

# A Deliberative Approach to Northeast Asia's Contested History\*

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## Abstract

The failure to reconcile views of the past and to address historical injustice has damaged inter-state relations in Northeast Asia. Joint committees, dialogues, and the participation of civil society have been used to address historical issues, but scholars in the disciplines of international relations and area studies have largely ignored these dialogues and deliberative forums. At the same time, there is an emergent theoretical literature on how deliberative democracy can address ethnic conflicts and historical injustice. There is a serious disconnect or distance between the theoretical literature on the resolution of conflicts via deliberation on the one hand, and empirical studies of deliberative approach in East Asia on the other. This article aims to address this shortcoming in the study of the politics of historical dispute in Northeast Asia by proposing a deliberative approach to history disputes and highlighting the achievements, limits, and dynamics of deliberation. Through mapping and comparative testing, we confirm that deliberation offers some potential for a departure from nationalist mentalities and a shift towards a consciousness of regional history in Northeast Asia. Our empirical test of the utility of the deliberative approach suggests that a new model for addressing regional disputes may be emerging.

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## 1. Introduction

Northeast Asian history – particularly the legitimacy of war, national boundaries, and political units – has been fiercely contested since the Pacific War. This war and its aftermath witnessed the birth of independent nation-states, which have appropriated that trauma and used it to forge new national identities. History plays a significant role in nation building and the construction of national identities, but it has also hindered regional integration (He, 2004b; Moon and Suh, 2007). The state should not be treated as a monolithic actor, but state elites in Northeast Asia have consistently addressed the publishing of history in the region as a matter of utmost importance. Official institutes oversee the preparation of school history textbooks, and history as an academic discipline has been used to construct a linearity of collective memory, such as the overt emphasis on victimhood via China's 'Patriotic Education Campaign' (Wang, 2008). Only in recent years has a loosening of this practice provided an opportunity for civil society groups to contribute to the writing of history.

History tends to be written for specific audiences, making problematic the recounting of events such as war and colonialism. All histories are *contemporary* histories (Croce, 1941: 19), or the history of *ideas* (Collingwood, 1946). In the eyes of Oakeshott (1933: 99), historians create history *through* their writing. The nationalist politics of history is often deliberately subjective, and distorts the past (Heisler, 2008b). History may legitimate territorial claims, and although nationalists appeal to historical 'facts', Renan noted a century ago: 'Getting history wrong is an essential part of being a nation' (cited in Alterman, 1999). The facts at the heart of nationalist narratives may be fabricated and lack deliberative qualities. A nationalist approach to contested history creates serious problems such as devaluing deliberation and reason, inciting needlessly adversarial emotions, denying and excluding certain groups from debate, intensifying diplomatic rows, and hindering regionalism.

The politicization of the past, and the identity conflicts it causes, are attracting ever-greater interest. For instance, some European leaders have provided 'stylized accounts' of the Nazi era in order to control recollections of the past (Wüstenberg and Art, 2008; Wüstenberg, 2010). It is traumatic for societies to face history, especially when illegal and evil acts have been committed in their name (Heisler, 2008a). A second body of work focuses on the interplay between history, textbooks, and conflict (see Cole, 2007). Pingel (2008) reviews transnational efforts to revise history textbooks in post-conflict societies. In Japan, political leaders have become more conscious of regional reactions to how history textbooks represent events of the war (Schneider, 2008). As Wang notes: 'History education is no longer a domestic issue in East Asia' (2008: 801). The pursuit for historical justice has included calls for Japan to pay restitution to Koreans who served in the imperial army against their will (Shin *et al.*, 2006). A third group of scholars has sought to reduce tensions in post-conflict societies by drawing on the 'deliberative democracy' approach, which has been applied in Northern Ireland and South Africa (Dwyer, 1999). Fishkin *et al.* (2007) conducted a deliberative polling experiment in

Northern Ireland, which enhances greater levels of trust and understanding between former adversaries.

Despite sharing an interest in history, memory, and conflict, these literatures have not been fruitfully combined. On the one hand, the politics of history is largely dominated by power, interest, and emotion, rather than rationality and deliberation. Subsequently, historians and political scientists have tended to overlook the role of deliberation in Northeast Asia's history disputes. For instance, a collection of essays on the politicization of history (Heisler, 2008b) mainly focuses on efforts by political leaders to control the retelling of the past, and Shin's volume (2006) concentrates on state-led efforts to achieve justice. The next logical step would be to include more voices and interests of civil society and citizens in the resolution of disputes. On the other hand, deliberative theorists have been reluctant to address complex history disputes, in which state-approved historians and 'experts' usually play significant roles to the exclusion of ordinary citizens. And while deliberative theorists have addressed various forms of conflict within societies and the states, they have avoided history disputes.

This article combines the study of regional conflicts and the literature on the deliberative approach. While acknowledging that the field of deliberative democracy is so broad as to occasionally operate merely at the level of abstraction, we believe that some elements of the approach, explained in more detail in the second section of this article, can be fruitfully applied to history disputes. Our first step, in Section 2, is to apply the deliberative approach to history disputes, outlining a new approach to the politics of history writing. The deliberative approach encourages pluralist rather than nationalist, deliberative rather than emotive, readings of history. By allowing for an 'ethics of difference' (Bleiker, 2005), it facilitates a more open debate about history, and fosters movement towards what Habermas terms the most valid interpretation of history (Suh, 2007).

The second step is empirical, and is the primary focus of the article. The empirical section of the article also consists of two main elements. First, in Section 3 we discuss various forms of debate about regional history, and then ascertain the degree to which civil society has been involved and deliberation has occurred. Section 4 highlights the *The Modern History of East Asia* (MHEA, TJHEC, 2005) project, which entailed the production of a history textbook for use in China, Japan, and South Korea. The project sought to overcome the 'liberation–invasion' dichotomy that characterizes the retelling of regional history (Hundt and Bleiker, 2007). We contrast MHEA with the tempestuous Goguryeo/Gāogōuli dispute between China and South Korea, which state-approved actors dominated. The second element of our empirical study is an attempt to discern the political implications of deliberation. By accounting for the factors that facilitate and hinder deliberation, examining the limits of deliberation, and discussing its dynamic potential, we empirically test the deliberative approach. Section 5 identifies three discernible and positive shifts away from conflictual forms of regional relations towards more peaceful relations, and we argue that the nascent attempts at deliberation

in the public sphere have contributed significantly to these shifts. A brief conclusion follows and completes the article in Section 6.

We are aware of the limitations to applying a Western theory of deliberative democracy to Northeast Asia, where historical issues are largely decided by states and where emotions dominate history disputes. Some previous attempts at reconciliation, for instance between West Germany and Poland in the Cold War era, were neither deliberative nor democratic. Closed-door discussions, sponsored by the German and Polish governments, resulted in an agreement about historical controversies. Such exclusionary mechanisms, however, are vulnerable to crisis and dysfunction, as our empirical studies below demonstrate. What is needed is an empirical study of the conditions under which deliberation can address history disputes. Ivison (2010) demonstrates that the deliberative approach has played an informal but important part in achieving reconciliation in Australia. Our empirical study provides evidence that the role of deliberation cannot be ignored in the politics of history disputes.

## 2. A deliberative approach to contested history

There is a growing literature on deliberative democracy, resulting from the ‘deliberative turn’ of the 1990s (Cohen, 1989; Cohen and Sabel, 1997; Dryzek, 1990, 1996, 2000; Elster, 1998; Fung, 2003; Fung and Wright, 2001; Goodin, 2002). Unlike liberal democracy, deliberative democracy goes beyond the aggregation of preferences and majority voting. It prioritizes reasoned argument and discussion in which ‘interests’ are recognized but do not dominate proceedings. In deliberative democracy, the force of the better argument should prevail over wealth and political influence. Arguments should be factually true, normatively right, and expressively sincere (Habermas, 1984, 1996). In this view, *deliberation* is a mode of communication which involves persuasion-based influence. It may take the form of dialogue, negotiation, discussion, and public forums. We seek to assess the degree to which discussions about regional history have had deliberative qualities, and summarize our approach in Table 2.

Following J.S. Mill, O’Flynn (2006) developed a deliberative approach to the Northern Ireland conflict. He focused on two key norms of deliberative democracy: reciprocity and publicity. Reciprocity requires that, in seeking to justify proposals, citizens appeal to interests that all parties can appreciate, and not simply to the interests of one ethnic group. In terms of publicity, O’Flynn emphasizes that decision-making processes should be open and transparent. Respect for these norms can help citizens develop and sustain a stronger sense of common identity, without discarding ethnic affiliations. O’Flynn also stressed the importance of fostering a civil society in which individuals engage in non-ethnic terms.

Dryzek (2005) considers the degree to which deliberative democracy can address mutually contradictory identities. Engagement in the public sphere should be ‘semi-detached’ from the state, or dissociated from sovereign authority. Dryzek’s pluralist discursive democratization (2006: 154–7) challenges the state’s monopoly over discourses about history, encouraging critical reflections of history.

The deliberative approach could apply to territorial disputes such as Kosovo, in which the warring sides might lay down their arms and submit themselves to a panel of historical experts who would study the historical record of a battle that occurred centuries ago (Alterman, 1999). There would be a ruling, and each side would give up its unjustifiable demands in light of superior historical documentation. This approach is deliberative but not democratic. For a deliberative democrat, the judgment of historical experts is insufficient. Only the participation of ordinary citizens and civil society groups in the writing of history can create a broad public consensus and legitimacy to deal with all historical disputes.

B. He (2010) has examined, compared and synthesized different deliberative approaches, and developed a deliberative experiment regarding the Tibet issue. By building on previous research, this article attempts to identify a new politics of history in the transnational public sphere. First, historical disputes are associated with pain, suffering, grief, anger, and revenge (Bleiker and Hoang, 2007). National leaders sometimes surrender to highly charged emotions, as in the case of then-Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine. Such behavior cannot deal with historical disputes adequately. An alternative lies in the deliberative approach, whereby actors prioritize reasoned argument, subject the facts to rational scrutiny, and engage rationally in a compromising spirit. According to Pingel, 'Critical questioning of the other's interpretation involves being critical of oneself' (2008: 189), and on this reflexive ground, history can be negotiated and be part of a democratic mechanism.

Second, within the nationalist paradigm, the question of *what* has dominated historical inquiry without giving due consideration to *who*. Most attempts to resolve historical disputes in Northeast Asia have failed because they rely on the input of elites. The writing of history in the region must involve civil society if it is to have maximal legitimacy, and this principle needs to be applied on a regional basis in order to avoid the temptation of reverting to nationalist interpretations of history. Now even Chinese scholars have a growing appreciation for the input of civil society and ordinary citizens (Zhong, 2008).

Deliberative democratic theorists stress the capacity, right, and opportunity of citizens to participate in historical issues. We envisage the writing of history as a deliberative process whereby historians, civil society groups, and ordinary citizens engage in dialogue and confirm a 'bare minimum of facts' as a basis for communication. The writing of history is thus a dialogue between all parties and among citizens. The deliberative paradigm offers civil society groups and ordinary citizens an opportunity to argue and debate, and to change their opinions during the process of deliberation.

Third, to handle historical disputes successfully, it is necessary to win support from the international community (Qian, 2009). Consequently, a certain level of deliberation is required to impart legitimacy over historical claims. In this context, a deliberative approach stresses the role of transnational civil society (He, 2004a; He and Murphy, 2007). An ideal-type regional public sphere on history would encompass transnational networks and organizations. Given the potentially disastrous consequences of a return

to interstate warfare, regional actors need to recognize each other as legitimate participants in a dialogue about the past (Suh, 2007: 382).

We have outlined the key features of the deliberative approach. Now we empirically test the deliberative approach through our case studies. In particular, we empirically test the following claims about the conditions for deliberation.

First, if states are the sole participants in discussions about history, it is likely that disputes will be resolved in a secretive and unsatisfactory manner. States are unlikely to conduct genuine debate and they are also unlikely to reach a lasting settlement which will satisfy most of their citizens.

Second, by seeking to ensure ‘semi-detachment’ from the state, the deliberative approach breaks the state’s monopoly over history writing and expands the potential for more accurate renditions of history. In Dryzek’s semi-detached condition, there is looser interaction between state and civil society. Without the backing of the state, civil society groups are too weak to make any impact; but if they are too close to the state, they lose their independence. Semi-detachment offers civil society the opportunity to contribute innovatively to the writing of history.

Third, elite settlements are closed and exclusive in nature, and such a process undermines deliberation. If the process is open and inclusive, states and civil society groups can achieve broader legitimacy for their claims about history. Appealing to international public opinion is likely to promote deliberation. The main features of our deliberative approach to history disputes, as well as the testable questions, are summarized in Table 1.

Our testable questions will be applied to two cogent case studies, the *MHEA* project and the Goguryeo/Gāogōuli dispute discussed in Section 4. Prior to proceeding to the case studies, we typologize history disputes in Northeast Asia according to the logic of deliberation.

### 3. Dialogues in Northeast Asia

There have been numerous attempts to conduct dialogues about Northeast Asian history, but most have been unsuccessful. Rather than providing an exhaustive list of dialogues, this article typologizes dialogues about regional history in Table 2. The *national* domain indicates that history is discussed within and for the purposes of an individual state, while the *intergovernmental* domain involves the input of several states. The *regional public sphere*, in contrast, involves both state and non-state actors in discussions about history. In terms of the degree of deliberation, we typologize dialogues as nil/low, moderate, and substantial. At the lower end of the spectrum, nationalist perspectives exclude all other alternative views. A moderate degree of debate meanwhile is attached to dialogues where nationalist perspectives coexist but are inflexible and non-reflexive. At the substantial level, dialogues overcome nationalist perspectives through a process of critically re-examining all perspectives, including one’s own.

**Table 1.** *A deliberative approach to contested history*

Aspect	Ideal type	Testable questions
Process	In contrast to the exclusive and secretive state-led process, the deliberative process is inclusive and open.	Can a democratic and inclusive process overcome the closed extant process?
Actors	Rather than state-sponsored historians, citizens and civil society play leading roles in resolving historical disputes. They develop a regional public sphere to overcome nationalist histories.	Can ordinary citizens and civil society play significant roles in resolving historical disputes? Can a regional public sphere evolve?
Deliberation	In contrast to intense, emotional, and adversarial nationalist narratives, the deliberative approach is reflective and critical, promotes mutual respect, and allows participants to change their views.	To what degree are contentious issues debated? Is it possible to engage in genuine deliberation on historical issues?
Outcomes	If citizens engage in a communicative manner, deliberation can clarify a bare minimum of facts and develop a regional identity.	Can deliberation achieve a bare minimum of facts? Can a regional identity overcome nationalist histories?

**Table 2.** *Dialogues about northeast Asian history*

Domain	Degree of deliberation		
	Nil/Low	Moderate	Substantial
National	<b>1</b> * Verification of the Rape of Nanking  * Goguryeo dispute	<b>2</b> * Truth and Reconciliation Commission	<b>3</b> * <i>Yomiuri</i> verdict
Inter-governmental	<b>4</b> * Tokyo Trials	<b>5</b> * Sino–Japanese Joint Declaration * Obuchi–Jiang summit	<b>6</b> * Obuchi–Kim summit
Regional public sphere	<b>7</b> * Joint history test	<b>8</b> * Beijing Women's Conference	<b>9</b> * <i>MHEA</i>

*Dialogues at the national level*

The nation-state is not a unitary actor with a single purpose and perspective. Branches of the bureaucracy, ministries, and factions of the military may develop and maintain diverse positions on history issues. When history is re-imagined and re-written free of competing voices, it is vulnerable to ‘mythmaking’. And if the writing of history is predominantly the remit of state elites, critical faculties may be seriously impaired. This ‘divergence of national memories created by elite historical mythmaking’ has ‘perpetuated and reinforced the problems of history in Japan–China relations’ (Y. He, 2006: 69). A prime example of a non-reflective dialogue was when a Japanese rightwing group met to discuss allegations that Japanese troops mistreated Chinese citizens at Nanking. Dubbed the ‘Verification of the Rape of Nanking’, the meeting found no evidence to support claims that the imperial army had wantonly assaulted Chinese citizens. This verdict, which sought to restore the reputation of Japanese troops, sparked an outcry from Chinese citizens (Gong, 2001: 48). A second example is the dispute over the Goguryeo/Gāogōuli kingdom, which we take as a case study and examine in more detail later in Section 4.

Another foray into deliberation is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was established to investigate issues in South Korean history, such as collaboration with the colonial Japanese government prior to Liberation in 1945. The Commission sought information – via forensic searches, eyewitness accounts, scholarly research, and testimony by perpetrators – about Korean officials during the war (Cumings, 2007: 262). It had long been known that leaders such as Park Chung Hee served in the colonial state, but the Commission uncovered evidence that other Koreans collaborated in various ways. While the ‘truth’ component of the Commission’s remit challenged the state-centric historiography, the revelations about prominent Korean officials resulted in little reconciliation. The Commission exacerbated conflict between conservatives and progressives, and did not generate substantial dialogue about regional history.

A third example of national-level dialogue occurred when Japan’s *Yomiuri Shimbun* broke with conservative ranks by calling for a resolution to wartime history disputes. In an interview in 2006, editor Tsuneo Watanabe – a conscript in the Japanese army during the war – argued that the Yasukuni Shrine acts as a symbolic impediment to better relations with China and the Koreans. One of several projects which coincided with the 60th anniversary of the war’s end, the *Yomiuri* study, concentrated on issues such as the decision to wage war on the US, the use of suicide bombers (*kamikaze*), and efforts to end the war. The ‘verdict’ was that a group of hardliners committed strategic blunders and needlessly prolonged the war. Further, the project apportioned blame to moderates, the emperor, the Diet, and the media – including the *Yomiuri* itself – for not criticizing the disastrous path of the war (Morris-Suzuki, 2007: 183–4; Takahiko, 2007: 45–8).



*Dialogues at the intergovernmental level*

Some dialogues at the intergovernmental level fell short of adequate accounts of the past. One example was the San Francisco Peace Conference in 1951, and another was the Tokyo Trials held in 1946 to prosecute Japanese leaders accused of war crimes. The trials provided grist for Japan's nationalist mill precisely because they were seen to dispense 'victors' justice'. Prosecutors charged Japanese leaders such as Tojo Hideki (military commander and prime minister) and Heitaro Kimura (overseer of the Burma railway) with war crimes. In total, about 30 high-ranking officials were executed or given life sentences. The evidence against them was substantial, but the trials did not represent a 'dialogue' in that the outcomes were predetermined. That is, political considerations limited the degree to which the Japanese state's actions were scrutinized. For instance, the emperor and members of the royal family were spared prosecution (Horvat, 2006: 221; see also Sin, 2008).

Further, along the spectrum of dialogues, there are cases of states finding a *modus vivendi* about the past in the name of better relations in the present and the future. Prime examples were Japan's re-establishment of diplomatic relations with South Korea and China. Japan reached a settlement with Korea in 1965, and began to normalize ties with Communist China in 1972. It is noteworthy that these settlements were between heads of state. The Sino-Japanese Joint Declaration established a dialogue about the war. It stated that while Japan committed crimes against its neighbors, a military clique were the chief perpetrators. In the spirit of a new era of bilateral relations, China relinquished all claims to restitution from Japan (Y. He, 2006: 73–4; Suh, 2007: 394).

Even more substantive bilateral summits occurred in 1998. Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi agreed with Korean President Kim Dae-jung, and Chinese President Jiang Zemin, to forge closer bilateral relations. And yet, due to differences in the wording of the communiqués, the Obuchi–Kim summit was more significant in terms of its impact on regional harmony than the meeting between Obuchi and Jiang. A crucial difference between the communiqués was that Obuchi offered Kim 'a written apology . . . for past sufferings' which Japan caused its neighbors prior to and during the war. Further, 'Kim accepted with sincerity this statement of Obuchi's recognition of history and expressed his appreciation for it' (Gong, 2001: 46, 50).

*Dialogues in the public sphere*

Even at a low level of intensity, the potential of deliberation in the public sphere is striking. A good example is the joint effort between schools in Seoul, Tokyo, and Hebei to conduct a history test for students in the three countries. The findings of the test were revealing. In aggregate, each cohort of students received a mark of 45 for the test, and all three cohorts scored more than 50% for the questions relating to their *own* country. However, students only scored 20% to 30% for questions relating to *other* countries (Ahn, Park, and Lee, 2005). The Korean and Chinese cohorts tended to share similar

knowledge sets that distinguished them from Japanese students: 90% of Chinese and Koreans knew that Busan was not the capital of Korea in the nineteenth century, but only one third knew the meaning of terms such as Tokyo Trials, Showa Emperor, and Russo–Japanese War. Most Japanese students correctly identified these terms, but few correctly answered the question about Busan.

Dialogues involving representatives of all three countries have also ensued. For instance one of the topics discussed at the Beijing Women’s Conference in 1995 was the Comfort Women, an issue about which new information was still emerging (Hayashi, 2008). One Japanese scholar and feminist attended the conference and viewed it as an opportunity for the public sphere to act as a venue for deliberation free of the strictures of state-dominated narratives. However, she found that her Korean and Chinese counterparts viewed her as Japanese first and a scholar and feminist second, highlighting the limits of the public sphere to resolve sensitive issues such as the Comfort Women (Ueno, 1999).

In the most fruitful sector of Table 2, we found one case of note. The Kim government proposed the *Modern History of East Asia* project in 2001 in collaboration with its Japanese counterpart. As befits the public sphere, educators, scholars, and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives from China, Japan, and South Korea compared different understandings of the turbulent relations between the three countries during the century beginning in the 1840s. The authors of the textbook sought to provide a single unified narrative of this controversial set of events (Ahn, 2005; Hundt and Bleiker, 2007: 83–6). The outcomes are discussed in more detail in Section 4.

#### 4. Two cases compared

Of the examples in Table 2, the Goguryeo/Gāogōuli dispute and *MHEA* textbook project fall into contrasting sectors. Whereas the dispute represents the worst possible outcome in terms of dialogue, the textbook project represents the best-case scenario. We analyze these cases by focusing on the aspects of the deliberative approach – process, actors, deliberation, and outcomes – discussed in Table 1. Given that we examine only two cases, the results are of heuristic value. However, they are worthy of study by dint of their occurring at precisely the same time, and yet evolving along quite divergent paths. The cases thus offer an opportunity to explore the conditions for, and effects of, deliberation.

##### *Background and process*

Both Korean and Chinese histories mention Goguryeo/Gāogōuli, whose name is based on the same Chinese characters (高句麗) but is pronounced differently in each country. Both sides agree that the kingdom survived for several hundred years, from about 37BC to the 660s. The kingdom is commonly agreed to have occupied territories that are now recognized as Manchuria and the Korean peninsula. Goguryeo is of great historical importance to Korea, being one the kingdoms (along with Silla

and Baekche) that unified and formed the Goryeo dynasty in the seventh century AD. For Koreans, Goguryeo is intrinsically linked to nationhood and identity formation. China, in contrast, claims that Gāogōulì was but one territory that forms part of the multi-millennial, multicultural Chinese civilizational sphere. In this view, China is a super-state that has readily absorbed minority peoples. This is the political principle to which most Chinese people subscribe (Sun, 2001).

The dispute stemmed from North Korea's attempt to have Goguryeo murals in the north of the peninsula listed by UNESCO as worthy of world heritage protection. China retaliated by asking UNESCO to list Gāogōuli castles and tombs in Chinese territory. It also launched the Northeast Project, under the aegis of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, which, along with other history projects about China's borderlands, intended to strengthen Chinese claims to disputed territories such as Gāogōuli. Koreans became enraged when China laid claim to not only Goguryeo but also Gojoseon, Gando, and Balhae, which are also, in the Korean view, integral to its national history (Kim, 2005: 142–3; Song, 2004: 95, 110). A feature of the dispute was the parallel assertion of exclusive ownership over the now-extinct kingdom. South Korean netizens initially played a leading role in fomenting the dispute via campaigns to press Korea's claims to Goguryeo. Chinese netizens responded in kind, leading to a series of highly charged online spats. Government officials were drawn into the dispute, with both sides recognizing its potential to damage bilateral ties. Eventually an agreement was reached to tone down contending claims and to rein in unofficial voices in the debate. The dispute was, in effect, relocated from the parallel contentious public sphere to the inter-governmental sphere.

*MHEA*, meanwhile, officially began in March 2003 in Nanjing where the first Peace Forum in East Asia was attended by scholars from Japan, South Korea, and China. Against the backdrop of the *New History Textbook (NHT)* produced by Fusosha publishing house for the conservative *Sankei Shimbun* and approved by the Japanese government in 2001 (Yoshida, 2007), it was proposed that the scholars from three countries co-produce a history textbook to correct the historical perspectives adopted in *NHT*. Consequently, a transnational editorial committee was formed, involving 54 academics, teachers, and researchers. It took three years to complete the project, involving 11 meetings over six drafts of the textbook plus hundreds of email exchanges among the participants.

In contrast to the restrictive and nationalistic discourse on Goguryeo/Gāogōuli, participants in *MHEA* engaged in dialogue and exchanged opinions quite freely. Via consultation and debate, its semi-detachment from the state resulted in the production of a textbook that included sensitive issues such as the Comfort Women, the Yasukuni Shrine, and the importance of history teaching (TJHEC, 2005: 230–35). Nonetheless, the exercise was not as inclusive as it might have been. For instance, consideration was given to the inclusion of North Korea and the Philippines, but no agreement on the terms of their involvement was possible. This is due to the 'oligarchic tendencies' which can emerge in deliberative forums. That is, there may be 'changes in the preferences of a

majority to match those of an interested minority through its control and manipulation of the deliberative process' (Tucker, 2008: 127).

### *Actors*

State-sanctioned actors dominated the Goguryeo/Gāogōuli dispute. The Korean side berated China for 'stealing' Korean history, and responded by establishing the Goguryeo Research Foundation (Go, 2006: 112–13). In both countries, the public supported the government via unofficial, often internet-based means, but was excluded from the writing of history. In contrast, civil society groups were involved in the *MHEA* project. The editorial committee drew on testimonies from survivors of the war and schoolteachers who contributed to the textbook, which is easily digestible by young audiences. Most participants were reflective, critical, and willing to change their opinions. Being inspired by the reconciliation between France and Germany, some members, for example Professor Su Zhiliang of Shanghai Normal University, were committed to regional peace through deliberation (author interview, 2009).

The failure of the Goguryeo dialogue was largely due to the state's attempts to monopolize discussions about history and preoccupations with sovereignty. In contrast, the success of *MHEA* can be partially attributed to Dryzek's 'semi-detachment' from the state, which is a strategy of temporarily shelving the issue of sovereignty. *MHEA* revealed semi-detachment in that civil society groups took the initiative, but the patterns and intensity of this detachment varied quite substantially.

The Chinese participants exhibited a certain degree of detachment from the state. Since Korea and Japan are democracies, while China is not, it is easy to be skeptical about the degree to which Chinese participants could participate autonomously. And yet, the *MHEA* was not a state-funded project and some of the Chinese participants had to pay their own airfares. They departed from certain official positions after deliberation and the final textbook was not adopted by the Chinese Ministry of Education.

In contrast, the Korean state and civil society groups collaborated quite closely. Although most participants shared the liberal–progressive outlook of the Kim and Roh governments who promoted the *MHEA* project, the political leanings of Korean participants was not a point of contention. The position they adopted on the key issues in the textbook received bipartisan support. For instance, the *Chosun Ilbo* described *MHEA* participants merely as 'history researchers' (2005a) and 'civil society groups and historians' (2005b). The Korean participants thus enjoyed a substantial degree of detachment, or autonomy, from the state.

The greatest degree of detachment was evident in Japan. At precisely the same time as Japanese participants were co-authoring a regional history that acknowledged the damaged wrought by the imperial army, their government was adopting a far less contrite attitude to its neighbors. During the lifetime of the *MHEA* project, Prime Minister Koizumi visited the Yasukuni Shrine four times, and his government approved the sale of the *NHT*. For representatives of Japanese civil society to co-produce a

textbook which contains a vastly different historical narrative constitutes a significant degree of detachment from the state.

### *Deliberation*

Political considerations complicated differences between the two sides to the territorial dispute, and subsequently eliminated any prospect for genuine dialogue. The main motivation for Chinese claims to Gāogōuli was to strengthen its claims to its northeast territories for fear that a reunified Korea might seek to appropriate some parts of Manchuria (Zhang, 2004). Modern conceptions of the nation-state, which imply exclusive sovereignty over a fixed territory and a population sharing a common language and culture, were applied to events that occurred at a time when borders and sovereignty were far looser concepts (Ryuichi, 2006: 406–10).

Highly sensitive to issues of sovereignty, neither China nor South Korea was willing to countenance a dialogue that could weaken their status as modern nation-states. State-funded research on the disputed kingdom by one side invited suspicion and hostility from the other. In China, the heads of three provincial departments of propaganda were involved in the project. Some Koreans regarded an article published in *The Guanming Daily* (Li, 2003) as 'a declaration of war' (MOFAT, 2007).

The nationalist insularity of the Goguryeo/Gāogōuli dispute contributed to its intensification, while the relatively democratic, deliberative, and inclusive process of *MHEA* contributed to its success. Instead of the nationalist monopoly of discourse and the disregard for the opinion of others in the dispute, *MHEA* took the form of a genuine, non-adversarial dialogue that dealt with difference. The working principle was that all parties must be treated as equals and must be willing to revise their own opinions if others devised a more compelling argument.

The authors of *MHEA* exhibited a substantial degree of rational discussion, tolerance, and fairness. For example, the Korean and Chinese participants changed their conceptions of victimhood after accepting the arguments of Japanese scholars. They initially deemed it an insult that an aggressive Japan was also a victim of the war, but eventually ceded their monopoly over victimhood. Despite the emphasis on Japan's culpability, the notion of victimhood was relaxed to incorporate Japanese citizens, opposition politicians, anti-war activists, and conscripts (TJHEC, 2005: 172–83). However, the Japanese state itself was not deemed to be a victim. In this sense, dialogue allowed for new understandings of victimhood. A related instance of changing perceptions of the war revolved around the legality of Japan's incursions. The Chinese and Korean delegations stressed how Japan violated the sovereignty of its neighbors, while the more legalistic Japanese accounts emphasized that these states did not exercise full *sovereignty* over their territories prior to Japan's invasion.

Second, the textbook allowed the presentation of contending views of such sensitive issues as the death toll from the Nanjing Massacre. Chinese participants had insisted on the Chinese official 'correct' number of 300,000 deaths in order to show the cruelty of the massacre, but after deliberation they accepted that the Tokyo Trials and the

Nanjing Trials had arrived at different, lower figures. However, the textbook noted that another 150,000 deaths could be counted, for example, by including bodies found along the riverside or buried by Nanjing-based charities (TJHEC, 2005: 150–1). In a similar manner, culpability for the outbreak of war was discussed in a reasoned way. Initially, the Japanese scholars explicitly stated that Japanese soldiers did not fire the first shots on 7 July 1937. However, the Chinese scholars questioned this claim, and the Japanese scholars later emphasized that the Japanese army had used the excuse of ‘illegal shooting’ to start the war.

A third example of the effects of deliberation is evident in the depiction of China’s political influence in Korea. As one Japanese participant in *MHEA* recollected, ‘There were fierce debates between the Koreans and the Chinese . . . Korea argued that both Japan and Qing China strongly intervened in Joseon [Korea], but China responded that that was a different type of intervention to that of Japan’ (cited in Ahn *et al.*, 2005). The relevant section of the textbook indicates how Chinese participants moderated their stance via deliberation. *MHEA* recounts that Qing initially helped the Korean government to quell a rebellion in 1882, but that Chinese troops overstayed their welcome and stymied reform. Both Qing and Japan are described as continuing to pursue their interests in Korea until Japan triumphed in the war of the mid 1890s (TJHEC, 2005: 44–5).

### *Outcomes*

The outcome of the Goguryeo/Gāogōuli dispute was a compromise whereby China toned down its claims to the kingdom. At the same time, the Korean side appeared to loosen its claims to Gando, which lies entirely within China’s current borders. According to the Korean government’s account of the dispute, verbal agreement was reached in 2004. China sent a high-ranking official, Jia Qinglin, to Seoul to find a solution to the dispute. China would avoid ‘additional distortion of interpretation of Goguryeo’s history’, and ‘make efforts to correct existing distortions’ (MOFAT, 2007). The Korean government monitored China’s compliance with the verbal agreement, noting efforts to remove signs and other forms of information that Korea deemed offensive. Furthermore, China proposed that the dispute be resolved through academic exchanges, with the kingdom being considered a ‘shared history’ (Ha, 2006: 12) or ‘dual inheritance’ (Sun, 2001), which each side could recall separately.

It is possible to interpret the dispute as an example of the state’s near-monopoly over the discussion of history being disrupted in a way that was unanticipated by, and unwelcome to, state leaders. After the dispute erupted via online forums, leaders from both countries attempted to re-appropriate the debate and reach an elite settlement. However, the compromise in the inter-governmental sphere did not constitute the type of deliberative forum which can satisfy popular demands for greater input to political processes. Nor may the compromise provide a lasting agreement that all sides can accept.

The *MHEA* project can be judged a relative success for at least three reasons. First, the history textbook was completed and made available for sale. In the six months following the publication of *MHEA* in May 2005, 60,000 copies were sold in Korea, 70,000 in Japan, and 110,000 in China. By contrast, just over 1,000 copies of Fusosha's *NHT* were sold in the same period (Bao, 2006). In late 2008, one of the Korean participants in *MHEA* credited the textbook with 'contributing heavily to [*NHT*] being limited to an adoption rate of less than 10 percent' (cited in Kim, 2008).

Second, *MHEA* offered a corrective to the claims made in the *NHT*. In particular, the *NHT* describes the Great East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere as a way for Japan to help liberate Asian states, whereas *MHEA* describes it as a way to equip Japan with the resources to belatedly join the Western powers in the imperialist game (*Chosun Ilbo*, 2005b). It went beyond nationalist frameworks, built a new regional perspective of modern history in Northeast Asia, acknowledged the challenges and geopolitical situation faced by all three states, and constructed a regional identity. Chinese readers left numerous positive comments on websites such as Amazon China, saying for instance the textbook 'opens up my horizon', and 'It's the first time I learned Korean and Japanese perspectives!' *MHEA* thus complemented efforts by a range of organizations across the political spectrum, including the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, to view the war in a more critical light (Morris–Suzuki, 2007: 184–5).

Third, the project demonstrated a wider effort by transnational civil society to address national identity questions (He, 2004a, 2004b, 2010), and the embryonic formation of regional deliberative forums. For instance, Chinese scholars praised the textbook for making a contribution to peace and regional integration in Northeast Asia (Bu, 2005). Most importantly, the project elicited a commitment to further cooperation. In 2006, work began on a 'follow up' volume, due for completion in 2011, and participants demonstrated a capacity to innovate in terms of deliberation. For instance, the second volume of the joint history textbook will consciously adopt a regional perspective. Whereas scholars involved in *MHEA* initially wrote a history of their own country's experiences in the century of turbulence and then sought to weld three separate histories into a single unified narrative, the successor volume requires them to write a history of all three countries' experiences. The state-centric focus will be further challenged by recounting events at both state and popular levels (Kim, 2008). Table 3 summarizes the two cases discussed in this section.

### 5. The limits and dynamics of deliberation

It is worth attaching some caveats to our analysis. While the textbook project is still the most extensive attempt at dialogue in the regional public sphere, most examples described in the article did *not* fall into the most desirable sectors of Table 2. There are limits to the deliberative approach, and consequently we have predicted only modest results. First, the deliberation process involves certain authoritarian and oligarchic elements. China's authoritarian deliberation (B. He, 2006: 134–5; He and Warren, 2011) was evident in its pre-determined agenda and its refusal to include issues such as the

**Table 3.** *Comparing the cases*

Aspect	Goguryeo/Gāogōuli	MHEA
Process	Little development of inclusive process	Democratic and inclusive process
Actors	Dialogue attached to state; public opinion supported state but unable to influence direction of debate	NGOs and scholars play leading role; semi-detached from state
Deliberation	Absence of deliberation in highly nationalist atmosphere	Contentious issues debated; genuine deliberation on some issues; some issues too sensitive to discuss
Outcomes	No agreement on bare minimum of facts	Achieve bare minimum of facts; formation of regional public forum; production and sale of textbook; some differences remain

development of civil rights, democracy, and even the Goguryeo/Gāogōuli dispute in the textbook. While Western and Japanese imperialism was properly scrutinized, there was no mention of US hegemony or China's contentious claims to Tibet, Xinjiang, and Taiwan (ICG, 2005: 13; Wasserstrom, 2006: 82).

Second, merely providing a venue for dialogue does not guarantee that all perspectives are considered, or that a reasoned and critical account will emerge. Competing nationalist imageries can clash in the public sphere and a 'contentious regional sphere' may emerge (Suh, 2007: 383). The Goguryeo/Gāogōuli dispute eventuated within the confines of state organizations, suggesting that both democracies and non-democracies are adept at harnessing public opinion to nationalist ends, and at preventing the emergence of non-official and parallel dialogues.<sup>1</sup>

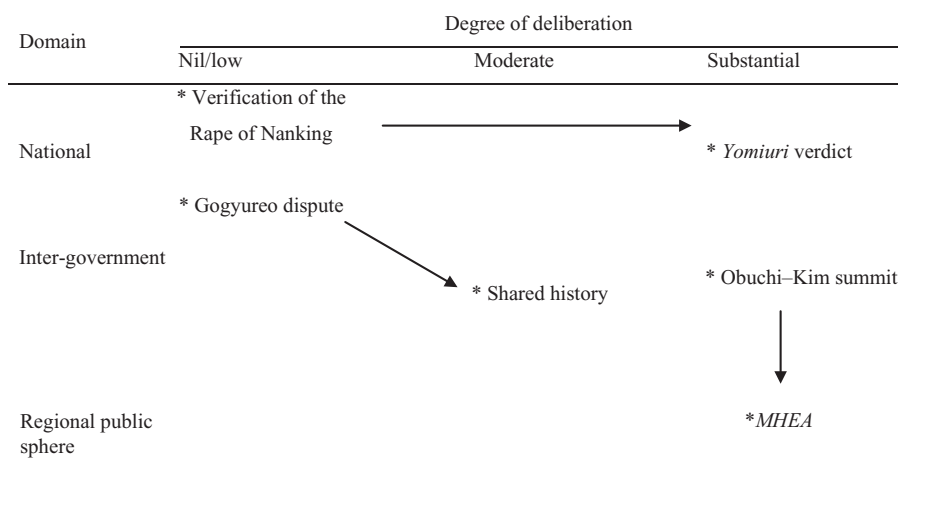
Third, the maximalist interpretation of sovereignty is likely to persist; state elites are unlikely to ease restrictions on narratives about the sanctity of soil, borders, and history (He, 2010). They will resist attempts to subject what are generally perceived as domestic issues to regional deliberation.

Despite the obstacles to dialogue, it appears that shifts *between* sectors are possible: dialogues at one point in time may create the basis for more inclusive deliberations at later stages. As Table 4 illustrates, three shifts are discernible. We acknowledge that our

<sup>1</sup> One factor which has limited the textbook's sales performance in Korea is the rigid system of school examinations: teachers use the 'official' history textbook to prepare their students for university entrance examinations, and have little scope to introduce new materials. Hence, MHEA has been treated as merely a supplement to official teaching materials, despite being highly popular among both teachers and their students (personal communication with author, September 2010).



**Table 4.** *Dynamics of dialogue*



sample of dialogues is too limited to ascertain direct causation, and these shifts are best considered as purely *indicative* of the potential impact of deliberation. These findings may therefore act as pointers for further confirmatory work.

First, the *Yomiuri*'s 'verdict' on the Japanese wartime government was a reaction to events such as the Verification of the Rape of Nanking. Thus, a nationalist dialogue in Sector 1 instigated a reaction in Sector 3 from a mainstream conservative newspaper. The verdict can consequently be interpreted as a shift in Japanese consciousness about the war. This has reduced the potential support for politicians who seek to rehabilitate the legacy of war criminals such as Tojo. It has also bolstered those elements of the LDP, namely its moderate and liberal factions, who seek better ties with Korea and China (Morris–Suzuki, 2007: 182–3). We interpret the *Yomiuri*'s actions as an attempt to protect the national interest by confronting the extremist elements of Japanese society and preventing these voices from damaging relations with the region. The verdict did not produce a lasting solution to the issue of revisionism: the shrine visits, publication of the *NHT*, and intemperate comments by some Japanese politicians continue to elicit vociferous reactions from China and Korea. However, Japanese prime ministers have refrained from visiting the shrine since Koizumi's retirement from public office, removing a significant impediment to better relations in the region.

A second shift – from Sector 6 to Sector 9 – resulted from the Obuchi–Kim summit of 1998, which created momentum for the *MHEA* project. While much credit for the textbook is given to Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, the input of Japan was crucial. Indeed, *any* shift towards a more inclusive dialogue about regional history will require

a similar spirit from the Japanese side to that displayed by Prime Minister Obuchi. The vertical shift induced by the Obuchi–Kim summit represents the deepening of transnational civil society. We have already noted that the absence of democracy hinders the emergence of civil society in China, which in turn necessarily limits progress towards the ‘best-case scenario’ (Sector 9). It is unsurprising, therefore, that this shift took longer to effect than the horizontal shift described above. The vertical shift was from one position within the substantial zone of dialogues to another, but progress becomes more difficult as it nears the ideal conditions for dialogue. This interpretation of the politics of history accords with our cautious expectations about the potential of the deliberative approach. One implication is that dialogues between Korea and Japan over issues such as the Comfort Women may achieve progress on history disputes; granting China a veto over the content of dialogues may frustrate the aspirations of the region’s democracies. That said, bilateral initiatives such as the Japan–Korea Future Partnership and the Japan–Korea History Commission have foundered due to tensions emanating from issues such as the shrine visits. With intermittent discord rife even between democracies, common understandings of regional history will evolve only gradually.

A third shift resulted from the compromise over the ‘shared history’ of Goguryeo/Gāogōuli. This was a potentially fruitful way to resolve issues surrounding ancient kingdoms, and as such represents a shift from the worst-case scenario (Sector 1) to Sector 5. In other words, after parallel domestic dialogues – or perhaps more strictly, monologues – degenerated in such a way that bilateral relations were damaged, state leaders in China and Korea cooperated to resolve the matter. However, such a shift requires the Korean side to be comfortable with the notion of shared history, and any suggestion of insincerity – that China is merely waiting until it is strong enough to ignore the complaints of its smaller neighbor – will strain ties again. To date, the Chinese government has respected the settlement reached in 2004. Since elite settlements are sub-optimal due to their lack of legitimacy, states are susceptible to future demands from dissatisfied publics to revisit and revise agreements in line with popular expectations. Consequently, we treat the shift to Sector 5 with caution, and again note the potential for raw politics to compromise or even reverse any gains from dialogue about regional history.

These three shifts resulted from the interaction of multiple factors, including efforts to solve historical issues, the pressure from and participation of civil society and citizens, the emergence of a transnational public sphere, and, above all, public deliberation. The dynamic potential of deliberation implies that the nationalist politics of history is increasingly ill suited to historical disputes. If Germany has created a successful state-driven model of dealing with the past (Wüstenberg and Art, 2008), Northeast Asia has the *MHEA* model of an embryonic regional public sphere, in which civil society groups created a single unified narrative of history. The *MHEA* case offers empirical evidence to support the claim that the deliberative approach is viable if favorable conditions are met.

## 6. Conclusion

This article has examined the deliberative approach to contested history in Northeast Asia, and highlighted its achievements, limits, and dynamic development. It has confirmed that deliberative dialogues offer some potential for a departure from nationalist mentalities, and a significant shift towards a consciousness of common regional history. The dynamism of deliberation signals the emergence of a new politics of history, which, in turn, has the potential to foster the evolution of a Northeast Asian regional identity.

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