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THE DYNAMICS OF NARRATIVES: WHAT GERMAN AND JAPANESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TELL US ABOUT WORLD WAR II TODAY

Ingvild BODE & HEO Emilia Seunghoon

As of 2015, 70 years have passed since World War II came to an end across Europe and Asia. How the war's two main aggressors, Germany and Japan, have faced their past has been a constant source of comparison in reconciliation studies.¹ While much research has analyzed school curricula and textbooks, little is known about how these official versions of history are retained or challenged by university students. Our project explores what kind of narratives students in Germany and Japan tell about World War II and how these characterize their home countries.

Focusing on narratives underlines the nature of historical knowledge as the outcome of social construction. Moreover, our engagement with that knowledge is also part of an interpretative process. To get access to student narratives, we devised an online survey with 19 open or multiple choice questions, sub-divided into three thematic parts: World War II knowledge, World War II narratives, and international reconciliation issues. We shared this survey among our professional networks from May to August 2015, which led to 133 and 155 responses from German and Japanese students, respectively.

In this contribution, we present initial findings focusing on three aspects: first, depth and sources of students' World War II knowledge; second, whether their narratives include reflective or non-reflective characterizations of their home countries; and third, whether and how students would change their history education.²

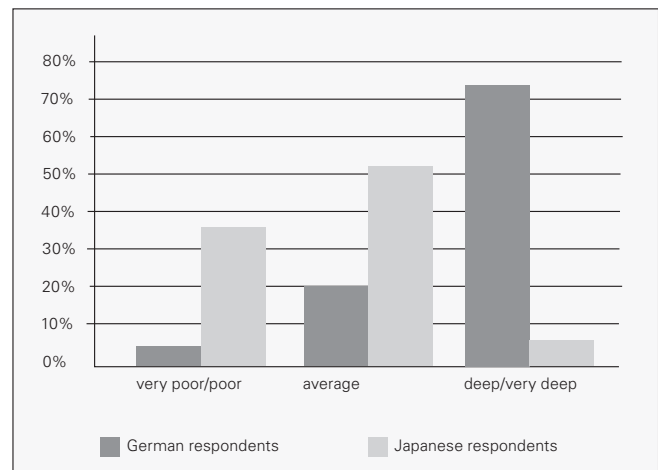


Figure 1: Student self-assessment of their World War II knowledge

¹ See, for instance, Berger, Thomas. 2012. *War, Guilt, and World Politics after World War II*. Cambridge: CUP; Feldman, Lily Gardner. 2012. *Germany's Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield; He, Yanan. 2009. *The Search for Reconciliation: Sino-Japanese and German-Polish Relations since World War II*. Cambridge: CUP; Heo, Seunghoon Emilia. 2012. *Reconciling Enemy States in Europe and Asia*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

² We aim to publish a detailed examination of our findings in a longer article: Ingvild Bode and Seunghoon Emilia Heo (forthcoming) *Choosing Ways of Remembering: Comparing Student Narratives about World War II in Germany and Japan*.

Q1: HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT WORLD WAR II?

(On a scale from 1 – very poor to 5 – very deep.)

Student assessment regarding how much they know about World War II differs greatly across the two survey groups (c. figure 1). A clear majority of German respondents (75%) rate their knowledge as either “deep”/“very deep”. The “poor”/“very poor” ratings of knowledge are statistically insignificant (5%), while 20% rate their knowledge as average. Half of the Japanese respondents (53%) rate

their knowledge as “average”, while another 37% rate their knowledge as “poor” or “very poor”. In other words, 90% of Japanese respondents do not think that they have developed sufficient knowledge about World War II. These responses illustrate a gap between German and Japanese students when it comes to their self-assessment of World War II knowledge.

Q2: WHAT HAVE BEEN IMPORTANT SOURCES OF YOUR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT WORLD WAR II?

(This was a multiple choice question with eight possible answers as depicted in figure 2. Students were also asked to provide examples for each source they ticked).

Both German and Japanese students chose high school education as the most important source of their knowledge (93.2% to 88.3% respectively), while there were major differences between the groups with regard to two aspects: First, how much time students actually spent learning about World War II at school, and second, how this relates to other sources of knowledge students have (c. figure 2).

“oral stories” (63.9%), while 10% of German students came up with other sources beyond the list, e.g. student exchange. Less than half of the Japanese students checked sources such as “media” (48.3%), “oral stories” (43.3%), or “visits to memorials” (42.5%) and only a few (3.8%) provided sources beyond the options given, e.g. anime.

Teaching about World War II figured prominently in most of the German students’ school careers: 31.7% spent more than 100 hours learning about World War II and another 19% stated that they find it difficult to estimate the exact number of hours as there were so many. Another 18.2% answered having spent 50-100 hours learning about World War II. A further 14% also highlighted that aspects of World War II are not only covered in history classes but in other subjects such as literature and religion as well. In comparison, 34.2% of Japanese respondents said they spent about eleven to twenty hours learning about World War II, while about half (52.5%) answered less than ten hours. Among those who answered “less than ten hours”, more than half noted that they spent around three to four hours during their entire high school careers. Further, 98% of Japanese students stated that they learned about World War II in history class only, either Japanese history class or world history class, a course that often remains optional in the Japanese high school system. Student knowledge in Germany and Japan also differs remarkably when it comes to the variety of knowledge sources. More than 2/3 of the German respondents checked various knowledge sources such as “visits to memorials” (85%), “media” (82.7%), “books” (64.7%), and

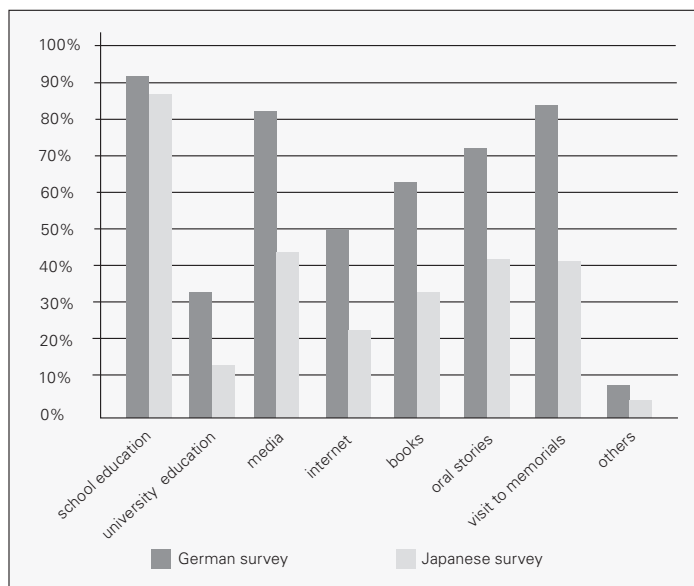


Figure 2: Sources of German and Japanese student knowledge about World War II

Q3: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE JAPAN'S/GERMANY'S ROLE IN WORLD WAR II?

Answers to this question provide the most substantive assessment of how German and Japanese students perceive of their country's role in World War II. We have come up with labels referring to various kinds of reflection in terms of how Germany and Japan are characterized.

Labels attached to German student narratives range from "highly reflective, including substantive value judgments" to "non-reflective/positive elements" (see table 1). There are three main results: first, a clear majority of German student narratives include some form

of reflective characterization of Germany (107 out of 120). Second, looking at the different types of reflection within this group, many narratives can be found in the "reflective" category. Most of these (48) were one-word responses, such as "perpetrator". 33 narratives were labeled as "highly reflective" because of explicit references to German war crimes and/or value judgments. Third, only few narratives included some relativization of Germany's role (5), or blended reflective assessments with relativizing (3) or positive references (4). These three labels account for twelve out of 120 narratives, which

LABEL RANGE	NUMBER OF NARRATIVES	EXAMPLES
Highly reflective, including substantive value judgements	33 (27%)	"Started the war, imperialist campaign, totalitarian methods, racist deluded ideals and unbelievable war crimes, as well as crimes against humanity." "Germany is the cause of World War II and responsible for indescribable suffering."
Reflective	48 (39.9%)	"aggressor"; "war monger"; "responsible"; "guilty"
Reflective with attempts towards a balanced portrayal	9 (7.4%)	"Aggressor. Responsible for unbelievable suffering brought upon those that NS ideology characterized as inferior, the European countries that Germany invaded, and the Germans themselves."
Low level reflective	10 (8.2%)	"I consider Germany as the main initiator of World War II and a role model for other aggressors."
Neutral ³	8 (6.5%)	"leading"; "at first offensive, then defensive"
Mixed reflective/relativizing	3 (2.4%)	"Aggressor, victim of World War I"
Relativizing	5 (4.1%)	"Not only Germany is guilty of having caused World War II. The events of World War I almost automatically led to World War II. This country's racism that continues until today is, however, insufferable."
Mixed reflective/positive	4 (3.3%)	"Initially very superior. The main cause, in hit-and-run style, overreached itself."

Table 1: German student narratives per label

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The label "neutral" was attached to narratives if they do not contain substantial value judgements pertaining to the characterisation of Germany and Japan but simply stated "facts". To note that Germany played a "leading role" in World War II or that Japan had a "huge influence" on World War II cannot be contested but does not include reflective characterisation.

all still contain some reflective characterization of Germany's role.

While German students' answers displayed various ways of understanding their past, Japanese students' responses were strongly homogeneous (c. table 2). There are three key results: first, many narratives included a highly positive/non-reflective characterization of Japan's role during World War II (47 out of 119), often Japan is portrayed as the "savior" of Southeast Asian countries through assisting in liberating themselves from Western colonialism.

Second, a victimized view of Japan was also prevalent in student narratives, most often connected to the atomic bombings. Overall, these narratives clearly show that many students' understanding in the context of World War II focuses on how Japan was bombed, lost the war and lost lives rather than on the harm inflicted by Japan on others. Third, only few (9) responses clearly mentioned Japan as an aggressor, while more characterized Japan in a "neutral" way, i.e. with one-word answers such as "big role".

LABEL RANGE	NUMBER OF NARRATIVES	EXAMPLES
positive / non-reflective	47 (39.4%)	"Japan helped Asian countries to become independent from European countries..." "Asian countries hope because Japan tried to fight again big countries such as the US."
victimized / focus on victimhood	29 (24.3%)	"Japan was instrumental in WWII. We were attacked and we are the only victim of atomic bombs. We are a symbol for peace, I guess." "Atomic bombs dropped on Japan was the reason why the war ended. So Japan had a very sad but important role in the war."
mixed reflective / positive	11 (9.2%)	"Japan wanted to be the strongest country by invading other East Asian countries but eventually failed and the atomic bombs were dropped. I think Japan's role was to show you must not think it is good to invade others to become the center of the world."
reflective	9 (7.5%)	"Japan was aggressor just like Italy and Germany" "Japan started the Second World War because of overconfidence in its own power."
neutral	16 (13.4%)	"Japan was one of the most important countries during World War II"; "World War II leading country"

Table 2: Japanese student narratives per label in response to question 5

Q4: SHOULD WORLD WAR II HISTORY BE TAUGHT DIFFERENTLY? IF YES, HOW?

Answers to this question across both groups indicate critical engagement with how World War II history is taught at school (compare figure 3).

More than half of the German respondents (58.7%) came up with various suggestions regarding different approaches that education about World War II history could take. Although most students in this group supported the current reflective treatment of German

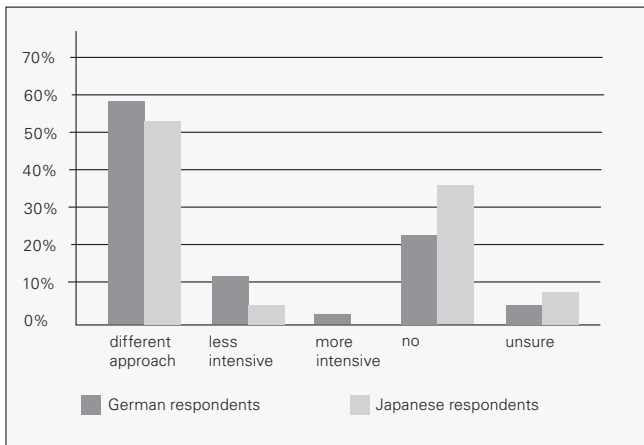


Figure 3: German and Japanese student answers to question 4

history, about half (48.4%) encourage the usage of different materials to enable more emphatic understanding, such as autobiographical accounts of Holocaust survivors, more interactive engagement through visiting memorials or a greater emphasis on World War II's historical relevance for understanding today's Germany and combating racism. Another sub-group (26.6%) criticized content-related choices, e.g. advocating a less German and Eurocentric approach to learning about World War II. 10.9% discussed how early teaching of traumatic topics such as the Holocaust should start at school and noted the psychological challenges of coming to terms with German historical guilt. Moreover, 22% of German students are satisfied with the way World War II history is being taught, while 12% suggest a less intensive treatment. Most students in this group do not dispute its general importance but criticize how the sheer volume of WWII-related topics covered may lead to oversaturation and boredom or leave less time for covering other historical epochs. These answers show a high level of support for current German history teaching, but include a substantial number of critical suggestions for improving it.

Half of the Japanese students (54.3%) think that World War II should be taught differently in Japanese schools. Many students

noted that their history lessons lacked the time to think and learn about the “why” and “how” of the war, e.g.: “At school, history was generally taught for the purpose of remembering dates and events for the entrance exam. I believe that the history of World War II should be taught as a story combining issues that countries are facing today. In this way, we can learn the connection between the past and the present.” Some students who studied abroad shared their comparative perspective, stating that history classes in the US or in European countries provided them with many opportunities to think critically, which was not the case in Japan. 14 students noted that they think Japanese history education focuses too much on a victimized image of Japan and does not really help them to learn the “real story”, the “hidden story”, or “why we were bombed”. Some said that they would like to hear the voices of comfort women, the victims of the Nanjing massacre, or any other colonized countries’ stories through primary material. Two students encouraged a new way of teaching but think it is impossible for a country to teach how “aggressive” or “criminal” they were in the past.

These answers show a high level of support for changing the way history is currently taught in Japanese high schools. However, there were also a large number of students answering “no” (34.6%). While most of these did not provide further explanations, 14 students said they are satisfied with the “neutral” way history is being taught, focusing only on facts, events, names, and numbers. In sum, Japanese student answers show two contrasting ways of thinking about history education: some think teaching history as if it concerned facts is dangerous as it does not allow students to deepen their understanding about the past and connect this with the world they live in. Others argue that critical thinking or reflection is unnecessary when it comes to history and only facts, events, and numbers matter.

Based on these findings, we reach three concluding arguments on Japanese and German student narratives about World War II. First, there is a knowledge gap when it comes to World War II history among German and Japanese students, both in terms of depth and sources of knowledge. Second, exposure to diverse sources of knowledge appears to lead to more varying characterizations of their home country, especially when it comes to reflecting on roles in World War II. Explanations for this finding can go in two directions: first, when encountering diverse sources of knowledge and attempting to integrate these, students are more likely to come

across inconsistencies. This may lead to reflection on this knowledge, as well as a more reflective narrative characterization of their home country. Following this, Japanese students may often share homogeneous and non-reflective characterizations of Japan in WWII, as their more limited exposure to diverse knowledge sources allows them less creative space to construct their own narratives. A second argument would be to interpret the different numbers of reflective characterizations in student narratives as expressions of the countries' diverging World War II remembrance discourses and their inclusion in school curricula. This would suggest high retention of official narratives in student narratives. Our third argument challenges this unidirectional view: When asked whether they would change how World War II history is taught at school, respondents across Germany and Japan put forward a wide range of suggestions. This points to highly reflective engagement with World War II history and knowledge, as well as student awareness for its continued relevance.



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OVERVIEW AND CASE STUDIES OF PEACE EDUCATION FOR RECONCILIATION IN NORTHEAST ASIA

OAKU Yuko

Northeast Asian countries, particularly Japan, China, and Korea, have followed a troubled path toward reconciliation in the wake of the region's bitter shared history of invasion and colonization by Japan. In this article, an overview of history education in Japan, China, and South Korea presents a possible impediment to the advancement of reconciliation between the three countries. Subsequently, three case studies of peace education programs in Northeast Asia are introduced and analyzed to offer recommendations for further development of similar programs to promote mutual understanding and reconciliation in the region.

OVERVIEW OF HISTORY EDUCATION IN NORTHEAST ASIA

In each region, history textbooks and education initiatives “have been fashioned to nurture a sense of national identity” (Duus, in Sneider, 2012). As a result, the primary function of history education

has been to promote national pride and identity in the Northeast Asian countries (Ibid). Increasing pressure to demand patriotism, especially through the stories of victimhood during the war times, remains an obstacle to the advancement of reconciliation through history education in Northeast Asia. This common phenomenon can be observed in Japan, China, and South Korea.

JAPAN

For Japanese students, Japanese history classes are only mandatory as part of social studies during elementary and junior high school (MEXT, 2015). During high school years, Japanese history classes are offered merely as an elective in most public schools (Nikkei, 2014). The obvious shortage of time spent on learning about national history consequently leads to disinterest and a lack of knowledge amongst Japanese students. Moreover, a rigorous screening process for