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Mark Baildon, Loh Kah Seng, Ivy Maria Lim, Gül İnanç, and Junaidah Jaffar (eds.). *Controversial History in Asian Contexts.* New York: Routledge, 2014. 282 pp.

Controversial History Education in Asian Contexts deftly explores the role of controversial histories within and across multiple epistemological paradigms. Woven throughout the volume are the recurring themes of teachers' curricular instructional decision making and curriculum gatekeeping, as well as the influence of contextual milieus. In short, what the editors' call the "centrality of context", and the inherent limitations of nomothetic generalisability, play pivotal roles in deciding the extent to which controversial history is used, the purported goals and aims of its use, and the limitations of external prescriptions of what should be done. Cutting across all cases within this volume is the overarching goal of developing an informed and active citizenry, which is a social education rendering of history and its utility. History has value within education only insofar as it "presents phases of social life and growth. It must be controlled by reference to social life" (Dewey 1897: 79). As such, controversial history education holds a rich potential for servicing the mandates of citizenship education.

In the first chapter of the volume, Stuart Foster emphasises how history taught in schools undermines controversial history instruction because it tends to be "insular and nationalistic" (p. 22). In a related piece, Helen Ting's chapter concerning textbooks in Malaysia asks what constitutes a "national history" (p. 42) and interrogates the role of ethnic politics in the writing and rewriting of history textbooks. Ting points to the struggle of historical texts in Malaysia to delineate identity and popular memory. In another chapter Khatera Khamsi and Paul Morris address Singaporean textbook narratives as they relate to the Japanese occupation, suggesting that the "Singapore Story", as an iterative form of national history informed by the government, has been advanced as historical truth.

The potent role of political influence is further mined in Jean-Louis Margolin's exploration of Japanese history textbooks. A revival of revisionism in Japan suggests increased pressure for authors of textbooks to be politically cautious and to engage in self-censorship, thereby undermining the exposure of controversial histories to students. The fear of exaggeration or, alternatively, understatement results in mainstream textbooks that are "essentially colourless, poorly

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developed, or unexplained" (p. 116). The underlying hallmark of these texts is the conspicuous absence of contentious histories. Likewise, Karl Ian Cheng Chua explores the use of Japanese manga as an alternative to textbooks, given its broad appeal. Chua suggests that there is a lack of historical knowledge among both revisionists and neo-nationalists in Japan. In another chapter, Deepa Nair addresses the contested historical narratives found in Indian history textbooks, pointing to the avoidance of social conflict and the role of political power in determining the content. Nair proposes that the uncomplicated rendering of topics conforms to a "teleological narrative of a heterogeneous yet conflict-free society" (p. 65). In a related chapter, Eisuke Saito, Theresa Alviar-Martin, and Khong Thi Diem Hang comparatively address the Japanese occupation and use of atomic bombs in textbooks in Singapore and Vietnam. They demonstrate that historical texts are linked to a "wider narrative of national identity and national ideologies…fashioned primarily to strengthen prevailing discourses of the nation" (p. 85). In Singapore, the omission of Japanese victims and images of the bombs in the textbooks points towards an emphasis on the perspectives of Singaporean citizens rather than their "historical foe" (p. 86), while Vietnamese textbooks display a "similar tendency to suppress Japanese voices" (p. 86). Ultimately, the "gaps in perceptions" (p. 88) about the wartime history reflect an "unnoticed and unaddressed controversy between Southeast Asian countries and Japan" (p. 88).

Governmental influence is also found in Gül İnanç's study of cultural heritage in Singapore's social studies courses. Given the discourse of multiculturalism in Singapore, the controversy in this case exists not so much in what is present, but rather in the silences (there is no mention of the heritage and legacy of Arab/Islamic and European/Christian civilisations). In a related chapter, Loh Kah Seng and Junaidah Jaffar highlight the caveats of western discourses on controversial history education and how they do not universally fit in contexts as witnessed in Singapore's approach to citizenship, which is "passive rather than active" (p. 167). Loh and Junaidah conclude that although an inquiry-based approach is at odds with state goals in Singapore, there is ostensible formal support for teaching controversy in schools, save political issues impinging on the government's legitimacy, though this is also waning. Ivy Lim's chapter explores the use of the Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) approach in Singapore. Given the missing alternative perspectives in Singapore's textbooks, Lim finds that teachers react positively to the use of the SAC strategy.

Another approach to challenge traditional narratives, which Mark Baildon and Suhaimi Afandi explore, is through substantive inquiry and discussion. Baildon and Afandi argue that the curriculum has been "carefully crafted to ensure a useable past" that "mainly serves to promote consensus" and "legitimize policies of the government" (p. 196). In a related chapter, Jason Lim's exploration of the Nanjing controversy in China during the Sino-Japanese War in an Australian university highlights both the difficulties and possibilities of understanding history from multiple perspectives. Denis Mootz's chapter raises the poignant concerns of teachers that arose amid innovation efforts in the Australian history curriculum–namely their considerations of instrumentality, congruence, and cost. These concerns intersect with a study of implementing lessons on issues of race, class, and sexuality,

which is the topic of Suzanne Goodney Lea and Taiyi Sun's chapter on student thinking. Employing the Interactivity Foundation's discussion process, which draws upon the use of student-centred discussions, the chapter reveals how people "often avoid talking about history", particularly in most countries in East and Southeast Asia, where governments "only teach their own version of this history, which can differ substantially from other countries' versions" (p. 252).

Ultimately, history teaching in Asian contexts, as well as the struggle of collective memory and national identity, is encumbered by the influence sanitised accounts and political motives (p. 10–11). Moreover, sensitive histories in Asia are necessarily juxtaposed with a manifold array of variables influencing history teachers' gatekeeping decisions. Given the centrality of context, any quest for generalisations would seem illegitimate and chimerical. Yet, this volume collectively offers provocative points of departure as unique contexts grapple with the critical charge of positioning students to explore controversial normative and moral issues in historical and contemporary forms. The inclusion of controversial issues in the curriculum may help improve students' critical thinking, prepare them to participate fully and effectively in democratic societies, encourage political engagement, and develop a commitment to democratic values (Hess and Avery 2008). In the end, within every context, it is the teacher, as a "curricular-instructional gatekeeper", who makes the "day-to-day decisions concerning both the subject matter and the experiences to which students have access", as well as determinations about the criteria used to make these decisions (Thornton 1991: 237).

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