South Korea, Japan, and China: In Search of a Shared Historical Awareness

LIONEL BABICZ
The University of Sydney

ABSTRACT
The paper introduces past and current attempts to forge a shared historical awareness among South Korea, Japan, and China - official committees examining the historical disagreements between the two countries, citizen groups attempting to create common pedagogical material, and local or individual initiatives. Contrary to the common view of being a historical battlefield, Korea and Japan have also been confronting courageously the largest issues concerning their shared past. Nevertheless, a comparison with the European experience, especially that of the French-German joint history textbook, prompts caution regarding these attempts’ real chance for success.

East Asia all too often appears to be an historical battlefield. Disputes over a colonial and wartime past, protests and indignation following commemorations or untimely statements emanating from Japan, and clashes over school textbooks; all of these go towards characterising relations between Japan, China and South Korea. The legacy of thirty-five years of the Japanese colonisation of Korea (1910-1945) and that of eight years of total warfare with China (1937-1945) seem to be a long way from disappearing.

However, in the midst of such turmoil, other voices are audible, other processes at work and attempts underway. For around twenty years, joint historical studies have been led by civil groups, joined for the last decade by official institutions. The overriding objective sought for is to appease the historical issues which tear the region apart. Yet, beyond this there is another ambition, on the limit of utopia, which propels these forces working from the shadows; that of creating an historical awareness shared by the entire region.

These initiatives take the form of two major axis: an official axis, with joint Korea-Japan and China-Japan committees; and a citizen’s axis, which offers a series of rather courageous Korea-Japan or China-Japan initiatives, and even a spectacular trilateral Japan-China-Korea venture.

The aim of this study is to present the attempts at shared historical reflection, in addition to the writing and publication of joint pedagogical material, particularly as undertaken between Japan and Korea. As a conclusion, I will question the prospects of success of such attempts, particularly in light of the Franco-German history book experience.

KOREA-JAPAN OFFICIAL INSTITUTIONS
Between Japan and South Korea, the persistence of the issue of history, since the school textbooks crisis in 1984, has led, for around twenty years, a number of civil and official organisations to undertake joint historical studies.

Official initiatives – which came much later than the civil activities – began in 1997, in the wake of a meeting between Korean President Kim Young-Sam and Japanese
Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryūtarō. The two leaders decided upon the establishment of a “Korea-Japan Joint Committee for Promoting History Studies”, in an aim to “find ways of improving the study of history in the two countries” (Japan 2008). This “Joint Committee” met on five occasions between 1997 and 2000. In parallel, a much wider initiative was implemented – the “Japan-Korea History Forum” – which organised two conferences (in 1998 and 1999) in Korea and Japan (Nihon 1999).

The final report of the “Joint Committee” was presented to both governments in 2000. Outlined in this report was the necessity to cooperate with a view to developing joint educational material, but no concrete proposal was put forward. Critics stated that the Committee had failed to venture beyond that which had previously been agreed upon in 1982, and that its work had served the Japanese government as a way out of entering into a real dialogue with Korea on historical subjects (Yama 2002).

The second official initiative was established following the school history textbook crisis of 2001. Korean President Kim Dae-Jung and Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō decided upon the creation of a “Japan-ROK Joint History Research Committee”. The decision was taken during a summit meeting between the two leaders, but the resultant negotiations – regarding the definition of the task to be assigned to the Committee – manifested the existing gap. The Koreans demanded that history books take into consideration the findings which would result from the Committee. The Japanese refused to commit as such. The controversy was only resolved by the approaching World Cup. Time was running short, and Korea and Japan were obliged to collaborate and defuse historical controversies.

Once serious discussions were underway, both sides demonstrated good will. Between May 2002 and March 2005 six meetings took place, following which, in June 2005, an impressive 1,400 page “Japan-ROK Joint History Research Report” was published simultaneously in Japanese and Korean, and made freely accessible on the Internet in both languages (Nikkan 2005).

The Committee chose not to focus upon school textbooks themselves, but rather to begin a large-scale joint research program into the history of Japanese-Korean relations, from the ancient period to the present. Mitani Taichirō, Japanese Committee chairman, said it was about creating an “academic community” of historians capable of transcending the borders of national history in each country (Nikkan 2005, 5). And for Cho Tong-Kŏl, Korean Committee chairman, the aim was to try and grasp, for each period, the areas of agreement and disagreement in the historical approaches of both countries (Nikkan 2005, 7).

In order to undertake this, the Committee was divided into three groups responsible for examining three different historical periods: the ancient period, the Middle Ages and pre-modern period, the modern and contemporary periods. The first two groups were each made up of three Japanese historians and three Korean historians, the third group made up of four historians from each of the countries.

The first of these texts – about the ancient period – is given over to Japan-Korea relations between the fourth and sixth centuries. Each century is the subject of two studies, one written by a Korean researcher and the other by a Japanese researcher. In a second part, these studies are then discussed by all participants. The aim is both to highlight the areas of agreement and disagreement, as well as the issues emerging from the studies and discussion. The discussions are highly specialised, dealing with specific issues, such as the Japanese empress Jingū or the Koguryŏ king Kwanghaet’o, and additionally more general
issues such as the nature of Japan-Korea relations in the fourth century or that of the relations between the Yamato and Korean states in the sixth century. A general discussion dedicated to “a new history of Japan-Korea relations in the ancient period” concludes the second section of the report. Satō Makoto makes a fitting summary of the overall impression when he states that the findings reached by the participants only constitute a “starting point” for much wider joint research.

This feeling is strengthened in the third part of the report, which includes remarks and impressions from each of the six participants. Hamada Kōsaku expresses the desire to see research about the formation of ancient Korean and Japanese States additionally include Chinese and Western researchers. Kim Tae-Sik states a desire for a wider approach, beginning from the fifth century BCE up to the tenth century CE.

Organisation of the second report – about the Middle Ages and the pre-modern period – is slightly different. The first section is given over to Japanese articles, and the second to Korean studies. Furthermore, the six Committee members were aided by the collaboration of eight additional researchers, four from each country. Three subjects dominated the more than 600 page document: “pseudo-envoys” (gishi) 1, the Korean wars of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1592-98), and the Korean embassies to Japan. (1413-1811).

More than simply a revision of the areas of agreement and disagreement, the participants presented in a very detailed manner the history and the state of research of these issues in their respective countries2. The result is a highly specialist report, which makes for passionate reading for people aware of the subjects, yet also difficult reading for lay people.

The third report, which relates to the modern and contemporary periods, deals with the most burning issues from the Meiji Restoration to present day: the Russo-Japanese war (1904-05) and the two Sino-Japanese conflicts (1894-95 and 1937-45), the annexation of Korea in 1910, the thirty five years of colonisation (1910-1945), the reestablishment of relations after the war (1965), economic ties and the issue of North Korea. Given the scale of the task, the eight Committee members called for assistance from twenty three additional experts (twelve Japanese and eleven Koreans). The result was on the same scale as the number of participants: thirteen thematic chapters made up of between two to four articles, almost all followed by remarks from a specialist originating from the other country, and these general remarks themselves being accompanied by reflections from the author.

This confrontation allowed for a clearer understanding of the areas in which divergences remained the strongest: the link between the evolution of international relations and the process of modernisation of the countries in the region, problems relating to the legality of the treaties signed between Korea and at from the beginning of the twentieth century, the effects of colonial power on social transformations and relations with North Korea.

The “Joint Research Committee” undertook a gargantuan task. For three years, its members confronted each other over some of the most difficult issues, covering a period ranging from the fourth century to present day, and managed to draw up a faithful

1 Between the end of the fourteenth to the beginning of the seventeenth century, some Japanese people, in passing themselves off – using false documents – for official envoys, travelled to Korea for trade. These were named “pseudo-envoys” (gishi), in opposition to “authentic envoys” (shinshi).
2 With the exception of Son Sün-ch’ŏl’s study which aims at shedding light on the differences in approach relating to the period studied in history books as often used by University students.
assessment. However, the issue of school textbooks was not approached, and no effort made to create joint pedagogical material. As a specialist work being aimed at specialists, the Committee’s work did not have a great deal of effect on the general public.

Following a break of two years, a second round of official conversations between Japan and South Korea began in 2007 (“Second Phase of the Japan-ROK Joint History Research Committee”). Would this second round of dialogue allow for the obstacles confronted in previous discussions to be overcome? It is very difficult to say, but the desire to move forward was clearly evident. In April 2007, the creation of a sub-commission responsible for studying the issue of school textbooks was announced, which came in addition to three other sub-commissions dealing with ancient history, the Middle Age and the pre-modern period and the modern and contemporary periods, in a similar vein to the first round of conversations. A first plenary session of the Committee took place in Tokyo on 23 June 2007. A second session took place in Seoul in November 2007, and a third one in June 2008 in Japan (Gaimushō 2008).

JAPAN-KOREA CITIZENS’ GROUPS

The difficulties encountered by official organisations were immense, and there was a great deal of scepticism. Effectively, the most tangible outcomes achieved to date have come from citizens’ groups, and not from official organisations.

On 1st March 2007, the very symbolic anniversary of the March First Independence Movement, a book entitled “Joint Japan-Korea Historical Educational Material: History of Japan-Korea Exchanges – From Prehistory to Today” was published simultaneously in both Japan and Korea (Rekishi 2007). This book constituted the first joint pedagogical material ever to be published covering the entire history of Japan-Korea relations – from prehistory up to the 2002 football World Cup. It was aimed at schoolchildren, secondary-school children, students and teachers from both countries, and beyond, all of those interested in the subject. Although based upon the most recent historical work, it is not a research study which is presented, but a sort of textbook, extremely well organised and very readable.

This book is the fruit of a decade of joint work accomplished by a group of around twenty teachers and researchers from Japan and Korea. The joint project was aimed at overcoming the obstacles confronted by official organisations. The project participants, believing that it would be difficult to arrive at a shared state-based historical awareness, chose to freely exchange ideas, without any constraint and from a “citizen’s” point of view, so as to establish a collection of shared historical pedagogical material, aimed at deepening mutual understanding between the two populations.

Kimijima Kazuhiko, working on the basis of the three elements constituting the title of the work (shared historical material, history of exchanges, from prehistory to present day), reflects on both the scale of the task and the difficulties encountered (Kimijima 2007). The principles which oversaw the work were as follows: the publication of educational material accessible to all, and surpassing the framework of interstate exchange by embodying human exchanges in a continuous and encompassed recital, written as one. The writing process, where the endless comings and goings of the text erase the very trace of the authors, constitutes a major concrete contribution to the elaboration of a truly joint Japanese-Korean vision of history.

The “History of Japan-Korea Exchanges” arguably constitutes the most ambitious attempt at publishing a joint Japan-Korea educational work, but this is not unique. Other joint works have indeed been published, examining more specific aspects of the history of
relations and bilateral exchanges or aiming to apprehend in their entirety the history of both countries.

The first joint Japan-Korea educational textbook indeed dates back to 2005. Entitled “Korean Embassies to Japan: from Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s Invasions of Korea to Friendly Relations”, published simultaneously in Japan and Korea, was written by a group of eleven secondary school teachers from Hiroshima and Taegu who were brought together in a “Joint Japan-Korea Educational Material Publication Team” (Nikkan 2005).

The initiative dated back to 2001. Members of the Taegu teachers union, in Korea, made a proposition to their Japanese counterparts in Hiroshima, to act together in response to the revisionist “New History Textbook” by publishing a joint educational material. At the outset, the group attempted to tackle modern and contemporary history, but owing to the depth of the cultural gap, quickly decided to focus on a much older period, albeit rather sensitive, in that of the Hideyoshi’s invasions at the end of the sixteenth century and the Korean embassies in the Edo period. This allowed for an optimistic tone to be adopted, which appeared in the very title of the book – from invasions to friendship.

The outcome, published following four years of work, is a beautiful, well written and vastly illustrated book, which focuses on the history of Japanese-Korean relations from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. The main themes covered are those of Hideyoshi’s invasions, their violence and brutality, but also the profound influence of this war upon exchanges between the two countries, and the neighbourly relations of the Edo period, symbolised by the Korean embassies travelling to Japan. The most original chapters are those concentrating upon the welcome granted to the Korean embassies by the fiefs of Hiroshima and Fukuyama, which provides an excellent educational material usable at a local level.

Another joint work, with a vastly differing approach this time, was published in 2006. “Face to Face – History of Japan and Korea: From their Origins to the Modern Period” is a greatly ambitious book, in two volumes, which does not so much present a narrative of Japanese-Korean exchanges, but an overall history of Japan and Korea (Rekishi 2006). Five years of work were undertaken by two history teachers associations from both countries which resulted in a unique publication of a parallel, comparative and joint history of both countries from prehistory to the nineteenth century.

The book comprises two volumes divided into four sections: “Neighbours since the dawn of time”, which focuses upon prehistory and the ancient period; “East Asia through change”, where the emergence of warrior powers on the island and the peninsula in addition to the evolution of Buddhism in both countries are notably examined; “The yangban and bushi periods”, and “Preparing for a new period”, which deal, inter alia, with the Japanese and Korean reaction to Western penetration. A follow up, with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as its focus, is currently in progress. Once again, it will adopt an original approach, as the book’s material will be taken directly from actual lessons taught by Japanese and Korean teachers in education establishments in both countries.

Miyahara Takeo, one of the main authors, invokes concrete examples of differing viewpoints between the Japanese and Korean parties during the writing of the book, and the manner in which these were overcome (Miyahara 2007). He attributes the vast part of these differences to a fundamentally different approach towards nationalism in Japan and South Korea, differences which were encouraged by the Americans after the war. In the case of Japan, it was indeed the democratic and individualist values which were promoted, whilst in Korea a nationalist and ethnocentric vision prevailed.
Miyahara Takeo seems a great deal less optimistic than Kimijima Kazuhiko. While, for the latter, a joint Japanese-Korean vision of history may have been possible — as was proven by the joint publication in which he was involved — the former believes the obstacles to be much greater. Finally, in the view of Miyahara Takeo, it may be more worthwhile to envisage a publication on various different levels of history, respecting cultural and historical differences.

The approach desired by Miyahara Takeo is not entirely contradictory to the joint efforts of historical writing. In this vein, Kimijima Kazuhiko was amongst the translators of a Korean publication which appeared in Japan in 2004, aimed at teaching Japanese schoolchildren the Korean vision of history (Lee, Seo, and Chung 2004). The book is divided into two sections: a history of Korea, and an overview of Japan-Korea cultural exchanges. The particularity of the textbook resides in the fact that it was neither written by a Japanese historian, nor by a Korean specialist addressing his/her own people, but that it is written purposely by three Korean historians aimed at Japanese school children. The three translators were additionally closely involved in the formulation of the book and its adaptation for Japanese readers. The book is abundantly illustrated by pictures and is remarkably concise and readable. Admittedly it does not represent a joint historical writing effort, but rather constitutes without any doubt a precious tool for Japanese to gain knowledge of the Korean historical vision.

**AN OFFICIAL SINO-JAPANESE INITIATIVE**

In parallel to these Japanese-Korean activities, other attempts at compiling joint pedagogical material and implementing a shared vision of history are underway between Japan and China. Such initiatives came much later, and in lesser quantity. Once again, there was an official forum as well as citizen activities.

A “Japan-China Joint History Research Committee” was established in 2006, based upon the model of the Japan-Korean “Joint committee”. The committee is composed of twenty two members: eleven Chinese and eleven Japanese, and presided over by Kitaoka Shin’ichi, a Tokyo University professor, and Bu Ping, director of the Modern History Institute at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Two sub-commissions have been implemented, one focussing on ancient, medieval and modern periods, the other on modern and contemporary periods. Two meetings have taken place in December 2006 in Beijing and March 2007 in Tokyo. A third session was held in January 2008 in Beijing where participants expressed the hope to publish their report in July 2008, prior to the opening of the Beijing Olympic Games. However, at the time of writing, May 2009, no report has yet been published.

Differences between the two parties seem quite considerable. The first meeting as such saw a “candid and wide exchange of opinions” between the parties, Bu Ping invoking the insults felt by the victim country when Japanese words and actions go to denying the “historical fact of the aggressive war” led by Tokyo; Kitaoka Shin’ichi declaring the difficulty in “sharing a joint historical awareness” and regretting the existence of an “excessive gap between Japan and China” (Gaimushō 2006).

The second session confirmed that the desired objective of the Committee was not the publication of a joint history of Sino-Japanese relations, but rather the constitution of separate reports accompanied by remarks from the other party. A series of historical events to be studied was also agreed upon including the Nanjing massacre in 1937 but not

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3 Kimijima Kazuhiko, Kokubu Mari and Tetsuka Takashi.
the issue of “comfort women” (Gaimushō 2007). Admittedly a surprise is still possible, but judging by the current state of affairs, it is unlikely that the Sino-Japanese Committee will finalise a work on the scale and of the same quality as that accomplished by their Japanese-Korean counterparts.

**Chinese and Japanese Researchers**

In reality, the task of the “Joint Committee” has already been partially accomplished by a group of Chinese and Japanese researchers in a book entitled “Historical Awareness Crossing Borders: Attempt at a Sino-Japanese Dialogue” (Liu, Mitani, and Yang 2006), published simultaneously in 2006 in both languages and countries by the Tokyo University Press and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Press.

The book, accomplished under the management of Liu Jie, Mitani Hiroshi and Yang Daqing, is the fruit of five years of reflection. In addition to these three men, eight additional researchers contributed, thus involving a total of three Chinese and eight Japanese. Such a disproportion is further accentuated by the fact that two of the Chinese involved, Liu Jie and Yang Zhihui, reside in Japan and teach at Waseda University, and the third, Yang Daqing, is a lecturer at George Washington University. No researcher working in China at that time actually contributed to the book, even though a certain number of them were involved in various stages of the project. Finally, it is necessary to note that the “Sino-Japanese conference of young historians”, whose reflection was behind the publication of the book, was financed by the “Sasakawa Japan-China Friendship Fund”.

Be that as it may, the outcome is an excellent work. The book is divided into two parts and thirteen chapters. The first part entitled “Historical Facts and Historical Awareness” sets out rather remarkably the various narratives which have taken place in both countries relating to the period between the mid-nineteenth century up to 1945. One chapter is devoted to Manchukuo and another to the Nanjing massacre. The second part entitled “In search of an historical awareness leading to reconciliation” deals with more specific issues which are likely to favour rapprochement and reconciliation: joint visions such as they appear in Chinese and Japanese school textbooks, differing apprehension regarding the Japanese colonisation of Taiwan, the problem of Yasukuni as well as that of indemnities.

The most remarkable characteristic of these works is the desire to outline, in the most unheated manner possible, the varying approaches and issues. The outcome is that of a rare tool which allows for the substance and scale of current issues to be apprehended. It is difficult to imagine just how the official “Joint Commission” could accomplish a work of better quality.

**The Trilateral Japan-China-Korea Committee**

A certain number of civilian groups have undertaken a great deal of research activity in the move towards a shared historical awareness. The most spectacular initiative to date is arguably that led by the “Trilateral Japan-China-Korea committee for joint pedagogical material”, whose work led, in May 2005, to the publication of a shared modern history book, published simultaneously in the three languages and countries. In total, fifty-four people (fourteen Japanese, seventeen Chinese and twenty three Korean) took part in

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4 The Sasakawa Foundation (official title: The Nippon Foundation Nippon zaidan) is an institution established by the former war criminal and business man Sasakawa Ryōichi (1899-1995). In spite of the controversy surrounding it, the Foundation provides support to a large number of quality research projects.
writing this book and a second edition was published in July 2006 (Nitchūkan 2005; Nitchūkan 2006).

This group, composed primarily of researchers, teachers and civil group activists, constitutes a product of the “Asian Educational History Network”, whose activities form part of the tradition of the 1992 Yokohama Declaration when Chinese, Korean and Japanese Universities called for a joint review of history textbooks in East Asia (Bungei 2002). This network was established in 2001; and in 2002, it began collaboration with the “Korean Civilian Movement for Correction of Japanese Textbooks”, both organisations together forming the “Joint Japanese-Korean Organisation of Historical research”.

This group is much more politically involved that the “Japan-Korea Symposium” outlined earlier. The Organisation states its desire to assemble, in addition to academics and teachers, “representatives of the victims of the war of aggression and the colonial regime”, and the overriding objective is “the creation of a shared historical awareness, which will give rise to fresh relations and bolster peace and friendship between Korea and Japan, in addition to within Asia” (Kodomo 2002).

The reference to Asia is not accidental. Indeed, in 2002 the “Forum for historical awareness and peace in East Asia” was established, holding its first meeting in Nanjing in March of the same year. Six organisations – Chinese, Japanese and Korean – participated in this meeting, amongst them figuring the “Asian Network” and the “Joint Organisation”. The “Nanjing Forum” focussed upon the review of the revised textbook which was behind the 2001 crisis, in addition to the attitude of the Japanese authorities. The debate was politicised and predictable, with the primary signification of the event being the inclusion of China in the reflection upon school textbooks. The main outcome from the Nanjing Forum was the creation of the “East Asian Committee for the publication of joint historical pedagogical material”. Composed of Chinese, Korean and Japanese representatives, the Committee was the first trilateral structure ever to be established in the area of historical research.

Eleven working sessions were to be held (four in Japan, four in China and three in Korea) prior to accomplishing, in 2005, the publication of a book on the history of the three countries, from the nineteenth century to the dawn of the twenty first, bearing the title “A History which Opens up the Future: Modern and Contemporary History of Three East Asian Countries” (Nitchūkan 2005).

This book had a rather strong “progressive” political accent. Modern East Asian history was presented in a clear and univocal perspective, that of the Chinese and Korean “resistance” (tekō) to Japanese “aggression” (shinryaku). However, the Japanese did not simply join the Chinese and Korean subjects. “The difficulties were immense”, explains Obinata Sumio from Waseda University. “For example, the writing of the passage focussing upon the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki gave rise to major differences in opinion; the Japanese wanting to outline the evil nature of nuclear weapons, while the Chinese wanted to outline the liberation that the bombings had provoked”. Differences in opinion also manifested themselves between the Koreans and Chinese, particularly concerning the Chinese policy on Korea at the end of the nineteenth century (Saitō 2008).

The outcome was admittedly a politicised work, but one which is highly interesting due to the focus placed upon the history of the “people” in all three countries. Nevertheless, this book was rather a “progressive” educational work, written by
individuals with relatively close political sensitivities, who took note of their shared opinions, and additionally discovered their differences in opinion5.

**VARIOUS INITIATIVES**

This trilateral work did not constitute a unique phenomenon, but was rather part of a vast ranging activity spread across various different axis. Indeed, in addition to the official and civilian organisations invoked, there were a large number of initiatives coming from various sources.

As such, the daily paper *Asahi shinbun* published a collection entitled “Impact of History: one hundred and fifty years of East Asia”. These one hundred and fifty years included the period going from the opium war in 1840 to the end of the cold war in 1989. The aim of the paper was to examine the significance of ten central themes during this period in history, the manner in which they were presented within Japanese, South Korean and Chinese textbooks (People's Republic of China and Taiwan), and the memories they evoke. The articles were published in Japanese and English in editions published by the newspaper as well as in Korean and Chinese (simplified and traditional characters) on the internet (Asahi).

The publication of this collection was motivated both by the ignorance displayed by young Japanese people about the war and events preceding the war, and by the small amount of understanding regarding democratic changes which had taken place in Japan since the end of the war amongst Chinese and Korean young people. In November 2008, simultaneously in Japan and South Korea, a book was published based upon this collection, which was also likely to be used as pedagogical material, and can be included on the list of the many works dealing with history and memory in a perspective of a rapprochement of consciences (Asahi 2008).

Another important book was published in 2007 in Japanese under the supervision of Mitani Hiroshi and Kim Tae-Chang. It is entitled “Historical Dialogues in East Asia: Beyond Borders and Generations”, and aspires towards a similar rapprochement of consciences (Mitani and Kim 2007). This book is based upon the work of a symposium organised in 2004 by the Kyoto Forum, a philosophical association devoted to the establishment of a “public philosophy” based upon dialogue (taiwa), cooperation (kyōdō) and innovation (kaishin).

Japanese, Chinese and Korean historians and philosophers undertake, throughout the book, a dialogue based around themes liked with the perception of twentieth century history: “From the historical experience of a Chinese”, “Asia in the thoughts and memory in post-war Japan”, “Historical awareness through the appreciation of the colonial cultural policy”, “History as I lived it: experience, sensation and conscience” are just some of the themes touched upon in this far-reaching, arduous and stimulating book.

The dialogue which is undertaken consists, first and foremost, of “recounting to one another” (katariau) the history of East Asia, such as it was lived and witnessed by each individual. It is not about “talking” (hanasu), writes Kim Tae-Chang in a magnificent postface, but rather about “recounting” (kataru) just like one would recount a story such

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5 Although there are no overall statistics on the subject, the book is used as additional educational material in some classes, particularly in Korea, where it benefits from strong governmental support, in spite of its overtly “progressive” nature. It is interesting to note, in this context, that some corrections made in the second edition deal with the Korean war. Whilst in the first edition it was written that the North Korean People’s Army had “begun to descend south” (nanka o hajimetā) with a view to “liberating” (kaihō) the peninsula, in the second edition, the aim of this “descent” was “unification” (tōitsu) of Korea.
as the listeners can identify themselves with what they hear. As such, the participants alternated their own considerations in terms of philosophy and personal experience, reflecting upon the history they had each witnessed, the memory they retain and the recital they make. The “Historical Dialogues”, therefore, constituted a major contribution to the reflection of an historical awareness of East Asia, forcing each and everyone to listen and recognise themselves in each other.

Another dialogue underway which has recently given rise to a joint publication is that of the Japan-China-Korea Conference of Historians (Kibata and Cha 2008). Originating from an official Japanese-Korean report published in 2000, the Conference constitutes nevertheless an independent structure bringing together historians from both countries reflecting upon their own profession and the problems with which they are confronted. It is, thus, a bilateral dialogue both very specialised – historians in dialogue with other historians – but also very vast, as the discussion is not strictly limited to Japanese-Korean issues. The work is based upon the results of seven meetings held in Seoul and Tokyo between 2002 and 2007, on themes such as modernity and nationalism. The themes discussed are varied – the history of masses and the thinking of the post war period, or even the search for an inner world – and the objective seems to be to make known to readers in both countries the actual state of historical research (and its sophistication) in the neighbouring country.

A similar aspiration for rapprochement and an increased awareness of others is additionally often expressed at an individual level. Hence the recent publication of a work devoted to the Russo-Japanese war as written by Koyasu Nobukuni, specialist of Japanese thought, and Choi Moon-hyung, historian of Korea (Koyasu and Choi 2007).

The book was born subsequent to an accidental meeting in 2005 between the two researchers, and their mutual understanding, which was followed by a series of both formal and informal dialogues in Tokyo and Seoul. The two men are of similar age (one born in 1933 and the other in 1935), and have been witness to the same historical events in the same region of the world. As Koyasu Nobukuni wrote: “living our lives in Korea and Japan in the twentieth century led us to become friends. In the same vein, we hope that this book will represent an important step forward in the establishment of a shared history of East Asia”.

The opening section of the book is essentially constituted of a series of conferences held by Koyasu Nobukuni in Seoul in 2006 on the theme of “Imagining the issue of East Asia from the perspective of Japanese-Korean relations”, accompanied by Korean remarks; and the second part of a sequel of articles written by Choi Moon-hyung about the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05.

The differing approaches with regard to this war constitute the overriding theme of the book. The Japanese generally consider the Russo-Japanese war through the perspective of the Shiba Ryōtarō’s novel Clouds on the hill (Saka no ue no kumo), an ordeal imposed upon Meiji Japan so that it transformed itself into a real Nation State, a war of defending the homeland, a bilateral conflict from which Korea was almost totally absent. This conflict, a Japanese nationalist war, was also evaded from the Korean national memory, which did not grasp its overall significance for the country’s history. For Koyasu and Choi, jointly re-evaluating of the Russo-Japanese war was intended to be a first concrete step toward the elaboration of a joint Japanese-Korean history.
IN LIGHT OF THE FRANCO-GERMAN EXPERIENCE

In East Asia the historical issue is a long way from quietening down. The joint attempts at clearing a passage and the publications of shared pedagogical material only constitute for the time being an initial, rather hesitant step towards the establishment of a shared regional consciousness. This is where European experiences may have a role – albeit indirectly – to play. Indeed, in the same way that those in favour of a greater regional integration considered the European Union, in spite of many failings and difficulties, as a model for inspiration, those involved in the publication attempts of joint pedagogical material often feel encouraged by the recent success achieved in Europe. Since France and Germany achieved the publication of a joint history manual, and since Poland and Germany held historical dialogues regarding textbooks which led to concrete results, Japan, China and Korea have every reason to keep their hopes alive.

Nevertheless, a more careful examination of European activities requires caution. In East Asia, it is not so much about joint textbooks, as in the case of France and Germany, but about joint reflection and, in the best case, the creation of shared pedagogical material, which teachers may choose to use as additional material for history classes.

In East Asia, there is no counterpart to the Franco-German history textbook, and for good reason. The creation of a joint textbook has as a prerequisite the harmonisation of school curricula, which was achieved between the German Lander, and subsequently between France and Germany. Such a shake up requires political desire at the highest level, which is, for the time being, totally absent between China, Korea and Japan. Presuming, on the other hand, that such a desire exists would additionally require a definition of the subject which this textbook would teach. For France and Germany, the choice was based upon a history textbook for classes in the final year of secondary school and the 13. Klassen, entitled Europe and the World since 1945; and two other books for first year of sixth form education/12. Klassen and second year of sixth form education/11. Klassen, are currently being published. While particular issues surrounding Franco-German relations are discussed, in addition to subjects such as “memories of the Second World War”, this continues to be a textbook of European and world history, which extends far beyond the sole scope of France and Germany (Defrance and Pfeil 2006).

So, what might be the equivalent of such a subject in East Asia? In Japan and Korea, the two subjects taught in history at school are local history (“Japanese History” and “Korean History) and “World History”. Subjects such as “History of Japanese-Korean exchanges” or “History of Japan, China and Korea” – to lend the title of some of the recently published works – are not part of the curriculum. It is for this reason that these books carefully avoid being categorised as “textbooks” (kyōkasho), preferring the name “pedagogical material” (kyōzai).

Yet another difference presents itself. The Franco-German textbook is part of a long tradition of historical dialogue, going all the way back to the beginning of the 1930s. A joint history textbook programme which deals with Franco-German relations was even undertaken in 1932 by Jean de Pange and Fritz Kern (Defrance and Pfeil 2006, 6). Even after the arrival of Hitler to power, in 1935 historians from both countries put together “recommendations” for history teaching. These were used as a basis for discussions which were to take place following the war.

Truthfully speaking, the current situation of an historical dialogue in East Asia invokes more the pre-war Franco-German contact than the recent publication of a Franco-
German textbook. Just as before the war, there seems to be a preference for studying exchanges between the countries concerned rather than aiming to write an overall history. Just as before the war, commissions of historians are trying to take stock of controversies, so as to ease these. The Franco-German experience may not, therefore, lead to an optimistic vision of the situation in East Asia. In the same manner as the historical dialogue of the 1930s did not prevent a violent explosion of the world situation, the actual search for a shared historical awareness, as fascinating, enriching and passionate as it may be, would not be worth a great deal in the event of a degradation of the regional situation.

However, if tensions ease, if East Asia moves in the direction of increased economic and political cooperation, this pioneering search for a regional historical awareness could contribute to the crystallisation of new and stimulating perspectives into the past.

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**Contact Details:**
Dr Lionel Babicz, Department of Japanese Studies, University of Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia
Email: lionel.babicz@usyd.edu.au