

THE RAPE OF NANKING IN JAPANESE HIGH SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS: HISTORY TEXTS AS CLOSED TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a study of how the Rape of Nanking in December 1937 and January 1938 by the Japanese Army is reported in the 88 history textbooks used in Japanese high schools in 1995. The textbooks do, contrary to widely stated opinion, deal with the event in reasonable detail. However, an analysis of the language of the textbooks shows that they often contain this information in the form of closed text (in Eco's sense of the term), which, I suggest, prevents students from arriving at a full understanding of the atrocity. One possible result of this is that students have no basis from which they can critically respond to denials within modern Japanese society that this well documented atrocity took place.¹

1. INTRODUCTION

From a European or North American perspective it is easy to forget that the war Japan fought from 1941 was but one part of a much longer war, going back to 1931, the beginning of Japanese military expansion in Manchuria.

In Japan, how to interpret this war is still a matter of debate. Many issues dating back as much as sixty years are still being hotly debated in Japan —not necessarily because they are interesting or historically significant, but because they are unresolved and thus remain foci of intense ideological conflict. (For those interested in views of the war in modern-day Japan, see Buruma, 1994.)

So, for example, whether Japan fought a war of aggression or a war to liberate Asia from Western colonialism is a debated issue. While there are those who say that Japan fought a war of territorial expansion, there are also those who say that Japan fought for its national self-preservation.

One of the events in this war was the atrocity known as the Rape of Nanking. On December 13, 1937, Nanking, capital of the Chinese Nationalist Government, fell, and soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army entered the city. The ensuing arson, pillage, rape, torture, murder, and mass killings continued for approximately six weeks. (For readily available discussions of this atrocity see, for example, Bergamini, 1971; Calvocoressi, Wint, & Pritchard, 1995; Chang, 1997; Harries & Harries, 1991; Ienaga, 1978; Joyaux & Coox).

There are Japanese historians and politicians of ministerial rank who maintain, or have recently maintained, that the Rape of Nanking never took place, or even if it did, it was a relatively minor affair. (See Buruma: 112-135; Chang: 200ff.) In any event, the whole question of Nanking in modern Japan is still very much a sensitive issue.

Some foreign writers say that the Rape of Nanking is glossed over in Japanese history textbooks (e.g., Chang). But the actual physical space on the page devoted to the Rape of Nanking, as well as the information given, is, when compared with other historical events, rather adequate. In almost all the textbooks there is enough information given such that one could read these textbooks and get a reasonable idea of what happened at Nanking.

This charge of glossing over the information in the textbooks is a serious one, since it would imply that it is official government policy. The reason for this is that in Japan, all textbooks used up to the end of secondary education have to pass the compulsory screening and authorisation system of the Japanese Ministry of Education. Many critics of this system say it is a form of censorship, and therefore contrary to the Japanese Constitution.

Asian countries that were invaded by Japan in the period 1931 to 1945 have frequently criticised the content of Japanese history textbooks. In particular, China, North Korea, and South Korea have protested at what they say is a minimising of the Japanese aggression towards these countries (Buruma; Chang; Seddon, 1987)

Related to this, is the insistence within sections of the government, the bureaucracy, and the educational establishment that one of the aims of school history education should be to develop in children a feeling of patriotism and a love of country (Yamazumi, 1989).

Opponents of this view say that such aims are not relevant to the subject of history itself, and those who advocate such history teaching are actually attempting to play down the heinous and aggressive actions carried out by Japan during the war years, and rather than teaching patriotism are actually teaching a form of nationalism. This question of a nationalistic history is a sensitive one in modern Japan, since it harks back to the extreme form of nationalistic history that was taught up to the time of the Japanese defeat in 1945, and which was used to serve the expansionist aims of the Japanese Empire, and inculcate an extreme sense of loyalty towards the Emperor (Brownlee, 1997; Horio, 1988: 69).

2. THE FOCUS OF THE STUDY

In this paper, I will analyse the language of the textbooks with respect to the Rape of Nanking, and show that:

(a) Although no particular textbook can be criticised for the way it reports the atrocity (since it does contain the information, and any criticism against individual textbooks can be answered by appealing to questions of style, requirements of space, page layout, etc.), when one looks at *all* the textbooks, one finds consistent patterns of language use that play down or obfuscate the nature of this atrocity.

This is a question of how the information is in the textbooks. This is dealt with mainly under the section *Naming*.

(b) Certain information is consistently not in the textbooks, and although this absence of information can be explained away in particular cases, it becomes difficult to do so when all the textbooks are considered together.

This is a two-part question of how the information is not in the textbooks, and whether one can identify the information that is not there. This is dealt with mainly under the sections *Passive Verbs* and *Perpetrators*.

In this paper, my analysis is informed by the systemic-functional model of grammar (e.g., Eggins, 1994; Halliday, 1994) as well as by a critical discourse approach to text (e.g., Fairclough, 1992; Hodge and Kress, 1993).

3. THE NATURE OF THE TEXT AND THE ROLE OF THE READER

The relationship between the reader, as a consumer of text, and the text itself has been discussed by a large number of writers in the fields of literature, linguistics, and semiotics. One important concept is that there is a dialogic relationship between the reader and the text, and that texts do not simply contain meaning, but meaning is created by the reader in the process of reading text.

One way of thinking about this is in terms of Eco's (1979) distinction between open and closed texts. Open texts require the reader to think about the text in different ways and from different points of view; they encourage the reader to respond in a variety of ways and to consider a range of interpretations. Closed texts are constructed in ways that block the reader from seeking other interpretations; they reconfirm or reinforce what are already the accepted ways of looking at the world.

Luke (1989: 74), in discussing the relevance of Eco's distinction between open and closed texts to the language of textbook narratives, writes that:

Closed texts flatten out relationships between, and structure within possible worlds, ruling out the invocation of other possible worlds and meanings. Denoting rather than connoting, stating rather than alluding, delimiting rather than expanding temporal and spatial deixis, such texts offer an airtight kind of cohesion which reinforces rather than expands known lexicon and syntax.

In this paper, I will show how the texts are closed and how they can be opened so that readers can find out what the "full story" is, and thus question the texts critically.

4. THREE ELEMENTS OF CLOSED HISTORY TEXTS

I will divide the patterns of language use that produce closed texts into three, and discuss them under the following headings:

(a) *Naming*. Under this heading, I will show that the way the Rape of Nanking is named in texts can close these texts so that the *content* of the event (i.e., what occurred to create the event) and the *name* of the event become one and the same. I will also show that focussing on the event as an entity that is named removes focus from acts that constitute the “goings-on” of the event. The general effect of *naming* is to produce texts in which there is no “full story” of the atrocity.

(b) *Passive Verbs*. Under this heading, I will show how a certain grammatical pattern can close texts so that the Japanese government, a party that must bear some responsibility for the atrocity, does not figure in the narrative of the event.

(c) *Perpetrators*. Under this heading, I will show how texts can be closed so that the perpetrators of the atrocity, who must bear the major responsibility for it, either do not figure in the narrative of the event, or figure in it in a highly attenuated or backgrounded manner.

These types of closed texts produce a form of historical narrative in which people and organisations responsible for heinous acts are not clearly visible in the pages of history, and the nature of the acts themselves becomes unclear. The overall effect of this is that students are unable to easily question the *whos*, *to whom*s, *whats*, *whys* and *hows* of history.

To summarise the above, this paper deals with the nature of the atrocity as it is alluded to in the pages of the textbooks ((a) above), the party responsible, at the time, for permitting the atrocity to occur (i.e., the Japanese government), but which has residual responsibility extending up to the present period ((b) above), and the actual physical perpetrators of the atrocity ((c) above). Thus there is a good coverage of the event in terms of both the parties involved at the time, and in terms of the reverberation of the atrocity through time (namely how it impinges on the present period and thus provides a potential focus of ideological struggle).

In this study, I report my findings based on an examination of all 88 high school history textbooks that were approved for use in 1995. 50 of these continued in use until March, 1999. The actual illustrative texts discussed in this paper have been selected by me, but are highly representative of the corpus as a whole (with the exception of Text 3, which will be discussed in some detail).

4.1. NAMING

In this section, I will discuss *Simultaneous Naming* (the naming of an event at the same time that it occurs) and *Naming and Focus* (focussing the textual message on the name of an event, rather than the acts and behaviour that constitute that event). In the corpus, there are 10 examples of the former, and 45 examples of the latter.

4.1.1. *Simultaneous Naming*

Consider this extract from a textbook. It is in fact a caption and explanation beside a photograph:

Text 1 (071: 229)^{2,3}

Nihon-gun no Nankin-senryoo: 1937-nen 12-gatsu, Nihon-gun wa Kokumin-seifu no shuto Nankin o senryoo-shita. Kono toki ni, Nankin-gyokusatsu ga okotta.

>> The Japanese army's occupation of Nanking: In December 1937 the Japanese army occupied Nanking, the capital of the Nationalist Government. At this time the Nanking Massacre occurred.

Notice that the naming the event at the same time as it occurs allows no room for actions or types of behaviour to take place —only an event has occurred. Thus the massacre of people by other people is represented by an *event occurring*. The process is almost one of self-initiation and self-fulfilment, and in fact the same Japanese verb (translated as “occurred”) is used with reference to the occurrence of natural phenomena.

One result of this is that the people who did the killing and were killed are not in the text. Or rather, they are in the text in that they are *inside* the expression translated as “Nanking Massacre.” Thus, if one were to charge the writers of this textbook with not telling the whole truth, they would be entitled to reply that it is quite obvious from the language and the context that Japanese soldiers killed Chinese people, and anyway, a massacre always involves two parties, those who kill and those who are killed.

Nevertheless, my point is that, because of *how* the information is in the text, one has to question it in order to get “the full story.” Some readers may be capable of questioning such texts, but others surely are not.

I would call the text above (Text 1) a good illustration of a closed text. It is different from this one that follows, which is more open:

Text 2 (555: 227)

Nihon-gun wa, doonen matsu ni wa shuto Nankin o senryoo-shi, sono sai, josei ya kodomo o fukumu ooku no Chuugokujin o satsugai-shita. Kono jiken wa, Nankin-daigyakusatsu toshite shogaikoku kara hinan o abi, Chuugoku-minshuu no koonichi ishiki o sara ni takameru koto ni natta.

>> The Japanese army, at the end of the same year occupied Nanking, the capital, and at this time killed a large number of Chinese people, including women and children. This incident received criticism from foreign countries as the Great Nanking Massacre, and it came about that it further strengthened the anti-Japanese spirit of the Chinese people.

What actually happened is rather clear in Text 2: the story is not about an event occurring, but about some people (actually *not* people, but an *army*) doing something —namely carrying out heinous acts, directed against other people.

Text 1 is also closed in a more subtle way. To name something at the same time as it occurs means that there is no *space* for explanation (on the writer's part) or reflec-

tion (on the reader's part). There are, as it were, no interstitial spaces within the text into which readers can insert themselves; this text has no openings.

Readers can get a feeling for the differences between open and closed texts, as far as this idea of interstitial space is concerned, by comparing the following examples with Text 1 above:

Text 3 (054: 278)

Nihon-gun wa Nankin-senryoo no sai, tasuu no Chuugoku-gunmin o satsugai-shi, Nihongun-shoohei no naka ni wa bookoo ya ryakudatsu nado o okonau mono ga sukunaku nakatta. Nankin-daigyakusatsu to yobareru.

>> The Japanese army, on the occasion of the occupation of Nanking, killed a large number of Chinese soldiers and civilians, and among the officers and men of the Japanese army, those who committed rape and pillage were not a few. This is called the Great Nanking Massacre.

Text 4 (564: 312)

Nankin-senryoo ni atatte Nihon-gun wa hi-sentoojin o fukumu tasuu no Chuugokujin o satsugai-shi, ryakudatsu/hooka/bookoo o okonatta (Nankin-jiken). Kono bankoo wa Nankin-daigyakusatsu toshite kokusai- teki hinan o abita.

>> At the occupation of Nanking the Japanese army killed a large number of Chinese people, including non-combatants, and carried out pillage, arson and rape (the Nanking Incident). These barbarous acts received international criticism as the Great Nanking Massacre.

These two examples are more open texts from the point of view of the way they name the event. In essence, they allow textual space for reflection. To say that something happened and then to name it, is to give readers the opportunity to distance themselves from it and perhaps ask the question: "Is this a suitable name for this event?" Or perhaps even to ask: "Who gave it this name?" In other words, the use of non-simultaneous naming introduces the potential for making evaluatory judgements.

On the other hand, if an action or event seems to have been named "from on high," at the same time as it comes into existence in the pages of the textbook, this moves the action or event beyond the possibility of evaluation; it is outside of the arena of potential ideological struggle.

4.1.2. *Naming and Focus*

Texts can contain all the important information on the surface of the text, but still be closed. For example, consider this:

Text 5 (067: 328)

Nihon-gun wa, Kahoku, Kachuu no shuyootoshi ni tsuide shuto Nankin o senryoo-shi, horyo ya shimin o tairyoo ni gyakusatsu-suru Nankin-jiken o hikiokoshita.

>> The Japanese army, after the main cities of North and Central China, occupied Nanking, the capital, and caused the Nanking Incident of massacring a great number of prisoners of war and citizens.

All the important points are in the story in some form, but the story is primarily about:

The Japanese army caused the Nanking Incident.

and not about:

The Japanese army massacred a great number of prisoners of war and citizens.

I base this interpretation on the fact that the Japanese verb translated as “caused” is the main verb of the sentence; in fact, it is the only finite verb in this sentence. It follows that it contains the main experiential message of the sentence. To put this differently, the sentence under discussion is primarily about the Japanese army *causing a named incident*, not about the Japanese army *massacring people*. Of course the sentence does also include the information that the Japanese army massacred people, but this is not the main thrust of the sentence.

In support of this interpretation, there is also the evidence of potential deletion: the fact that the Japanese equivalent of the English which is translated as “caused the Nanking Incident” is not deletable (since it includes the main verb of the sentence) but the equivalent of “massacred a great number of prisoners of war and citizens” is deletable (since its function is to modify the Japanese noun which is equivalent to “the Nanking Incident,” as seen in the English translation) suggests that the former has grammatical and semantic primacy over the latter. Modification is, after all, an optional supplying of additional, non-essential information.

I realise that this one extract cannot be criticised; the information is in the text and there might be good reasons why this particular text was written in this particular way. What I am questioning is the consistent pattern of language use that moves the focus of the message away from acts to names or to incidents that have names. It is not possible in this paper to give all examples of this, but two typical extracts follow:

Text 6 (553: 103)

Kono toki, hi-sentoojin o fukumu tasuu no Chuugokujin o satsugai-shita Nankin-jiken ga okite iru.

>> At this time, the Nanking Incident in which many Chinese people, including non-combatants, were killed, occurred.

Text 7 (514: 140)

Nihon wa sensen-fukoku o suru koto mo naku sensoo o kakudai-shi, onaji toshi no 12-gatsu no Nankin-senryoo de Chuugoku-gunjin ya minshuu ni taisuru daigyakusatsu-jiken o hikiokoshita (Nankin- daigyakusatsu).

>> Japan escalated the war without even declaring war, and in December of the same year at the occupation of Nanking caused a great massacre incident of Chinese soldiers and civilians (the Great Nanking Massacre).

In Text 6, the story is primarily about the Nanking Incident occurring; in Text 7, it is primarily about Japan causing a great massacre incident. In both cases the killing

is recorded in the texts, but it is not what the stories are focussing on. This is a matter of how the information is in the text, not about the information being or not being in the text.

4.2. PASSIVE VERBS

Let us look at the following example:

Text 8 (062: 290)

Kono aida no sentou ni oite Nihon-gun wa ippan Chuugokujin no gyakutai/gyakusatsu o okonai, toriwake Nankin-senryoo zengo ni wa, daigyakusatsujiken o okoshita (Nankin-daigyakusatsu). Kono jiken wa Nihon-kokumin ni wa shirasarenakatta ga, Nankin ni ita gaikokujin ni yotte sekai kakuchi ni shirasareta.

>> In the war at this time, the Japanese army carried out cruel treatment and massacres of Chinese people, and in particular before and after the occupation of Nanking caused a massacre incident (the Great Nanking Massacre). This incident was not made known to the Japanese people, but it was made known to all the world by foreigners who were in Nanking.

I wish to pick out the last sentence, simplify it, and rearrange it as follows (with English translation equivalents, but in Japanese word order):

This incident		
???	to the Japanese people	was not made known
by the foreigners	to all the world	was made known

This not only brings out the parallelism between the two clauses, but also directs attention to where the parallelism is not perfect —namely in the absence of someone or some organisation that could be the equivalent to the foreigners. This highlights the disparity between the foreigners making the massacre known to all the world and some unspecified person or organisation *not* making it known to the Japanese people. This organisation is presumably the Japanese government (or army).

The effect of the passive verb in this example is to create a text in which the organisation which did not inform the Japanese people is almost perfectly hidden. In order to open this text we have to ask a question like: Who was this incident not made known to the Japanese people by?

To open a closed text takes some mental effort and sometimes even a practical application of linguistic analysis. A conscious effort to open the above text allows the following possible interpretation of events to be made: The Japanese government did not inform the Japanese people of this event but the foreigners informed the world.

One characteristic of the textbooks is that they represent historical events as occurring naturally, in a well-ordered sequence in the flow of time. The story the textbooks tell is a “flat” one, and the grammar itself is “flat.” A result of this is that there are very few negative verbs, and even fewer negative passives, in the textbooks. However, not only in this textbook, but also in 5 others, the word that I have translated as “was not made known,” or close equivalent, occurs. Why should this be so? The alter-

native to not using this negative passive verb is almost certainly this: The Japanese government hid this incident from the Japanese people.

I would also say that this sentence almost certainly entails this: The Japanese government lied about this incident to the Japanese people.

I think that this attempt to open a closed text is interesting for three reasons. First, it shows how much hard work is sometimes required to open a text. Second, it shows how the opening of a text allows readers to look at the events in a new and different light. Third, it shows how this enables readers to question contemporary interpretations of history. So, when a Japanese minister of justice or minister of education denies the historical reality of the Rape of Nanking, as indeed has happened (Buruma; Chang), readers of the textbooks can at least question these denials.

Of course, I realise that it is possible to argue that in this particular example the Japanese government are not in this sentence for reasons of style or context, or because of some characteristic of the Japanese language. But this hardly explains why, in looking at all 88 textbooks, the foreigners are there in this equivalent sentence 6 times and the Japanese government is never there.

The very act of rearranging the clauses as above leads one to realise that there is something that could very well be in the text, but is not. This is thus an example of information not being in the textbooks; but, by looking at the language carefully, one is able to identify what could be there.

At this point it is important to clarify that I am not dealing with a matter of how history has to be written, or with certain characteristics of the Japanese language. There is nothing intrinsic to the study of history that necessitates it being written in the kind of ways I am illustrating; nor is the Japanese language not rich and flexible enough to express events in other ways.

Also, the argument that the textbooks are presenting an objective, dispassionate, unemotional view of history which reports the facts “just as they are” does not bear up to examination. To illustrate this, compare Text 2 with Text 6 and Text 7. All these texts are in some sense saying the same thing, in that the information content is rather similar. But the first example (Text 2) is rather open in that it does state that the Japanese army killed Chinese people. The other two texts (Text 6 and Text 7) do not clearly state who did what to whom, and are in this sense rather closed. This shows that there is a range of choice available to writers. My question is: Why is the choice so often in one particular direction —namely the direction that closes the text, and thereby conceals the full nature of the event?

4.3. PERPETRATORS

Remarkably, there is only one textbook that states Japanese *people* killed Chinese people (i.e., in which the language is reasonably open regarding the perpetrators of the killing as well). Thus, in contrast with the textbooks recording Chinese being present at Nanking on an individual, human level (e.g., prisoners of war, women, children, etc.), the Japanese, when they are present, are there on a faceless, organizational level (i.e., the Japanese army).

My question is: Why do the textbooks almost never ascribe the killing to Japanese people? Of course one can always find the Japanese army there; and, since the Japanese army is made up of soldiers, who are Japanese people, one can also find

Japanese people in the story. But why should readers always have to open texts to discover the full story? Again, why do they have to examine texts in order to identify what is not in the texts?

Text 1 is an example of a type of closed text, similar examples of which occur in several textbooks. This pattern can be represented thus:

The Japanese army did something relatively innocuous (namely occupied Nanking) and then something heinous (namely killing) occurred.

Thus, in this case, although the Japanese army is recorded as being a perpetrator, this is only so to the extent of being directly involved in a relatively innocuous act, but indirectly involved in a heinous act. Text 9 is a related example. In this case, the Japanese army does something relatively innocuous, and then causes a heinous incident to occur:

Text 9 (066: 212)

Nihon-gun wa 1937- (Shoowa 12-) nen 12-gatsu, shuto Nankin o senryoo-shita.*

*Kanraku kara ikkagetsu amari no aida ni Nankin to sono shuuhen de, fujoshi o fukumu juumin 7-8 man nin, horyo o fukumeru to 20-man nin ijoo to iwareru tairyoo no hitobito o gyakusatsu-suru jiken (Nankindaigyakusatsu-jiken) o hikiokoshita tame, Chuugoku-kokumin no koosen-ishiki wa sara ni takamatta.
>> The Japanese army in December of 1937 (Showa 12) occupied Nanking, the capital.*

* During the more than one month after the fall of the city, in Nanking and its vicinity, because of causing an incident of massacring (the Great Nanking Massacre) of a great number of people, said to be 70 to 80 thousand citizens, including women and children, and if one includes prisoners of war, more than 200 thousand, the Chinese people's spirit of resistance grew even stronger.

Text 1 and Text 9 are certainly telling no lies, and one can easily draw the conclusion from these texts that Japanese people *did* terrible things. But this is not what the texts say. Readers will certainly find Japanese soldiers in Text 3, and therefore believe this is an exception to what I am saying. This is only partly so. A careful reading of the text will show that there are two references to Japanese soldiers (laying aside, for the moment, the reference to "Japanese army," which of course contains Japanese soldiers). These references are "the officers and men of the Japanese army" and "those." The larger body of Japanese soldiers is the former ("the officers and men of the Japanese army") and the smaller body is the latter ("those"). The larger body of Japanese soldiers are not present as perpetrators of heinous acts, but exist as a large group within which the vaguely defined smaller group ("those") is located. It is this smaller group which is responsible for the atrocity. Thus a rather vaguely identified group of soldiers, comprising some vague proportion of all the soldiers present at Nanking, carried out the heinous acts. Out of all 88 textbooks, this is the nearest that Japanese people get to committing atrocities at Nanking.

In fact, the way this text is struggling to put Japanese soldiers in the story as perpetrators, whilst at the same time struggling to take them out of the story as perpetrators, suggests to me that the original text was the subject of dispute between the

author and the competent authorities in the Japanese Ministry of Education, and that the text we see here is a compromise. The ambiguous position of Japanese soldiers as perpetrators, the use of the rather technical, military Japanese word, which I have translated as “officers and men” (and which is not present in any other textbook), and the fact that Japanese soldiers are present in this short sentence *three* times in different guises (“the Japanese army,” “the officers and men of the Japanese army,” and “those”), but are *not* there in the most simple and frank guise (namely “Japanese soldiers”), seems to suggest that the text is under ideological “pressure.”

The last point, namely the Japanese soldiers being present in different guises, is an example of what Fairclough (1989) calls “overwording.” He writes that “Overwording shows preoccupation with some aspect of reality—which may indicate that it is a focus of ideological struggle” (115). The textbooks clearly are being very reticent about the presence of Japanese people at Nanking, and the acts they carried out. This is their ideological struggle.

4.3.1. *Comparison with another massacre*

Readers of this paper might think I am making too much of this business of there being no Japanese soldiers at Nanking—of the perpetrator of the atrocity at Nanking being an organisation. Many people might say that this is the normal way of writing about these things in history books, or that there is no real difference between “the Japanese army” and “Japanese soldiers,” and that the two expressions have the same effect on the students’ consciousness and understanding of the event. But let us compare these texts, from the same textbook:

Text 10 (509: 328)

Nihongun wa Shanhai ni mo gun o susume, 12-gatsu, Nankin o kooryaku-shita ga, kono toki ni Nankin-gyakusatsu-jiken ga okotta.

>> The Japanese army, advancing its forces to Shanghai, in December captured Nanking, and at this time the Nanking Massacre Incident occurred.

and this:

Text 11 (509: 328)

1919-nen 4-gatsu, Indo hokusei-bu no Amurittosaru de Igrisu-hei ga daigunshuu ni mukete happoo, 1500-nin no shishoosha ga deta.

>> In April 1919, in north-west India at Amritsar, British soldiers shot into a crowd, and there were 1500 dead and wounded people.

It is strange that in one of the few books that deals with the Amritsar Massacre, the perpetrators are people (British soldiers), but in none of the 88 textbooks do we have Japanese people as perpetrators at Nanking (excluding Text 3, discussed above). I cannot believe that this is merely a coincidence.

This of course clearly proves that there is nothing in the nature of the Japanese language itself, or the way such events are written about in history textbooks, that blocks or prevents the writing of sentences in which soldiers are present in Nanking, and carry out heinous acts there.

5. DEVELOPING A CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

If students were regularly to open texts as I have done in this paper, they would see that the kind of history they are learning is not a frank, honest, straightforward recording of the facts “just as they are.” But it is easy to see why students are taught a closed history.

For example, consider the “was not made known to the Japanese people” text (Text 8). If students were to open this text (or any of the similar texts), they would certainly notice that the Japanese government was curiously absent from the narration of events; they might even think about the difference between “not tell someone something” and “hide something from someone,” and notice that the textbooks certainly do not go so far as to say the government hid anything from the people.

Why this is so, is rather obvious. If I hide something from you, it strongly suggests that you have the right to know and that I have violated, or intend to violate, some general ethical or moral standard that is determined by the mores of society—in short, that I have a guilty conscience. If I do not inform you of something, it strongly suggests that it is I who decide who has the right to know, and I am also the one who has the right to decide the ethical and moral standard of that particular issue.

The opening of such a text by students could lead to questions regarding the relationship between the people, the bureaucracy and the government, and by extension might even lead to students wondering in whom or in what the ownership of the State is vested.

By this, I mean that if the government does not inform the people of something, this suggests that the State belongs to the government, who acts as caretaker of the people. If the government hides something from the people, this suggests that the people are the masters of the government, and the State is the people’s. The former of these was certainly the case up to the time of the introduction of the new Japanese constitution after the war, when Japanese were subjects of the imperial state, not citizens of their country. But it is not the case according to the post-war constitution, in which sovereignty is vested in the Japanese people.

Within a modern Japan it is strange that the Ministry of Education is uncritically accepting the naturalness of this pre-1945 way of thinking. What, one would hope, the Ministry should be doing is to actually bring this into focus and question it, by not allowing textbook writers to write “was not made known to the Japanese people,” but by encouraging them to write something like “was hidden from the Japanese people by the Japanese authorities”—a writing of history which is amply supported by historical research.

But the kinds of questions that this way of thinking leads to are potentially subversive, and this is perhaps the reason why they cannot be allowed to rear their heads in school textbooks—and especially in textbooks that are controlled by an unelected bureaucratic organ of the State, as is the case in Japan.

The ability to open text empowers readers because it gives them the option of questioning, and rejecting, knowledge that is presented to them. And it also means that they are actually learning history by actively engaging with the received knowledge as it is presented to them. Freire (1993: 53) criticises the “banking concept” of education. This envisages the students as receptacles who are filled with knowledge

handed down by teachers. “Good” students are likely to acquiesce in this, and thereby end up by being deprived of initiative and the ability to think for themselves:

It is not surprising that the banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result in their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more completely they tend to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited on them. (54)

How much easier it is to learn the “story” and the “facts” as they are presented in textbooks than to spend one’s time struggling to open a text, particularly when opening texts and questioning them does not get one through multiple choice examinations. And how much safer this is for the people who have the power to authorise textbooks that this is what students should do.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have given examples of closed texts, and have shown that:

(a) Texts can be written in such a way that the prominence or salience of information can be downplayed.

(b) Texts can be written in such a way that although the information may not be in the text, there may be enough clues in the language of the text itself to suggest that there is important information below the surface of the language.

Finally, for fear of leaving readers with a wrong impression, I must deal with the question of motivation. I do not think that the writers and publishers of these textbooks consciously set out to write closed texts that hide historical facts or obfuscate history. If there is deliberate and conscious motivation regarding the patterns of language use that I have identified, this is probably nothing more calculated than a “play it safe” attitude that is adopted in order to get through the screening procedures of the Ministry of Education, which are certainly seen by publishers and writers as a potential hurdle.

When one looks at all the textbooks, one of the most striking things is the extremely high level of similarity among them. Naturally enough, any textbook that is fully a part of this “culture of similarity” is more or less assured of a safe passage through the screening procedures. To be not part of this culture is to take a risk, and probably cause oneself unnecessary trouble and expense.

Without doubt there is extensive mutual copying of textbooks, probably going back over many years. Any of these textbooks that claims to be “new” is rather like a dictionary claiming it is “new.” Thus the textbooks, like dictionaries, exchange information with each other.

As long as this situation prevails, the textbooks cannot be written in any other way. They are written as they are because of what they are, and to write them in any other way would mean that they were something other than “textbooks,” as defined and required by the Japanese Ministry of Education.

Notes

- ¹ Much of this paper draws on Barnard (1998a and 1998b), referenced below.
- ² Material from the textbooks listed below has been quoted in this paper. Citations in the body of the paper are to the official code number of the individual textbooks, and to page number.
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 3. Ienaga, Saburoo. *Shin Nihonshi* (054). Tokyo: Sanseido, 1994.
 4. Sakamoto, Shoozoo, Kiichi Rai, Makoto Iokibe, et al. *Nihonshi B* (564). Tokyo: Daiichi Gakushuu Sha, 1994.
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 9. Ezaka, Teruya, Rizoo Takeuchi, Seiichiroo Seno et al. *Yoosetsu Nihon no rekishi* (066). Tokyo: Jiyuu Shoboo, 1995.
 - 10 and 11. Nunome, Choofuu, Yooji Noguchi, Minoru Kawatika, et al. *Zusetsu Sekaishi B* (509). Tokyo: Teikoku Shoin, 1995.
- ³ The romanization used in this paper is very close to Hepburn romanization. I have written long vowels double, instead of using the macron, and I have not indicated the syllabic nasal. The Japanese punctuation mark known as “nakaguro” is represented by a slash. All translations from Japanese are by me, and carefully checked with native speakers of Japanese. However, all responsibility for the accuracy of these translations is mine.

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