

Book Chapter Review

Fawcett, C. and Habu, J. *Education and Archaeology in Japan*. In Stone, P.G. and Mackenzie, R. (1994) (Eds.). *The Excluded Past: Archaeology in Education*.

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By

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Abstract

The paper presents a critique of 'Education and Archaeology in Japan', which is a chapter in the book (The Excluded Past: Archaeology in Education) edited by Stone, P.G. and Mackenzie, R. (1994). The reviewer strongly agrees with the verdict of the contributors of the book chapter – Fawcett, C. and Habu, J. - that historical education in Japan is biased and ideological due to political reasons. Events such as changes in contents of historical text, Professor Ienaga Saburo's lawsuits against the Ministry of Education over authorization of textbooks, and the restrictions on archaeological knowledge, lend credence to this assertion. A main demerit of the paper is the apparent lack of details in the account of some events in 'Education and Archaeology'. This will likely restrict understanding, especially if the reader does not have prior knowledge of Japanese role in the Second World War. However, 'Education and Archaeology in Japan' is highly readable, because it is constructive and thought-provoking.

Introduction

The official history of a nation is usually influenced by government; because it is thought that regulating what people know about their history is relevant for effective social control. More often than not, however, how history is controlled is determined by the opinions and ideologies of dominant groups in a country. In order to influence history, these dominant groups hijack the media and education (historical education) - two vital means of knowing what happened in the past. An example is the case of the North American Indians in textbooks authorized by the Quebec Ministry of Education. The texts were simplified and distorted to fit the white society's stereotyped image of native people (Fawcett and Habu1994:217). Under this situation, historical education is prone to ideological manipulations and distortions, which favour the aristocrats and inevitably relegate weaker groups to the background.

In Education and Archaeology in Japan, Fawcett and Habu (1994) set out to examine the nature of historical education, and the related issue of archaeological research in Japan, putting into consideration the potential political implication of Archaeology (Smith, 2004).

The article is a product of careful research into Japanese historical education. It was written in a simplified English language, which enhances easy understanding of the paper's focus of inquiry. The organization of the paper is equally beautiful, as it has nine sub-headings, with each sub-heading leading coherently to the next. However, the article is not perfect, like every other work of man; it has its own deficiencies, which the review shall point out. First it is pertinent to recapture the salient points in the paper.

Paper Summary

In Japan, history (official history) has been an important avenue of defining Japanese national identity since 1883 (Fawcett and Habu, 1994: 217). In the last 100 years, there has been a drastic change in the interpretation of Japanese ancient history; the most dramatic and rapid transformation was in 1945 after Japan was defeated in the Second World War. Before 1945, mythological texts, which promote emperor worship ideology, were used to describe Japanese prehistory and history, but after the Second World War, Archaeology became the major tool of interpreting Japanese past. Thus, Fawcett and Habu (1994) identified two major phases of historical education in Japan - prewar and postwar historical education. Before looking into the nature of historical education in prewar and postwar Japan, it is necessary to understand how the writers of this article perceived 'nationalism' and 'ideology' in Japan.

'Nationalism' and 'ideology' have specific meanings in Japan; the term 'ideology' refers only to explicitly state political ideologies: communism

in contemporary Japan, on the other hand, refers to those view points and government policies that echo pre-war values (militarism, imperialism and and nationalism. Fawcett and Habu argue that if an idea, statement, or book is declared ideological, it is by implication, biased. They concluded that ideologies are distortions of knowledge and as such, diametrically opposed to idea systems derived from 'science', a body of knowledge considered to be neutral, value-free and, therefore, non-ideological. Nationalism notion of Japanese superiority).

Japanese historical education before 1945 focused on imperial history, the origins of the Japanese nation and the imperial thought were explained by the mythological and quasi historical tales of the Nihon Shoki (The chronicles of Japan) and Kojiki (A Record of Ancient Matters) texts.

Archaeology became the basis for interpreting Japanese ancient past following the USA occupation of Japan in the latter half of 1945. The major preoccupation of the Supreme Council of Allied Powers was to change the political philosophy of Japan. The Supreme Council of Allied Powers (SCAP) aimed to introduce the principle of democracy in young Japanese to counter pre-war nationalism. As a result of this, courses like Geography, Ethics and History were suspended because text books used in these courses were rife with ultranationalist doctrines. Archaeology became a popular discipline, archaeologist were aware of the potential political importance of their work, and they used studies of prehistoric people to counteract the effects of pre-war ideology (see Titus, 1924).

In the immediate postwar period, historical materialist interpretations of prehistory and history were used to reconstruct ancient lifestyles and determine relationships between the prehistoric subsistence base and the social structure. However, historical materialism would soon lose its place in Japanese archaeology, one of the reasons being frustration suffered by young archaeologists as a result of ideological manipulation.

In contemporary Japan, discussions about Archaeology and Ideology revolve around debates over the effects of specific ideologies, such as nationalist ideology on Archaeology, and on historical education. Archaeologist, educators, and others interested in educational policy are constantly wary of a return to nationalist values in Japan. Fawcett and Habu, in the note attached to this paper, cited a newspaper article (March 15, 1989), where the Mombusho (Ministry of Education) announced the

drastic revision of guidelines for primary, middle and high school textbooks. The new guidelines mean that primary school children will soon be exposed to the Kojiki (A Record of Ancient Matters) and Nihon Shoki (The Chronicles of Japan). Many historians and archaeologists are worried that this development might result in the merging of myth and history when teaching about the ancient Japanese past, a situation that occurred before 1945.

The question that has continued to preoccupy archaeologists and educators since the war is whether historical education, as manifested in textbooks, has really been purged of ideology; can Japanese historical education be considered neutral and free of ideology? (Fawcett and Habu 1994:218).

Critique

The stand taken by Fawcett and Habu is very clear, in their opinion, they have argued that historical education in Japan is biased, ideological, and therefore, not neutral. In making this conclusion, they raised certain points like changes in contents of historical texts, which were as a result of nationalist influence, Professor Ienaga Saburo's lawsuits against the Ministry of Education over authorization of textbooks, and the restrictions on archaeological knowledge, for example, the 1958 guidelines which specifically warned authors against delving too far into Archaeology.

The writer strongly agrees with the verdict of Fawcett and Habu - that historical education in Japan is biased and ideological. The teaching of both ancient and contemporary history has continued to be very contentious issues in Japanese educational policy. Some scholars have questioned the validity of the mythological texts that were used as the basis for explaining the origin of Japan in prewar era. The myths were used to legitimize the imperial ideology and to establish Shinto (Way of the Gods) as the official religion of the Japanese state. The 'imperial ideology' is based on the Shinto religious belief, that the emperor was divinely descended from the mythic sun goddess (Brownlee, 2000). Thus, the mythological texts, Nihon Shoki and Kojiki, were used to protect the interest of those who claim to have descended from the imperial line - the politically and economical dominant groups. In line with the aforesaid, Brownlee (2000) argued that:

The ancient Japanese court produced six national histories between 720 - 901 ..., The first of the national histories, Nihon Shoki, is full of obvious fabrications. First, the author imposed the Japanese past, which had no known chronology, an invented chronology based on Chinese calendrical system. According to this chronology, Emperor Jinmu began his reign in 660 B.C.E. and ruled for 76 years. Later rulers were slotted in place. Lacking empirical data, the authors of Nihon Shoki drew on Japanese myths and inserted material and quotations from Chinese works, which they presented as actual fact.

Brownlee (2000) argued that in addition to *Nihon Shoki*, other historical recordings in early Japan were subject to distortion or embellishment, especially in family genealogies. Brownlee remarked that genealogy was the source of power, *place* and preferment in the imperial state, such that leading families sought either to justify or improve their positions by demonstrating superior descent. The best rewards were reaped by those who could cite ancestors from the 'age of the gods'. The ranking of the mythological deities was well understood, so families attempted to prove they were descended from the most important deities. When these claims became a common practice, the government in ninth century set-up a commission to look into the genealogy of the so called great families, the result of the enquiry was shocking:

They lie about their great grandparents, and they falsify their grandparents. They freely embellish their genealogy. They show proof that they are descended from deities and cite imperial origins. They falsely claim the right to wear ceremonial headdress (Shinsen Shojiroku - New Compilation of the Register of Families, 815, cited in Brownlee 2000).

In the Tokugawa period (1603-1867), skeptics questioned the imperial ideology; notable among them was the Confucian scholar, Arai Hakuseki (1657 - 1725). He argued that the tales of the 'age of the gods' were originally tales of humans that had been distorted (see Farris, 1998: 1 and Brownlee, 2000). Brownlee (2000) has also remarked that the nineteenth century scholar - Yamagata Banto (1748-1821), found all of the beliefs about the 'age of the gods' ridiculous and scorned those who faithfully expound them. In the preface to *Yume no Shiro* (Instead of Dreaming), he wrote:

In the section on the age of the Gods, I have destroyed the ancient theories that were handed down to the present day. I cannot escape from the charge that I have argued against the foundations of the august imperial house. In the section on the historical succession of emperors, I have criticized the national histories, including the theory of the divine ancestors... (Brownlee, 2000:219).

Generally, historians of prewar Japan, for fear of attracting the wrath of a government that fiercely defended the imperial authority, kept mute over the historical distortions and falsifications. Brownlee (2000:220) remarked that "it is shocking to discover that prior to 1945, academic historians in Japan, publicly professed believe in historical myths that they knew to be untrue". Those who challenged the 'imperial ideology' received as their 'reward' dismissal from duty, harassment, or even jail terms. A case-in- point is Kume Kunitakes challenge of the *Shinto* religion, which culminated in his dismissal from the Tokyo Imperial University in 1892. Thus, prewar Japanese historians were caught between the demands of nationalism to which the imperial ideology was central, and the need to affirm scientific historical truth. As Brownlee (2000) put it, "rampant nationalism and political pressures forced prewar historians to develop a double standard by which historical truth might be circulated privately, but the state mythology was affirmed in public. This double standard solution was the formula developed by Mikami Sanji (1865- 1939).

From the foregoing, it suffices to argue, following the lead by Fawcett and Habu (2000), that historical education In Japan is not neutral; it is biased and distorted for political reasons. From the Look of things, it is very difficult to separate politics from education in Japan. In fact, since 1945, Japanese education has been as involved with politics as ever before. What this means is that the teaching of both contemporary and ancient

Japanese history may continue to be very sensitive issues in Japanese educational policy.

