

# Reflections on Historical Objectivity and Intellectual Engagement: Transnational scholarship on Mutual Sino-Japanese Historical Issues during Imperial Japan's Wartime Occupation of China

Annika A. CULVER

Associate Professor of East Asian History  
Florida State University  
Institute on World War II and the Human Experience,  
Faculty Advisor, Asia-Pacific War  
Scholar, US-Japan Network for the Future (Cohort II)

## Introduction

Briefly, the “history problem” [*rekishi mondai*] in East Asia refers to the politicization of the often conflicting, competing, and politically-suffused views on history related to the Second World War, which most historians of East Asia believe began in 1931 with the imperial Japanese Kantô Army's invasion of Manchuria, or northeast China.<sup>1)</sup> This region, and the Japanese-led state of Manchukuo, set up in 1932, but crumbling in 1945 after imperial Japan's defeat, is one of my main research interests. As a specialist on cultural propaganda and Japanese intellectual engagement in Manchukuo,<sup>2)</sup> I will discuss some of my thoughts on intellectual engagement for historians, in addition to the value and importance of transnational scholarship, and the potential richness of intellectual exchange between scholars, academics, foreign policy communities, and even museum curators to provide a multi-faceted view of a complex time period deeply affecting global history, and influencing international relations for over seventy years since the 1945 end of the Second World War.

This essay covers contemporary developments related to “history issues” in the Japanese history profession in the US, as well as certain projects that I have been working on representing current, ongoing work in transnational scholarship on historical issues related to imperial Japan's wartime occupation of China, as viewed from an intellectual perspective.

## Questions of Objectivity and Intellectual Engagement

In terms of what I have experienced in academic circles in greater China,<sup>3)</sup> Japan, and North America (the United States and Canada),<sup>4)</sup> I can see the growth of an increasingly progressive

tendency within academia to willingly confront the grey nuances in portraying a once politically fraught wartime history. Greater, over-arching political narratives tied to national aims appear to be waning in the scholarly works of academics from most countries, including the People's Republic of China (PRC), which has attempted in the past, and sometimes even into the present, to strictly control such narratives—for example, certain archives are now essentially “closed” under the premise of “digitalization,” but a thriving private market for historical materials circumvents this. Intriguingly, the PRC government now seems to be especially fostering (or seeking to assert some modicum of control by funding) historical and literary research related to the puppet state of Manchukuo (1932-1945), or Japanese-occupied northeast China from 1931-1945. (This kind of government support has seemingly not extended quite as freely to investigations of other parts of China under Japanese wartime occupation, which a younger generation of transnational scholars in North America, Australia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan are examining in nuanced ways.) Yet, perceptions remain amongst the general greater Chinese and South Korean populations (and amongst Americans) that Japanese academics are also tied to political constraints in terms of crafting their views of history.

As a more recent case, I will discuss some examples of how the so-called “Comfort Women” issue has led to renewed controversy within the US and Japan. However, should we as historians accept the views of groups and individuals seemingly leading these debates, including journalists, who rarely operate from within academic circles, as those properly qualified to investigate these very questions? Are historians more objective than others, or are their views now so complicated by the narratives surrounding types of sources, archives, philosophies, political considerations, and external subjectivities, that, as Carlo Ginzburg, a historian of early modern Europe, once lamented, objective truth and objectivity are often so enwrapped in rhetoric as to become mere myths of representation?<sup>5)</sup>

What exactly is objectivity? And, can pure empiricism, allegedly based on objective readings of historical materials, ever be maintained? Is this even a desirable goal, as some American historians of Japan seem to assert, for “solving” the international relations and political problems surrounding “history issues” in East Asia? Or, should we instead be looking at the debates themselves to understand the contemporary political climate in which they arose? This approach can also be an important way to interrogate what intellectual engagement<sup>6)</sup> means to a historian in the context of East Asia.

In terms of understanding interpretations of historical objectivity in the US context, an influential book for American historians was Peter Novick's 1988 study *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession*,<sup>7)</sup> which is still frequently assigned to US-based students in history seminars. He examines how historians (and even university history depart-

ments) in the US have viewed history in accordance with prevailing views of objectivity in the profession from the nineteenth into late twentieth centuries, which he divides into four phases: The Rankean Consensus (1884-1914), or empirically viewing the “past as it essentially was”; The Interwar Progressive Challenge (1914-1940), a post-WWI commitment to secular progress; The Postwar Reconstruction of Objectivism (1941-1967), a Euro-/US-centric return to scientific objectivism rooted in Cold War values; and The Crisis of Objectivism (1967-Present), a post-Vietnam War re-examination of an earlier consensus coinciding with the rise of a sometimes divisive diversity in the New Left, second-wave feminism, race/ethnicity studies, post-structuralist or post-modernist social sciences, and even conservative hyper-objectivists.<sup>8)</sup> Indeed, is objectivity a necessary value for our history profession? Is our work *ever* objective, or does it at least in some ways intersect with the aims of the institutions, organizations, and universities funding us, along with our own political sensibilities? For that matter, when *should* historians become intellectually engaged in political issues?

### **American Historians of Japan Enter the Fray**

Media controversy in the US surrounding historical views intersecting with contemporary political viewpoints, such as how the Civil War should be remembered and what should be done about existing statues commemorating the Confederacy, is also a part of the current Japanese political landscape in terms of memorializing the Second World War. This includes issues related to the statues of “Comfort Women” erected in the United States and South Korea by activist groups seeking recognition for women having allegedly served as “sexual slaves” for the wartime Japanese military. Prior to this, major political backlash, as well as attacks on mainstream Japanese historians who had written about the “Comfort Women” issue, were prompted by the August 2014 retraction of news stories from the left-leaning newspaper, Asahi Shimbun, that included Yoshida Seiji’s flawed testimony allegedly uncovering wartime evidence of the imperial Japanese military “hunting” for women to staff military brothels on Cheju Island in colonial Korea.<sup>9)</sup> Unfortunately, the errors of single source generated a firestorm of controversy over the topic. Japanese nationalists used this issue, as well as groups promoting historical revisionism, to entirely deny the existence of any type of coercion in the matter, while attacks began on historians who maintained this view.

Concern for these issues spread to historians across the Pacific into North America. In spring 2015, at the late March Association for Asian Studies (AAS) Conference held in Chicago, Illinois, following a panel on reinterpretations of Japanese fascism, private discussions about growing concerns about press freedom and academic engagement in contemporary Japan led to a call to action by two American historians. An “Open Letter in Support of Historians in Japan”<sup>10)</sup> was written by Alexis Dudden, a University of Connecticut historian known for her influential 2008 book

*Troubled Apologies Among Japan, Korea, and the United States*,<sup>11)</sup> and Jordan Sand, a Georgetown University historian of material cultures, domestic space, and urban life in imperial Japan.<sup>12)</sup> Intending to write on behalf of historians in their field, in the 5 May 2015 Open Letter, they noted their support for “the many courageous historians in Japan seeking an accurate and just history of World War II in Asia” and stressed in particular, the so-called “Comfort Women Issue”.<sup>13)</sup> In order to do this, they promoted a certain way of writing history that remained free from political bias or governmental control. In other words, Dudden and Sand favored a return to objectivity, which they defined as thus: “Like our colleagues in Japan, we believe that *only careful weighing and contextual evaluation of every trace of the past can produce a just history. Such work must resist national and gender bias, and be free from government manipulation, censorship, and private intimidation.* We defend the freedom of historical inquiry, and we call upon all governments to do the same.”<sup>14)</sup> Both wrote this in their context as public intellectuals, who seemed to urge government protection of the “freedom of historical inquiry”—not only in Japan—but also at a time in the US when conservative politicians in states like Texas also began to support revisionist forms of history in textbooks (primarily on the 1861-1865 Civil War and the mid-twentieth century Civil Rights Era).

The “Open Letter in Support of Historians in Japan” soon mushroomed into a major social media phenomenon via H-Net, an online forum for historians, and other modes of communication like Twitter and Facebook; from 187 initial people who signed the letter, it bloomed to nearly 500 historians and social scientists from all over the world, with listed names soon growing into a thousand over a matter of weeks. Before hundreds signed on, it was originally signed by a core group of about twenty US-based Japan scholars, including Ezra Vogel, who had until then usually maintained an impartial voice due to the sensitive nature of his transnational scholarship on US-Japan-China political and historical issues. After western news media like *Wall Street Journal* and *Financial Times* portrayed the Open Letter as a “rebuke” to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, on 16 May 2015, Dudden and Sand defended their ideas in an online interview to Dispatch Japan, and denied that they intended it as a rebuke, which they stated was not part of their role as historians,<sup>15)</sup> but instead hoped that it would lead towards government action in solving the “Comfort Women” issue.<sup>16)</sup> Both saw themselves as public intellectuals and advocates for change on an issue where they had some expertise.

Yet, not all Japan scholars or even the general public engaging with these ideas thought this Open Letter was a good idea, or even effective. Left-oriented younger Japanese bloggers like Tsuneno Yujiro, a critic of the Japanese education system, and what he views as the enduring nature of the imperialist and colonialist project associated with the Japanese nation, also provided their input in articles on online peer-reviewed journals like “The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus.” On 3 June 2015, from his antiwar and leftist standpoint, he published the essay “The ‘Open Letter in

Support of Historians in Japan': A Critique," where he views the Letter as a disappointment, and seemingly as "the result of a compromise among people with divergent views."<sup>17)</sup> Intriguingly, he views the recent eruption of "history issues" like that of the "Comfort Women" as the result of an unfinished postwar, like historian Hideki Kan, where the US should claim some responsibility in maintaining the Emperor as a national figurehead (but without direct political power) and many of its prewar institutions in rebuilding the country after the war:

It is no accident that the Japanese government had never conducted significant research into its wartime system of sexual slavery until some of the victims started to come forward in the 1990s. Thus, it is mistaken to see, as Sand does, a "turn" in recent years; rather, the unfinished business of 1945 has left Japan without any major transformation despite its defeat. Today's revisionists are not an anomaly but a natural extension of what has been going on and what has not been going on in the last seventy years. If the goal is to prevent denial or distortion of the historical facts of atrocities, then painting its "*sengo*" as something to celebrate and making the Japanese feel good is not helpful. Post-1945 Japan, in cooperation with the United States, has continued along many paths charted in its pre-defeat era. Fundamental change is needed if it is to fully recognize its wrongdoings and make amends. If you respect the Japanese as beings with moral capacity to admit their historical crimes and injustices, you can criticize their revisionism straightforwardly without sugarcoating it by listing its "achievements."<sup>18)</sup>

Tsuneno urges a return to a kind of (post) post-war self-reflection upon the dangers of nationalism, and favors a clear acknowledgement of how the rectification of imperial Japan's errors of the past was deeply enmeshed in the postwar aims of the United States.

However, this kind of reflection actually *did* exist for a while in immediate postwar Japan, most notably amongst intellectuals like political theorist Murayama Masao (1914-1996), who attempted to understand the rise of Japanese fascism in a series of late 1940s lectures on ultra-nationalism.<sup>19)</sup> I recently reviewed political historian Laura Hein's recent manuscript, *Post-Fascist Japan: Political Culture in Kamakura After the Second World War*, where she details how Japanese intellectuals chose a seaside town distanced from Tokyo as a space where they could make amends for a wartime fascist political culture through the building of institutions like a university with an egalitarian flavor, art museums offering "democratic" narratives, and progressive urban administration.<sup>20)</sup> As we see a renewed rise of nationalism in East Asia (including China, Japan, and the two Koreas) as well as in the United States, it may be prudent for historians of East Asia to revisit the makings of a post-fascist political culture amongst postwar intellectuals in Japan. Their self-reflexivity, critical views of history, and contextualization of contemporary political concerns could also become a

more impartial way for East Asia historians to address the continued impact of “history issues” on international relations.

The social media phenomenon surrounding the Open Letter, which sparked interesting discussions about the role of historians as public intellectuals, was followed in December 2015 by a petition from 50 Japanese conservative academics, including the group’s leader, the Japanese military historian Hata Ikuhiko, to urge the revision of a US textbook published by McGraw Hill, *Traditions and Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past*, which they believe misrepresented the “Comfort Women” issue in a 26-line text that contained what they felt were factual errors.<sup>21)</sup> The initial group of 19 scholars who had examined the passage thought that the numbers of women involved were too large, and that they had not been coerced into working at military brothels, while taking issue with the type of language used by historian Herbert Ziegler, a specialist in modern Germany and twentieth century Europe, who had written the text.<sup>22)</sup> In fact, around this time, I even received a packet of information to “educate me” about the nature of these alleged errors in the textbook.<sup>23)</sup> Several of my colleagues throughout the United States who research Sino-Japanese history also received this. Regardless of the veracity of the textbook, or whether Europeanists should actually be writing definitive histories of East Asia, the fact that a group of Japanese scholars and a leading historian would get involved in the writing of history textbooks by historians in another country, with even Japan’s Foreign Ministry complaining to the publisher, is illustrative of the primacy of “history issues” for Japan *and* the US, and clearly points to mutual, unresolved transwar issues affecting both countries.

In addition, I was also put on a list for receiving periodic email messages from Kase Hideaki, who runs the “Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact,” a nationalist group which promotes a revisionist view of imperial Japan’s wartime history.<sup>24)</sup> The SDHF website also contains misleading historical evidence taken out of context, and highlights reviews of books supporting their views, like one alleging that “the US started the Pacific War.” The group argues that Chinese government propaganda has influenced interpretations of such data, like the number of civilians killed during the war. While a certain amount of this assertion about the effects of CCP propaganda influencing domestic views in China may be true, it seems facetious to assume that lower numbers of war dead would make a difference in terms of international perceptions of wartime Japan, which the revisionists believe are tied to Japan’s current global image. In 2008 and 2010, the SDHF group had also protested against the findings of the “Japan China Joint History Research Committee” on the Nanjing Massacre, and specifically targeted the research of political scientist, diplomat, and historian Kitaoka Shin’ichi, who chaired the Japan side of the Committee between 2006 and 2010. Ironically, the very heated debates over these issues are exactly what have revived the specter of a wartime history that Japan seemingly cannot get past.

In March 2011, Kitaoka gave the keynote address, “A New Asian Order and the Role of Japan,” at the combined AAS/International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) meeting in Honolulu, Hawaii, and also presented on a panel detailing the latest 2010 findings of the “Japan China Joint History Research Committee”<sup>25)</sup> –both of which I attended. The title of his talk and the topics he discussed now seem quite prescient of Japan’s revived 2015 defense guidelines and leadership initiatives in multi-national fora in greater Asia. I was also surprised to hear some of the Chinese academics on the panel, including historian Bu Ping, who chaired the Chinese side of the Committee, indicate that the Chinese people might not be ready for a more objective kind of history of the second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), especially due to nationalism amongst the youth.<sup>26)</sup> Their group had already examined many important mutual issues in the late 19th century and early twentieth, but the wartime era presented problems despite to the strong bi-national government sponsorship of the project. Such frank statements generated much discussion from attendees. Interestingly, Kitaoka now serves as President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency,<sup>27)</sup> which coordinates Japan’s official development aid (ODA) for developing countries, and seemingly now moves in much more conservative circles as an advisor to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe on constitutional reinterpretation. Whether this choice resulted from the fear of attacks by right-oriented groups in Japan or a genuine desire to represent his country in less politically-sensitive international venues to help extend its soft power globally, Kitaoka was clearly impacted by the political complexities of his position as a historian and scholar of international politics, and thus relied on his training as a diplomat to navigate them.

No doubt, in order to quiet these instances where historians from all political spectra are engaging in increasingly heated rhetorical battles over historical representation, the Japanese government attempted to resolve the so-called “Comfort Women” issue with South Korea once and for all—interestingly, quite in line with Dudden’s intent in the 16 May interview, and possibly, Prime Minister Abe might also have been influenced by Kitaoka’s guidance. On 28 December 2015, representatives from Japan and South Korea signed an agreement to bring a conclusion to the dispute,<sup>28)</sup> whereby the Japanese government would create a one billion yen fund for 46 surviving Korean women who had been coerced into sexual labor for the wartime imperial Japanese military.<sup>29)</sup> Yet, the issue persists, since officials of the current Moon administration allege that the South Korean people cannot accept this agreement emotionally, and citizens’ groups have also called for a deeper apology. Yet, the “culture war” over historical representation continues, and social media is intensifying these issues.

While it may be difficult to weigh and judge “every trace of the past” as Dudden and Sand advocated in their Open Letter, it is possible to welcome transnational collaboration by historians of East Asia with varying forms of expertise, allowing them access to and the ability to “read” and

contextualize a variety of sources, including material objects and visual images, along with more traditional written historical documents and official government reports. Instead of trying to prevent outside intrusions upon objectivity—the most obvious being government control, either through the framing of a project where politics may come into play, or in funding constraints—historians might instead unite under the banner of a collective project, where they can self-reflexively acknowledge their approach and influences, and agree that others may “frame” the evidence in radically different ways. For half a decade, this worked for a while on a top-down government level when Japanese and Chinese high-level officials supported a joint-history project during a positive time in Sino-Japanese relations, but the historians involved chose to keep some of their work inaccessible to the general public in order to prevent nationalistic outbursts in both countries. Nowadays, social media has provided such an outlet for individuals with all kinds of motivations and political beliefs, as well as forums for intellectual collaboration.

### **Manchukuo Perspectives: A Potential Model?**

However, outside of high-profile examples of groups manipulating history issues for political reasons, historians of East Asia usually come together quite peacefully to mutually work on projects together and to engage in debate in various venues, even when their interpretations differ. Much interesting work is being done on East Asia under occupation—either on imperial Japan’s occupation of parts of China (1931-1945) and Asia (1940-1945),<sup>30)</sup> or the on the American postwar occupation of Japan (1945-1952).<sup>31)</sup> In Japan, much of the Manchukuo period (1932-1945) is remembered as nostalgia, while for Chinese, memories of this time reveal different shades of complexity, as the collaboration versus resistance paradigm slowly begins to fade with the loosening of Marxist rhetoric that an earlier generation of scholars influenced by the Chinese Communist Party felt compelled to include in historical accounts. In North America, scholars including myself are also examining the revival of the US-Japan relationship during the Occupation through the lens of trans-war imperialistic scientific endeavors from the 1930s into the 1950s, but with the war viewed as a brief interruption of earlier cosmopolitan networks that allowed for the rapid reestablishment of international exchange.<sup>32)</sup>

In the field of Manchukuo studies, the histories of Japan, Korea, and China, and even the US and Russia intersect in intriguing ways. One can even argue that the current issues involving North Korea arose out of a shared history of involvement in Manchuria, first as an initial “safe haven” for Korean independence activists after imperial Japan’s 1910 annexation of the country, and then as a site of Korean resistance against Japan until 1945, and once again against the US during the Korean War (1950-1953), where China served as North Korea’s communist ally during a Cold War proxy war.<sup>33)</sup> This sort of study is inherently political, but it seems as if the contemporary governments of



these countries now have an interest in its history, though only South, and not North, Koreans at the moment can engage in the kind of international scholarship allowing free exchange of ideas.

In the US, Manchukuo briefly sparked the interests of left-oriented American academics around 2003 because of the US occupation of Iraq, largely to counter individuals remarking on the success of the postwar Allied and US occupation of Japan. For example, MIT emeritus Japan historian John Dower's book *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor/Hiroshima/9-11/Iraq*<sup>34)</sup> was one of the most critical voices, as a peace activist and antiwar military historian, where he found parallels in how these four events were portrayed in the American military imagination by individuals and institutions, with often uncannily repetitive paradigms culminating with the Iraq War and that country's subsequent occupation. In fact, he won a Pulitzer Prize for his now-classic 1998 text on the topic, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*,<sup>35)</sup> which examines how the US Occupation of Japan affected both the American occupiers and the defeated Japanese at all levels of society. Though a retired professor emeritus at MIT, he still is involved with the "Visualizing Cultures" website, for which he has also authored eleven presentations, and which allows international access to collections of visual images centering on China, Japan, and the Philippines from the late nineteenth into mid-twentieth centuries in clearly arranged units as pedagogical tools.<sup>36)</sup> On the site, there are not yet any image collections specifically related to Manchukuo, where postcards were an important part of the cultural propaganda landscape (while promoting tourism or support of the Japanese military overseas). However, historian Paul Barclay at Lafayette College continuously adds new postcards to the East Asia Image Collection (EAIC), which gives online access to visual cultures of Japanese imperialism, allowing scholars and students a deeper understanding of the propagandistic effects of Japanese colonialism and wartime occupation.

I recently co-edited with Canadian historian Norman Smith a forthcoming volume of essays by scholars from North America, China, Japan, and Korea on literary perspectives of Manchukuo and how writers of the different ethnicities of Japanese-occupied northeast China viewed the state. This book project was an outgrowth of a March 2015 panel "Manchukuo Perspectives" that I chaired at the Association for Asian Studies held in Chicago, Illinois. After my talk on Japanese cultural propaganda in Manchukuo, an acquisitions editor from Hong Kong University Press approached me about my interest in publishing our findings, so we began to talk about ways to turn the issues brought up by the panelists into an edited volume. I was elated that the project interested a well-known university press from Hong Kong, which would allow a wider marketing of the book in East Asia, and even the People's Republic of China. We intended to look at the issue of creating a new literary culture in Japanese-occupied Manchuria from a perspective that complicated the popular "collaboration and resistance" binary that had been so common in past scholarship. Although such an approach centered around complexity was already quite standard in studies of

Vichy France (under German occupation during World War II), political sensitivities in Mainland China have delayed a more nuanced view of the time period.

In the past decade, much has changed, especially the loosening of the political grip of the CCP on historical research,<sup>37)</sup> and Chinese scholars' increased exposure to global trends in scholarship over the past decade, and greater embedding into international scholarly networks. There are other encouraging trends, such as Chinese universities like *Renmin Daxue* [The People's University] in Beijing promoting bi-lingual Chinese-English history conferences amongst young scholars to bring in more international participants to allow exchanges of ideas. Also, in fall 2017, Tianjin University hosted the East Asian Environmental History (EAEH) conference, which brought together hundreds of historians from East Asia, Europe, and North America. The last conference was held in Takamatsu, Japan in October 2015, where US environmental historian Donald Tucker gave a keynote address on manufactured agricultural landscapes, and I presented some of my more recent work on an American Occupation official and his postwar collaboration with Japanese scientists on wildlife conservation and ornithology.<sup>38)</sup> Last October, in 2016, I met Tucker again in Beijing at the Young Historians' conference at The People's University! He mentioned that he enjoyed his new role mentoring Chinese students during a year abroad as part of his very active retirement years. These types of exchanges are indicative of the Chinese government's recent promotion of interactions with western historians over the past decade—something already quite robust for about twenty years between Chinese researchers and their counterparts in Japan at certain universities, like the exchanges between Peking University and Hiroshima University.

The Chinese government is also helping to fund more large-scale publication of reference works on Manchukuo, containing the scholarly efforts of multinational scholars. For example, this past spring 2017, a 34-volume set on Manchukuo literature, "Systematic Arrangement and Research of Literary Materials from Bogus Manchukuo," [*Wei Man shiqi wenxue ziliao zhengli yu yanjiu*] was published by The Northern Arts Press [*Beifang wenyi chubanshe*] in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province, of the People's Republic of China, with funding from National Publication Foundation [*Guojia chuban jijin dingmu*]. This indicates some Chinese government support for such a multinational endeavor to create an important resource reference collection on the topic; however, this might also indicate the Chinese state's desire for a modicum of control over the project through selective censorship of portions of text. The project was led by Liu Xiaoli, as head editor, in her role as a prominent scholar of literature based at East China Normal University in Shanghai, China, with the participation of scholars from Canada, China, Japan, and Korea. Nine other editors helped compile the collections of literature by various Manchukuo-based writers and write introductions to the volumes. On the China side, they include Zhang Quan, Li Haiying, Chen Yan, and Chen Shi; Japanese editors include Okubô Akio, and Kazeta Hideki; Kim Jaeyong is the sole Korean editor,

with Norman Smith an editor from Canada, and Ron Suleski an editor from the United States. While Smith is my co-editor for our book, many of these scholars are also contributing chapters to our project, which will be published in English in Hong Kong with nearly twenty chapters, including an introduction and conclusion.

As a specialist in Manchukuo literature, Liu is also part of the yearly multi-national conferences on colonial literature in East Asia, which began in Korea as meetings of the “East Asian Colonialism and Literature Study Group” [*Higashi Ajia shokuminshugi to bungaku kenkyūkai*] in 2005, which were held there ten times until 2014. The organizers wished for a more international focus, and thus changed the name to “Colonialism and Literature” [*Shokuminshugi to bungaku*], and moved the venue to a large international conference site in Shanghai in 2015, and Taiwan in 2016. For the 2017 conference in Tokyo, in part organized by Okubo Akio, and held on 18 September to reflect the impact of the Manchurian Incident on East Asia, its name was changed to “Colonialism and Cultural Negotiation in Taiwan/Manchuria/Korea” [*Taiwan/Manshû/Chôsen no shokuminshugi to bunka kôshô*]. In other words, there are now growing international connections between scholars who work on colonial literature from Manchukuo and elsewhere in the former Japanese empire.

In addition, there are currently several North American projects to translate previously overlooked types of documents that capture the cultural atmosphere of the Japanese occupation in China: news reportage, magazine articles, short stories, tabloid accounts, government directives, propaganda materials, and introductions to literary volumes. At the end of May 2017, in Vancouver, Canada, I took part in the second meeting at the University of British Columbia of the Social Sciences History Research Council (SSHRC)-funded workshop “Translating the Occupation of China.” The first one was held last year in August 2016. Scholars at all stages in their careers from Canada, the US, Australia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan were in attendance at the May workshop, and I assume that the August one may have included more scholars from the PRC due to the time of year it was held, and its earlier notification of funding from the Canadian government. In May 2017, I presented my translation of the introduction to a 1942 collection of selections of literature from “each ethnicity in Manchukuo,” which contained the short essays of five prominent Japanese literati, including Kawabata Yasunari (1899-1972) and one Chinese writer, Gu Ding (1916-1964), who enjoyed good relations with the Japanese in this occupied space. I also learned more about the latest views by scholars on Japan’s incredibly complex wartime role in China, but the most interesting insight that I gleaned was that multiple languages and deep transnational historical knowledge are necessary to understand the layers of translation in ideas communicated in the 1930s and 1940s—concepts sometimes initially expressed in European languages, but then retranslated into Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, while Japanese became a language of imperial modernity after the rise of Japan’s empire and colonies beginning in the late nineteenth century. It is my hope that such

transnational efforts will continue.

## Conclusion

I began this essay with a discussion about historical objectivity, and what it means for a historian to be involved in intellectual engagement. Social media and other online means of communication have become increasingly useful tools for advancing one's ideas, regardless of purpose or political opinion, amidst a background of greater politicization of historical issues in both the US and East Asia. Historians are now increasingly entering the fray of contemporary debates, and challenging the concept of what it means to be a public intellectual. Yet, how can historical objectivity be sifted from argument or interpretation? Is it useful to critically engage in these debates themselves, to understand their origins and their contemporary wellsprings? How can we allow a multiplicity of interpretations of deeply complex historical phenomena, especially in such fraught issues as the wartime and postwar occupations of East Asia?

Fortunately, transnational and international projects related to multi-faceted historical phenomena or time periods now appear to be the norm, and are growing in importance, nourished both by the growing availability of Internet resources, email networks, and social media, including Facebook and Twitter. Especially in terms of the historical complexity of China under Japanese occupation, of which Manchukuo is a part, a multinational approach of the combined interpretations of scholars throughout the world is a necessity to understand the nuanced experiences of intellectual life and writing during that time period (1931-1945). Both language skills, where at least three languages are a must (Japanese and Chinese, plus English, with preferred knowledge of Korean, and perhaps Russian), and ability to access archives in China, Japan, and the United States (where the University of Chicago and Harvard University have the robust resources, along with the Library of Congress), make collaborative work an absolute must.

In what I view as an extremely positive trend, recent transnational scholarship on mutual historical issues between China and Japan through critical analyses of imperial Japan's wartime occupation shows a multiplicity of intellectual perspectives. It is truly remarkable, how, even though they do not always have the same political views, or even agree about interpretations of documents or other historical sources, scholars from North America, Japan, greater China, and Korea, are working together to provide an in-depth investigation of cultural production in China and the Japanese empire during wartime. Part of this trend is the kind of transnational research and collaboration on investigating key historical issues by internationally-prominent scholars in the US, Japan, South Korea, and China, including at KUFS.

## NOTES

- 1) In fact, one can also argue that the Second World War began because of imperial Japan's invasion of Manchuria, since this move emboldened both Fascist Italy under Benito Mussolini in the mid-1930s to invade and take over Ethiopia and Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler's leadership in the late 1930s to occupy the Rhineland and invade the Sudetenland. Though all these actions by Japan, Italy, and Germany sparked international condemnation, they were largely met by appeasement until Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, formally beginning WWII in Europe. However, the "Phony War" continued until 1940, without major actions by western allies.
- 2) See Annika A. Culver, *Glorify the Empire: Japanese Avant-Garde Propaganda in Manchukuo* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013).
- 3) By this term, I include Taiwan and Hong Kong with the People's Republic of China. Some scholars, like philosophy scholar and early modern historian Du Weiming, now based at Peking University in Beijing, sees this designation as including much larger areas unbounded by nation-state, as a Chinese identity can also be based on language and culture, in addition to a history of shared Confucian values. Anthropologists Aiwa Ong and Donald Nonini argue that Chinese cultural politics has also emerged out of the influence of overseas Chinese circulating within the economy of global capitalism. See Aiwa Ong and Donald Nonini, eds., *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
- 4) Institutional support for the study of East Asian History is least robust in Mexico, while the United States still surpasses Canada in terms of amount of government funding and support from organizations like the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) based in Ann Arbor, Michigan.
- 5) Ginzburg instead favored a moderate view that both transcended empiricism and late twentieth century post-modernism. See Carlo Ginzburg, *History, Rhetoric, and Proof: The Menachem Stern Jerusalem Lectures* (London and Hannover: Brandeis University and Historical Society of Israel, 1999).
- 6) By "intellectual engagement," I mean a scholarly investigation of contemporary issues that enmesh with topics of academic research, and responding to current debates, a type of response which I differentiate from "activism," or direct action to further specific political causes, movements, or social justice initiatives.
- 7) Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- 8) For an excellent summary of this massive volume, see Tomasso Pavone, "A Critical Review of Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream*" at [https://scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/tpavone/files/novick\\_that\\_noble\\_dream\\_critical\\_review.pdf](https://scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/tpavone/files/novick_that_noble_dream_critical_review.pdf)
- 9) In April 1992, the more conservative Sankei Shimbun had noted errors in Yoshida's testimony, which had been found through the research of historian Hata Ikuhiko. See Reiji Yoshida, "Asahi Shimbun Admits Errors in Past 'Comfort Women' Stories," in *Japan Times* (5 August 2014) at [http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/08/05/national/politics-diplomacy/asahi-shimbun-admits-errors-in-past-comfort-women-stories/#.WV5rV9Pyv\\_R](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/08/05/national/politics-diplomacy/asahi-shimbun-admits-errors-in-past-comfort-women-stories/#.WV5rV9Pyv_R)
- 10) For the full text of this statement, see [https://networks.h-net.org/system/files/contributed-files/japan-scholars-statement-2015.5.4-eng\\_0.pdf](https://networks.h-net.org/system/files/contributed-files/japan-scholars-statement-2015.5.4-eng_0.pdf)
- 11) See Alexis Dudden, *Troubled Apologies Among Japan, Korea, and the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

- 12) See Jordan Sand's most recent book, *Teikoku Nihon no seikatsu bunkashi* [Everyday Life and Material Culture in Imperial Japan] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2015).
- 13) "Open Letter in Support of Historians in Japan," p. 1, at [https://networks.h-net.org/system/files/contributed-files/japan-scholars-statement-2015.5.4-eng\\_0.pdf](https://networks.h-net.org/system/files/contributed-files/japan-scholars-statement-2015.5.4-eng_0.pdf)
- 14) *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- 15) In the dynastic Chinese context, Confucian scholar-officials, many of whom were also historians, saw this precisely as their role as advisors to the imperial government. Because they knew history and had studied the Classics, they felt that they were equipped with the proper knowledge to steer the Chinese pre-modern state back towards moral and just governance expressing benevolence and a specific set of Confucian-inspired ethics.
- 16) See Peter Ennis (with Alexis Dudden and Jordan Sand), "Anatomy of an Open Letter: How 187 Japan Scholars Came Together to Push Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on History Issues," (16 May 2015), *Dispatch Japan: News and Views on the US, Japan, and US-Japan Relations*, at <http://www.dispatchjapan.com/blog/2015/05/anatomy-of-an-open-letter-how-187-japan-scholars-came-together-to-push-prime-minister-shinzo-abe-on-.html>
- 17) Tsuneno Yujiro, The "Open Letter in Support of Historians in Japan": A Critique," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* (3 June 2015) Volume 3, Issue 22, Number 4, at <http://apjff.org/-Tsuneno-Yujiro/4831/article.html>. In terms of social media, Tsuneno blogs in Japanese at <http://d.hatena.ne.jp/toled/> and his Twitter account is @yujirotsu.
- 18) *Ibid.*
- 19) See his collected writings in Maruyama Masao, *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1963).
- 20) See Laura Hein, *Post-Fascist Japan: Political Culture in Kamakura after the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2018). Details about the forthcoming book can be found on Bloomsbury's website: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/post-fascist-japan-9781350025813/>
- 21) For an United Press International article on this issue, see Elizabeth Shim, "Conflict Over Japan's Wartime Past Spilling into US: A Group of 50 Japanese Academics Have Signed a Petition Urging the Revision of a US Textbook, Claiming It Has 'Factual Errors'," [http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/World-News/2015/12/11/Conflict-over-Japans-war-time-past-spilling-into-US/5091449861986/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2015/12/11/Conflict-over-Japans-war-time-past-spilling-into-US/5091449861986/)
- 22) See Reiji Yoshida, "Japanese historians seek revision of U.S. textbook over 'comfort women' depiction," (18 March 2015), *Japan Times* at [http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/18/national/history/japanese-historians-seek-revision-of-u-s-textbook-over-comfort-women-depiction/#.WWUsvNPYv\\_Q](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/18/national/history/japanese-historians-seek-revision-of-u-s-textbook-over-comfort-women-depiction/#.WWUsvNPYv_Q)
- 23) Having taught introductory World History for five years at another university, I can personally attest to the need for a comprehensive textbook for students to understand broad, over-arching historical themes over a five hundred year period, as what the McGraw Hill textbook attempted. However, such a compiled publication unfortunately encourages generalities over specifics, and the nuances of complex issues such as the "Comfort Women" cannot be addressed in very short passages. Moreover, a small team of historians (or only two) may write a global history, which could include fields or time periods with which they are not familiar, besides in their teaching and readings. Textbook companies do send out their volumes to historians specializing in certain time periods and regions to make subsequent revisions for inclusivity and the vetting of facts, asser-

tion of new trends, and addition of new discoveries and developments in the field. However, the textbook editors usually have the ultimate authority over what to include. I have served as a reviewer of numerous World History and Japanese History textbooks, so I can personally attest to the complexities of writing them.

- 24) The revisionist Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact alleges that the numbers of wartime deaths during conflict in China at the time of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) are exaggerated, arising out of Chinese wartime propaganda, and were inflated largely due to the political concerns of the Nationalist Party ruling China (1945-1949) and then, the Communist Party (1949-Present). See <http://www.sdh-fact.com/mission-statement/>
- 25) The Committee grew out of the cordial efforts of the then Chinese and Japanese foreign ministers to create a group of historians to look at the varying interpretations of the kind of sensitive historical issues that might lead to tensions between the two countries. The first meeting of the “Japan-China Joint History Research Committee” met at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing in December 2006. Unfortunately, such organizations at the top-down level have seemingly stopped since Xi Jinping assumed office as General Secretary of the Communist Party of China in 2012, and was elected President by the party’s People’s Congress in 2013.
- 26) For an interesting view on how the Chinese Communist Party has institutionalized history education to construct Chinese national identity and pit it in a struggle against the West (and Japan), see Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).
- 27) Interestingly, Kitaoka’s predecessor was Ogata Sadako, former UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and professor emeritus at Sophia University. Her grandfather on her mother’s side was Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi (1855-1932), who was assassinated in 1932 by a young naval officer due to perceived dithering over official Japanese recognition of Manchukuo. In my field of Manchukuo studies, she is renowned for her notable book on the 1931 Manchurian Incident. See Ogata Sadako, *Defiance in Manchuria: Making of Japanese Foreign Policy, 1931–1932* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964). A version of this has recently come out in Chinese translation: see Xufang Zhenzi (Ogata Sadako), *Manzhou shibian: Zhengce de xingcheng guocheng* [The Manchurian Incident: The Formation Process of Policy] (Social Science Academic Press, 2015).
- 28) While applauded in Japan and the US, South Koreans remained ambivalent about the agreement. See Simon Tisdall, “Korean comfort women agreement is a triumph for Japan and the US: Shinzo Abe Hails New Era of Bilateral Relations, But, Mindful of China and Nationalism in South Korea, Park Gyeun-Hye’s Response Is Cooler,” *The Guardian* (28 December 2016), at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/28/korean-comfort-women-agreement-triumph-japan-united-states-second-world-war>
- 29) Justin McCurry, “Japan and South Korea Agree to Settle Wartime Sex Slaves Row: Shinzo Abe Offers Sincere Apology for Use of ‘Comfort Women’ by Japanese soldiers, Removing Major Barrier to Better Relations,” *The Guardian* (28 December 2015), at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/28/japan-to-say-sorry-to-south-korea-in-deal-to-end-dispute-over-wartime-sex-slaves>
- 30) See, for example, the larger European Research Council project headed by Japan historian Barak Kushner at the University of Cambridge in the UK from 2013-2018: “*The Dissolution of the Japanese Empire and the Struggle for Legitimacy in Postwar East Asia*,” which is described as “a major historical research project which will examine how East Asia redefined itself after World

War II, with results that affect international relations in the region even today. We aim to understand how political and legal authority was established by different regimes in countries such as Japan, China, North and South Korea and Taiwan, as the area emerged from the shadow of Japanese Imperial rule after 1945,” found at <http://warcrimesandempire.com/> See also China and Southeast Asia historian Jeremy E. Taylor’s “*Cultures of Occupation in Twentieth Century Asia*” (COTCO) project, based at the University of Nottingham from 2011-2016, whose objectives were “The core objective of this project is to produce a paradigm shift in the study of occupation, and to challenge the ‘collaboration’/‘resistance’ dichotomy which has defined the field thus far. It will adopt a transnational, intertextual and comparative approach to the study of cultural expression produced under occupation,” found at <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/groups/cotca/index.aspx>.

- 31) See, for example, “The Oliver L. Austin Photographic Collection,” a website that I curate of postwar color photographs of Tokyo and Japan taken by a US official for the Allied Occupation of Japan, many of which were identified and mapped by a team of interested Japanese researchers and private citizens, along with American counterparts, found at <http://digital-collections.wv2.fsu.edu/omeka/about>.
- 32) Myself and two other historians of Japanese science and empire are planning to present papers in the proposed panel “Cosmopolitan Scientists of Empire: Japanese Experts in Trans-war and Trans-Imperial Perspectives, 1920s to 1950s” for the 2018 Association for Asian Studies (AAS) meeting in Washington, DC. This is part of a larger trend.
- 33) Even Japanese leftists in the late 1920s like Nakano Shigeharu (1902-1979) understood the importance of Manchuria as a transitional space for leftwing Korean activists, who passed through it on their way to Moscow and even encountered northeastern Chinese border regions populated by their compatriots, like the Jiandao area (the Yanbian district of the contemporary PRC). In a 1928 short story, and sympathizing with the cause of Koreans who had lost their country to imperial Japan, Nakano hoped to connect with broader transnational anti-imperialist movements. See Annika A. Culver, “Introduction: Heading for Moscow (Mosukuwa sashite) (1928) Written by Shigeharu Nakano (1902-79),” at <https://ceas.uchicago.edu/sites/ceas.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/Sibley/Heading%20for%20Moscow%20Introduction.pdf>, and my translation of Nakano’s short story “Heading for Moscow,” found at <https://ceas.uchicago.edu/sites/ceas.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/Sibley/Heading%20for%20Moscow.pdf>. Other Korean independence activists, many of them Christians, emigrated to California in the United States, and later became the primary proponents of a new, allegedly democratic, South Korea, like Syngman Rhee (1875-1965). See Albert Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth: Religion, Activism, and Protest in Japanese Occupied Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015).
- 34) John Dower, *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor/Hiroshima/9–11/Iraq* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010).
- 35) John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999).
- 36) See “Visualizing Cultures: Image Driven Scholarship”, at <https://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/home/index.html>.
- 37) It is still hard for scholars without connections to gain access to national archives in China; however, several of the researchers involved in our project are affiliated with the China Academy of Social Sciences, or the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, and thus, this indicates that a



government-based research institution seems to be promoting the works of Chinese scholars on cultural production by Chinese in Manchukuo (or at least does not find this sort of research too politically sensitive for contemporary times).

- 38) Much international interest has also been garnered by another project I am working on, which concerns the postwar images of Tokyo and other parts of Japan taken between 1946 and 1950 by an American scientist who worked for SCAP in the early Occupation period (1945-1952). Oliver L. Austin's connections with prominent Japanese zoologist and bird researchers, who later became internationally-recognized figures in wildlife conservation, helped to rebuild an image of Japan as a peaceful, internationalist, democratic country furthering transnational scientific exchange. I am currently curating a digital humanities website of Austin's photos, which will be featured in an early spring 2018 exhibition at the Tokyo-based Shōwa-kan Museum, Japan's leading institution featuring archives from the wartime and immediate postwar period. See The Oliver L. Austin Photographic Collection, at <http://digital-collections.ww2.fsu.edu/omeka/about>

