela Kyle Crossley states that a historian employs verbal language to which imagination is carefully combined, and infuses to it a historian’s interpretation of the expressions of people and events of the past. As long as it is not misinterpreted as presenting “reality,” any expression can be considered valid. In other words, a historian expresses his or her interpretation as “history.” This interpretation is not the whole of reality; it is nothing more than the expression of a fragment of the diverse forms (meanings) of the past. Meanwhile, objective and universal descriptions are considered not realizable, even by a global historian who seeks to have truly unbiased objective or universal descriptions under the label of “global” or “universal.” The reason is that as long as “history” is described by prose, it cannot create expressions that transcend the understanding of the reader.⁷ In other words, for global history, the focus of much attention today, to be accepted for transcending Eurocentrism and the perspective of a single country,

we must nurture readers of "history," that is, global historians. How to do so is a major educational issue.

"Experiential Activities of a Historian" as Hands-On Activities in History Learning

Global history assumes that "history" is constructed based on the interpretation of the historian, and that it is understood through the interpretation of the reader. It is an attempt to make history more objective and universal by considering the content of "history" from a global perspective. The education of citizens as readers of history then becomes critical. I call history learning based on the assumption that "history" is the interpretation of the past by historians "interpretation type history learning." I am focusing on the "experiential activities of a historian," by which history is written, as a method for students to engage in "interpretation type history learning."⁸

When a historian interprets history, he or she first discovers information from historical materials. As mentioned above, *A Street Through Time* portrays 12,000 years of history, divided into 14 time periods. It imagines a time traveler journeying through the 14 time periods, which are depicted by illustrations. On the last page of the book, a "Time Traveler Quiz" is presented as information that should be discovered by the reader in each period. This quiz is shown in the table below.

Table Time Traveler Quiz⁹

Era	Quiz
Stone Age Hunters (Circa 10000 BCE)	The hunters start a fire for cooking by rubbing two wooden sticks together. Find the man using this method.
First Farmers (Circa 2000 BCE)	Reeds growing near the settlement are used to make baskets. Can you find the woman weaving a basket?
The Iron Age (Circa 600 BCE)	Can you see the warrior being tattooed? Vegetable dye is used to paint patterns on his body.
Roman Times (Circa 100)	A crane is used to lift heavy building material. It is worked by slaves. Can you find the crane in the street?
The Invaders (Circa 600)	Find two different wooden boats used by Barbarian tribes.

Viking Raiders (Circa 900)	The local people are now all Christians. Find the graveyard where they bury their dead.
Medieval Village (1200s)	Important buildings are now made of stone. Can you find three stone buildings?
Medieval Towns (1400s)	What structure has been built in stone across the river?
The Plague Strikes! (1500s)	With a printing press, a book takes only a few days to print. Find the press that has been abandoned during the plague.
Under Attack! (600s)	Garbage and sewage is still dumped in the street. Spot two places where it is trickling into the street.
An Age of Elegance (1700s)	Can you find the highwayman examining his loot from a recent raid.
Grim Times (The Industrial Revolution) (Early 1800s)	Two children are playing a game of marbles in the street. Can you find them?
From Town to City (Late 1800s)	There is now a new toy shop in the street. A boy is busy choosing a toy to buy. Can you find the shop?
The Street Today	How many of the objects in the museum can you find in earlier periods in book?

As stated above, a characteristic of global history is the telling of universalistic history over a long timeline. In the case of *A Street Through Time*, the book draws the reader's attention to humans' use of energy in the form of fire and tools in the form of baskets as indicators that the human race has achieved civilization. The book is designed so that the reader makes these discoveries from its illustrations

Discovering information can be said to be the first step in the interpretation of history. However, the activities of a historian also include writing history by combining the discovered information with other information. These are the basic elements of "experiential activities of a historian" by which primary and secondary students are given the hands-on opportunity to tell history. An example of these set of activities is introduced by a representative

textbook for secondary education used mainly in English-speaking countries, especially the United Kingdom. In the third unit of *Changing Minds Britain 1500-1750*,¹⁰ which belongs to a textbook series representative of global history education, *Think Through History*¹¹ from Longman, students are asked "How can you tell a good story about the Black Death, one's worst fear?" This is a lesson on an epidemic (the Black Death) during the Middle Ages in Europe. By combining information in the textbook, students themselves experience the work of a historian by writing about the spread of the plague, which began in villages during the Medieval period. This set of activities increases in complexity incrementally as students follow four assignments, starting with Step 1. The activity most characteristic of this series of assignments is the final task. It asks the student to proofread the story of the Black Death that the student himself or herself has written. This is not simply a check for writing errors, such as misspellings. The assignment is as follows:

[Final Assignment]

How good is your historical story? Of course, it is made up. But if it is really a good historical story, it should be based upon lots of facts about the Black Death.

1. Take a red pen. Underline in red all the parts of your story which are based upon facts about how horrible the disease was.
2. Take a green pen. Underline in green all the parts of your story which are based on what medieval people thought about the Black Death.
3. Take a black pen. Underline in black all the parts of the story which are based upon the effects which the Black Death had upon peasants and villages. For example, did William Brewer become freer? Was he able to escape the lord's control?

Perhaps you found that you did not have very much to underline in some of these colors. Now you know how to go back and make your historical story even better.¹²

The final assignment is an activity that allows students to confirm whether they reported correctly on the Black Death from the three standpoints of "facts," "psychology of the time," and "effects of the event." This activity is not simply writing a report. It is rather an activity of the student as an historian who depicts the past accurately from multiple analytic viewpoints.

According the textbook's teacher's guide, assigning such an activity fosters in students the following basic pathways: "What fact (or evidence or

idea) do I want?" and "Where shall I put it?"¹³ In this way, the set of activities emphasized by this textbook has students discover historical information from materials and combine them together as scholars. Through these activities, students interpret history and write "history." These are the basic elements of the experiential activities of a historian.¹⁴ For global history to fulfill its function, this kind of history education is necessary.

Global History Education in the Era of Free-Market Asia

There are many countries in world with multiple ethnic groups and religions comingling in the same country. Indonesia, for example, has a variety of languages, cultures, ethnic groups, and religions. Thus, it is said that there is the need to increase nationalism for Indonesians with education.¹⁵ The foundation of this nationalism is the national philosophy called "Pancasila," which recognizes the country's diversity. In the case of the European Union, diversity in peoples and religions is recognized while the region is integrated economically. In the case of Japan, even though its people are born in the same country and have the same nationality, the values of the young and the old differ greatly. Because of this diversity, what is meant by the term "pure Japan" cannot be generally explained.¹⁶ Thus, there is a political movement to make Japanese history a mandatory subject as a means to educate students on their identity as Japanese people.

In the midst of globalization, in the United Kingdom time for "religious education," which had been taught in many schools, is being replaced by time for "citizenship education." This is because the United Kingdom is becoming a society in which diverse religions and norms of life exist.

Japanese society is also not exempt from the effects of globalization. On the one hand, globalization is a movement that seeks to bring about one proper, integrated society. On the other hand, in contrast to the former goal it is a movement that seeks to create a democratic future by taking advantage of the benefits that comes from the presence of diverse people. In either case, the foundation of social studies education as a subject to build a democratic society is fostering the ability to engage with people. However, democratic learning activities, while seeking to ensure students' independence, carry risks. For example, the human race has a history of suppressing human rights through the democratic process. Hitler's Nazism created laws through the legislature that massacred Jews. The Japanese government has also carried out policies of aggression through parliamentary government. Examples also include the Iraq War, which the United States prosecuted without the approval of Congress. If social studies teachers do not teach students of cases where, for example,

human rights were suppressed through wars, it is possible that a future not of peace but of war will be produced. Social studies must develop educational materials and learning programs about examples of human rights suppression and wars carried out through the democratic process.¹⁷

From this perspective, social studies is not simply a compilation of knowledge from fields such as "history," "geography," "political science," and "economics." It is a subject that is pedagogically composed of the integration of these fields from the standpoint of student learning. This learning activity is the foundational training for nurturing peaceful and civil "citizens."¹⁸ Social studies play a great role in developing the abilities in citizens to resolve issues in actual civil society with peaceful and democratic methods. It is also a subject that fosters the ability to logically debate so that conflicts between people do not worsen. As a shared educational research problem in the Asian region, where teacher-led lecture-based classes to deliver knowledge is traditional, practical research to improve social studies from this standpoint can be said to be especially needed. The experiential activities of a historian, whereby primary and secondary students themselves interpret the past, are especially crucial in the era of free-market Asia, where diverse viewpoints and beliefs comingle. Classroom research of interpretation type history learning as a way to put global history into practice and the development of teachers who will assume the role for teaching it will be needed all the more in the Asian region.

Notes

- 1 Transcript of Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) Hakubun Shimomura's press conference (January 7th, 2014), MEXT website http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/daijin/detail/1343111.htm
- 2 The discussion in this paper is based on "interpretation type history learning" proposed in my books *Advancing Interpretation Type History Learning: Social Science History That Stresses Dialogue* (in Japanese), Azusa Shuppansha, 2011, and *The Possibility of Shared Asian History Learning: Historical Research of Interpretation Type History Learning* (in Japanese), Azusa Shuppansha, 2013.
- 3 Akita, Shigeru, "New Scenes Illuminated by Global History" in *Guidebook to High School World History* (in Japanese), 2013 Academic Year, 1st Semester, Teikoku-Shoin, 2013, p.8.
- 4 Mizushima, Tsukasa, *Introduction to Global History* (in Japanese), Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2010, pp. 2-4.
- 5 For example, according to Mizushima in Note 4 above, global history presents themes such as "Europe and Asia," "the environment," "migration and trade," and "regional and world systems." Pamela Kyle Crossley's *What Is Global History* (Polity, 2007) presents the following themes: "Divergence," "Convergence," "Contagion," and "Systems."

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- 6 Noon, Steve, and Millard, Anne, *A Street Through Time: A 12,000-Year Walk Through History*, DK Children, London, 1998. This picture book uses 15 illustrations to present the changes in a fictional town. The Japanese translation of the book won the 48th Sankei Children's Publishing Culture Prize.
- 7 Crossley, Pamela Kyle, *What Is Global History*, pp. 154-158.
- 8 See Note 2 above.
- 9 Noon, Steve, and Millard, Anne, *A Street Through Time*, p. 32.
- 10 Byrom, J., et al., *Changing Minds Britain 1500-1750*, Essex, U.K., Pearson Education Ltd., 1997. The book is composed of 14 units.
- 11 At present, this textbook series is composed of six volumes: *Medieval Minds Britain 1066-1500*, *Changing Minds Britain 1500-1750*, *Minds and Machines Britain 1750 to 1900*, *Modern Minds The Twentieth-Century*, *Citizens Minds The French Revolution*, and *Meeting of Minds Islamic Encounters c. 570 to 1750*. The textbooks are intended for Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14, or, grades 7-9).
- 12 Byrom, J., et al., *Changing Minds Britain 1500-1750*, Essex, U.K., Pearson Education Ltd., 1997, p. 31. Emphasis in the original.
- 13 Byrom, J., et al., *Medieval Minds Britain 1066-1500 Teacher's Book*, Essex, U.K., Pearson Education Ltd., 1997, p.8. This volume serves as a guidebook for teachers using the textbook.
- 14 See my book *The Possibility of Shared Asian History Learning: Historical Research of Interpretation Type History Learning* (in Japanese), Chapter 8.
- 15 Nasution and Tsuchiya, Takeshi, "Japanese and Indonesian Nationalism as Seen in Modern Textbooks" in *Bulletin of Comprehensive Center for Education Practice, Aichi University of Education*, No. 6, 2003, pp. 101-110. Mr. Nasution is a lecturer (social studies education) at the National University of Surabaya in Indonesia.
- 16 Observation by Kim Sonji, a *Zainichi* Korean (permanent ethnic Korean resident of Japan). He graduated from the Aichi University of Education in 1998. After studying abroad in South Korea, he is working as a full-time lecturer in public schools in Aichi Prefecture. When he was an elementary student, at the ceremony marking the start of the third trimester after the New Year, a teacher asked him, "How much *mochi* (sticky rice cakes) did you eat?" (Eating *mochi* as part of the New Year's dish of *osechi* is a Japanese custom.) Kim remembered feeling out of place upon hearing this question, and was filled with a sense of inferiority at being different. His family did not practice such a custom.
- 17 An example of this effort is the Tokyo Holocaust Education Resource Center (Fumiko Ishioka, director), an NPO that produces educational materials about the Nazi genocide. <http://www.ne.jp/asahi/holocaust/tokyo/>
- 18 Of course, historical researchers are also a part of the citizenry, and this kind of training is considered necessary for them as well. Social studies is a subject that seeks to nurture a greater number of citizens. The development of the teachers in this field is a major issue.