

## CHAPTER 1: DEFINING HISTORY

### 1. Perceptions vs. facts

The word *history* is on occasion defined as “the truth about past events.” That definition is then extended to “past events as they actually occurred.” Going by that assumption, we might conclude that history exists in the realm of objective reality, and is unbiased, impartial, immutable, and precise.

But a closer examination reveals that this definition does not reflect the meaning of the word *history* as we use it. A more accurate description would be “past events as we perceive them.” In other words, when we speak of history we are talking about past events created (or recreated) by human perception. So history is not past events as they actually occurred. We enter into various debates about past events, but we must remember that we are discussing past events as we perceive them, not as they actually happened.

I beg your indulgence as I rephrase my argument. Readers of this book have at your command a wide variety of fragmented knowledge pertaining to history: Japanese history, Chinese history, Korean history, world history, the history of biology, the history of the Earth, the history of the universe. The first definition of history I offered, i.e., past events as they actually occurred, colors every bit of that fragmented knowledge. But again, history is not past events as they actually occurred. It is simply history being made real by our perceptions.

But is it acceptable to perceive history arbitrarily, in any way that pleases us? Of course not. Historical fact must take precedence. Perceptions must be subordinate to the truth of past events.

When a controversy arises over an event in history, the argument that is closest to the past event in question must prevail. The conclusion must never be in favor of the argument farthest from the past event in question. Hence, history may consist of human perceptions, but it is clearly restricted by past events.

However, when we look at history as the actions of human beings beginning with the dawn of civilization, we must bear in mind that history is not those deeds as they happened, but as we perceive them.

Therefore, the meaning of the word as we most commonly use it is *perceived* past events. When we compare perceptions with past events as they actually happened, there are bound to be aberrations and biases.

China’s first official history was *Records of the Grand Historian*,<sup>1</sup> compiled by Sima Qian; its main focus is “Basic Annals” (chronicles of periods and dynasties). Huangdi (the Yellow Emperor), the four-eyed, many-faced emperor considered the first ruler of China, and the horned Yandi (the Flame Emperor) were legendary figures. In fact, the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, China’s earliest rulers, were all mythological. But nevertheless, they are included in China’s history. We see the same phenomenon in early Japanese historical works like *Records of Ancient*

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<sup>1</sup> *Shiji*; completed ca. 94 BC.

*Matters*<sup>2</sup> and *Chronicles of Japan*,<sup>3</sup> which begin with creation mythology and then transition to human rulers. As far as historical perception is concerned, both chronicles adhere more closely to historical fact than their Chinese counterparts.

In *Records of the Grand Historian*, the account of the Chu-Han Contention (206-202 BC) written by Sima Qian's father is believed to closely approximate historical fact because of his close connection to Emperor Wu of Han (141-87 BC). But all this means is that we are being informed of historical information that resembles historical fact, nothing more.

It is quite difficult to arrive at an accurate perception of history.

## 2. A strict definition of “perception”

Now we must construct a strict definition of *perception*, as in “perceived past events.”

Since my specialty is Western economic history, in graduate school I made use of primary sources written in German and French, as well as English. For that reason, I am able to read a wide range of books. But there is clearly a limit to how many languages one can master. All one need do is master the Japanese language. Japan is a translation superpower; mastery of that language enables us to read each and every classic and masterpiece ever written, because they have all been translated into Japanese. I studied German, but did not master it. Nevertheless, in Japan I have access to the works of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. The exponential growth of the internet has given us access to many outstanding works, but not every classic or masterpiece has been translated into every language. But to read a wide selection of them, all we need do is master Japanese. Japan's translators have been rendering huge numbers of works into Japanese since the Meiji era (1868-1912).

Yi Kwang-su has been characterized as the father of modern Korean literature. He was an ardent nationalist and author of the Declaration of (Korean) Independence delivered at a rally in Tokyo on February 8, 1919. Yi wrote the following about the Japanese language:

The Japanese language incorporates the remarkable Japanese spirit. Japanese writing absorbs all the world's cultures. Therefore, when we are learning the Japanese language, we are learning about the Japanese spirit and, at the same time, acquiring the key to the repository of the world's cultures.

I decided to read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in the original German.

Kant writes that things per se are unknowable. We perceive things with a combination of sensibility and logic. Carrying this idea further, we look at things in the context of an accumulation of past experiences. In other words, we are not looking at things as entireties; we are observing portions of things and encoding them. We then combine those codes, decide what a thing is, and form a perception. Things never become perceptions. Only the subjectivity of the perceiver creates perceptions of things. Fragmentary codes derived from things combine with past experiences to form perceptions.

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<sup>2</sup> *Kojiki*; compiled in 711-712.

<sup>3</sup> *Nihon shoki*; completed in 720.

Of course it is entirely possible to identify a thing and distinguish it from another thing, no matter how fragmentary the code we are using. Therefore, a conversation among multiple humans about a specific “thing” can take place without any confusion. The code at the basis of each person’s perception may vary significantly from that of the others. But the conversation is viable because each person understands exactly what thing is being discussed.

Returning to historical matters, a past event captured by a historical record is only a perceived past event. It is possible to use history to identify a past event, but it is not the same as that past event.

The fact that humans cannot perceive a thing per se is essentially a problem of perception. When we speak of historical perceptions, we cannot place too much emphasis on the fact that history exists as human perception.

When we stray from the perception of things per se and enter into a world where words are predominant, history pulls apart from past events and becomes nonsense. When that happens, we lose patience and complain that we hear nothing but unconvincing, hackneyed political comments and clichés, and demands for more numerical evidence. In Taiwan, too, an increasing number of people from all segments of society are demanding such evidence. Perhaps this is a worldwide phenomenon. Numerical evidence is valued as convincing and objective (because it is considered mathematical).

But we cannot rely even on numbers emanating from the Chinese world, whose inhabitants are addicted to hyperbole. For instance, historical accounts that mention lives claimed by a famine or epidemic offer only approximate numbers, like “the majority of inhabitants ” and “eight or nine out of 10.” Most numerical evidence is based on rumors.

Ethnicity and social climate are also very influential. The nations and inhabitants of the Chinese cultural sphere, to which I often refer, lie, brag, and double-cross; they separate words from facts before they use them. Postwar China’s biggest propaganda coup was the Nanking “massacre.” At one point the Chinese maintained that the massacre had claimed a million victims. The CPC later made a party decision in which it settled on “at least 300,000 victims.”

The number of Koreans “abducted by the Japanese” during World War II was once estimated at “at least 8 million.” The number of Korean military prostitutes was claimed to be 200,000, without the benefit of any proof whatsoever.

The basic number from which the planned economies of socialism arise is the population. Without a grasp of its population, no nation can pass muster as a scientific socialist state. But here in socialist China there is a consistent gap of 200 million between the lowest and highest population figures supplied by the PRC’s various administrative departments. The best estimates the Chinese can provide are “somewhere between 1.3 billion and 1.5 billion.” In the 1980s, when Zhao Ziyang was prime minister, he visited Japan. Asked by a reporter about the population of China, Zhao replied, “*Tian xiao de*” (Only heaven knows). Post-20<sup>th</sup>-century China does not have a monopoly on this phenomenon, of course. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the Qing dynasty, the Chinese referred to China as “a land of more than 400 states” with a population of 400 million. Even then administrative departments didn’t agree on the population, with differences of 100 million between the lowest and highest figures provided.

Four hundred years ago the Japanese were aware of the amount of arable land in Japan, thanks to the land survey ordered by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. But not until a land survey was done in the 1990s did the PRC discover that unregistered rice fields accounted for 40% of

China's arable land. Such vagaries give us much food for thought, and cause us to wonder whether the Chinese are capable of an accurate historical perception. And of course that is one of the limitations on having an accurate perception of history in Chinese states.

The lack of precise or complete historical truths makes it impossible to form historical perceptions. Since the dawning of the modern era in the 16<sup>th</sup> century gave rise to the disciplines of evidentiary scholarship (*kaozheng*) and authentication studies (*bianweixue*), scholars have been exposing fake sutras and falsified history.

### 3. Using perception and self-preservation to create a common denominator

If it is impossible to perceive a thing per se, and a perception is something perceived by means of a unilateral act, what does that say about the perceiver? We must consider carefully what the relationship between the perceiver and the perception tells us. Human beings are living creatures, and therefore self-preservation is inseparable from their perceptions.

Why is death such a sad event? Why do we fear it? Regardless of our reasons, death fills us with sadness and fear.

We humans gather together, and discuss past events according to our perceptions of them. We speak of perceiving past events, but the particular aspect of that past event on which we focus when we perceive is largely dependent on the object of our perception.

Past events perceived by humans are often related to death, because death is a perception we all have in common. In that sense history is very human.

Nineteenth-century German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey shed a great deal of light on this problem through spiritual science, or science of the mind. According to Dilthey, self-preservation is the source of human spiritual activity, and spiritual activity is a phenomenon that all humans experience.

Electromagnetic waves that we see as light are within the range of perceptions shared by human beings. Red electromagnetic waves look red to anyone and everyone. In our minds we all have the same impression of the color red.

Some animals can see light that humans cannot see. We humans do not know how those animals see that light. Artists create their work knowing it will be appreciated by other humans through shared sensibilities.

In other words, we may define history as looking at the past to form a perception, but this is not a perception formed from the observation of a subject, the way natural scientists observe nature. We are perceiving our shared commonality as humans, while we are, at the same time, significantly constrained by self-preservation, i.e, the impulse to survive.

If we are going to refer to the science that stems from human commonality as spiritual science, history and historiography are both spiritual sciences. Dilthey was right.

### 4. Historical accounts endure when events attract interest

Historical accounts may be long or short, or absent, depending on the amount of interest in a particular event. Here are some examples.

According to *Japanese Thought: Preserve Our Legacy*,<sup>4</sup> renowned folklorist Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962) made the following observation in *Methods for Studying Rural Life*, a very useful reference work for historians and historiographers.

There was only one peasant revolt during the 300-year-long Tokugawa reign (1600-1868). In some villages there were no such uprisings. There is no doubt that they were significant events, but that was not reason enough for accounts of them to be recorded.

If it had been necessary for magistrates and other officials in affected villages to issue reports to their superiors about actions they took during the revolt, they would have done so. But all they would be conveying to posterity were the disturbances that arose and the agitation of the people at the time. In hindsight, the passing of the more than 200 years of peace is more important to us than an uprising — an extraordinary event.

During that long, uneventful period there was no incentive for village officials to keep records and show them to a third party. Therefore, if we were to attempt to learn about the history of rural communities with only the benefit of extant chronicles, we would discover that the villages whose officials made the most strenuous efforts to maintain peace and but if we were to attempt to learn about the events of the past in a particular village, we would find that those communities whose officials made the most strenuous efforts to maintain peace and contentment have no written history. We might have gotten the impression that, during that era, rural Japan was a stage for an unending series of uprisings and natural disasters.<sup>5</sup>

There is nothing more precious than the gift of a happy life. But historical accounts never contain records of peaceful times. In the vast majority of cases, what they describe is the damage caused by natural disasters and wars (human conflicts).

The same is true of the history lessons we are taught in schools. Textbooks are monopolized by accounts of events like wars and other violent incidents. Compared with China and Korea, Japan has experienced many fewer armed conflicts. Even when they have arisen, they have been small in scale. But a glance at any history textbook will give you the impression that Japan has been involved in war after war all throughout its history.

When I was a student, I spent a great deal of time learning the dates of wars and personal names. I often heard scholars and students lamenting the fact that all they did was learn who killed whom.

For the most part, historical accounts describe incidents, natural disasters, and accidents, not peaceful or prosperous eras. Typical of them are the *Spring and Autumn Annals*<sup>6</sup> compiled by

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<sup>4</sup> Kunitake Tadahiko, ed., *Kataritsugou Nihon no shiso* (Tokyo: Meiseisha, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Yanagita Kunio, *Kyodo seikatsu no kenkyu ho* (Tokyo: Toko Shoin, 1935).

<sup>6</sup> *Chunqiu*.

Confucius, the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*,<sup>7</sup> the *Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*,<sup>8</sup> and the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government of the Ming dynasty*<sup>9</sup> (1873?). There are many accounts of natural disasters in the “Treatise on the Five Elements”<sup>10</sup> included in most of the official dynastic histories, and “Strange Events”<sup>11</sup> in *Comprehensive Investigations Based on Literary and Documentary Sources*<sup>12</sup> (1319).

Bai Yang, who translated *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* into modern Chinese, wrote that China has never had a year with no war. He based his conclusion on the lists of wars in that work. Additionally, accounts of Chinese cannibalism can be found in historical works. They are included not only in *Comprehensive Mirror*, but also in official histories. For instance, special mention is made of instances of cannibalism in the “Book of Heavenly Bodies”<sup>13</sup> and “Treatise on Astronomy”<sup>14</sup> they are described as abnormal phenomena like natural disasters.

Some of these accounts are bound to be exaggerations. For instance, according to the history of the Liang dynasty in *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*, after General Hou Jing, who lived during the Northern and Southern dynasties (420-589), perpetrated the Nanking massacre (548-550), the Han people residing in the Sanwu region (Jiangnan) were sold into slavery in Northern dynasties (420-589) territory, where every one of them died. However, in the Sui (581-618) and Tang (618-907) dynasties, there were nobles whose ancestors flourished in the Southern dynasties, such as the Jin dynasty (265-420), as well as nobles of Han Chinese descent (the Sui and Tang dynasties were a coalition of nobles).

## 5. Different cultures have different attitudes toward history

Now I’d like to discuss ways in which our cultures determine our attitudes toward history.

Is historical perception a life-and-death matter over which we must spill blood? Let’s have a look at India. Indians are not as interested in history as those surrounded by Chinese civilization. The reason for this difference is that Indians view history as simply a phenomenon in the passage of time, one that soon evaporates. Indians place more importance on fundamental problems — delving into the meaning of life (or death), for instance — problems that involve religion, thought, or philosophy. Therefore, it is not surprising that they are less interested in history than the Chinese.

Why, then, do the Chinese have such a keen interest in history? One of the main reasons seems to lie in their use of *hanzi*, or Chinese characters. The earliest *hanzi* can be traced to the Yellow River basin, where they started out as pictographs. They are also ideographs, which means that they symbolize ideas. They are not phonetic units, so no close relationship between characters

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<sup>7</sup> *Zizhi tongjian*.

<sup>8</sup> *Xu zizhi tongjian*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ming tongjian*.

<sup>10</sup> *Wuxing zhi*.

<sup>11</sup> *Wuyikao*.

<sup>12</sup> *Wenxian tongkao*.

<sup>13</sup> “*Tianguanshu*.”

<sup>14</sup> “*Tianwenzhi*.”

and language has developed.

The writing style used for inscriptions engraved on bronze vessels or stone monuments and classical texts written with wooden or bamboo instruments is different than that used to produce Confucian texts in the *Hundred Schools of Thought*,<sup>15</sup> written in the Warring States period (475-221 BC). What today is called classical Chinese writing style is that of the *Hundred Schools of Thought* (including the *Analects of Confucius*). That style became classical Chinese, and the *hanzi* cultural sphere has held sway over East Asia for more than 2,000 years. Some say that classical Chinese literary style was the vernacular of the Warring States period, but they are wrong. Inhabitants of Chu (present-day Hubei and Hunan) spoke the Chu language, which differed from Han Chinese. The inhabitants of Wu and Yue spoke the Wu and Yue languages, respectively.

The point I wish to make is that *hanzi* became tools, or conceptual symbols that enabled members of a multi-ethnic society to express themselves and communicate with each other. In specific regions *hanzi* became associated with specific words. They took on specific meanings, and functioned as a writing system.

Language (words and their meanings) used at the emperor's court was joined to *hanzi* that would be comprehensible to his subjects. In historiographical terms, each character possessed a meaning that was shared by everyone in the empire, and another meaning that connected it to the indigenous language. As time went on, the unification and cooperation of inhabitants of the Chinese cultural sphere made it possible for pronunciations and meanings used by the emperor's court to be shared by everyone.

Of the 5,000-8,000 or possibly more languages used today, Japanese is one of those with the fewest syllables. It has no complex combinations other than consonants and vowels. But classical Chinese is based on one concept for each syllable. Even when two-syllable words come into use, they can be separated. There is no distinction between singular and plural, as there is in European languages. There are no cases, nor are their rules requiring indicators for past, present or future tenses.

Han Chinese is a written language that is used for communication among people speaking different languages.

Ancient Chinese civilization originated near the Yellow River. Recent archeological research reveals that in ancient times there was a Ba-Shu civilization on the upper reaches of the Yangtze River. There was also a Yi civilization along the Huai River, a tributary of the Yangtze, and there were other civilizations as well.

In ancient times China was a composite culture comprising many ethnic groups and civilizations. And though we do not have conclusive proof that they existed, records have the Xia people founding the Xia dynasty (ca. 2070 - ca. 1600 BC), the Yin founding the Yin (or Shang) dynasty (1600 - 1046 BC), and the Zhou founding the Zhou dynasty (1046 - 256 BC). All three originally had close relationships with nomads, and eventually settled on the plains, where they engaged in agriculture.

In 770 BC, when the Spring and Autumn period dawned, a powerful state called Qin came onto the scene. Its inhabitants were non-Chinese peoples who were referred to as "Western warlike people." Some scholars think they originated in Persia. As China became unified, the Qin too

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<sup>15</sup> *Zhuzi baijia*.

were assimilated into the *hanzi* civilization, and began using the characters as a means of communication.

Toward the end of the Spring and Autumn period, the Wu were conquered by the Yue, then the Yue were conquered by the Chu. The conquered peoples (Wu, Yue, and Chu) joined the Chinese civilization that arose near the Yangtze River. During that time *hanzi* were used for disparate languages, and eventually the pronunciation and meanings of the court language gained currency. Central government officials (*guan*) were posted to other regions, where they continued to speak their own language. Regional officials (*li*) who spoke the court language would translate what the *guan* said into the regional language. The Japanese term for government officials, *kanri*, is a combination of the characters for *guan* and *li*.

During that era war followed war, and since the conflicts had such a drastic effect on people's lives, they were recorded. Eventually a new tradition developed: when a new dynasty was established, it took charge of compiling the history of the preceding, vanquished dynasty.

As *hanzi* became ingrained in the Chinese civilization, records were kept at every opportunity. The Chinese became obsessive about the past, and fell into an ultraconservative, mindset that considered the ancient times the best times and the ancient ways the best ways. Even today non-Han Chinese who speak different languages and use different writing systems are forced to assimilate by learning and using the Chinese language. Partly because the Jurchen peoples of Manchu ruled the Chinese world for nearly 300 years, the Chinese Communist Party has obliterated their language and writing systems. Reports have it that only one in 100,000 Manchus can speak Manchurian today.

Because the farmers who lived on the plains near the Yellow River would not have wanted to expand into a region where farming was difficult, they never moved northward to the grassy plains. On the contrary, fearing that the Northern peoples would rob or attack them, they built the Great Wall to a height that horses could clear. But against all odds, tribes known as the Five Barbarians (whose numbers included the Xiongnu, the Khitan, the Jurchen, the Mongols, and other tribes considered primitive or uncivilized) all breached the Great Wall, conquered the farmers, and established a dynasty on the plains.

The tribes who controlled the farmers spoke three language families: Ural-Altaic (mainly Tungusic, Mongolian and Turkish). They did so at different times, but all of them scaled the Great Wall and proceeded southward, and became the mainstay of the *hanzi* civilization. Some of the farmers were chased toward the south, where they absorbed the Yue people, or drove them away. Some of the Yue people moved further south, entering into Southeast Asia, or were chased into mountainous areas or highlands. Most of the inhabitants of present-day Vietnam, Thailand, and Myanmar are the descendants of peoples who once lived in China. The Thais and Burmese rejected the *hanzi* culture and instead, were influenced by the Indian civilization.

Therefore, when one speaks of the Chinese people, we are talking about an amorphous creature. The Chinese are an amalgamation of various peoples who were subjected to war after war, and during the time when war was the norm, they used *hanzi* to communicate with each other and to keep records. As they assimilated, they began taking an active part into the Chinese culture.

The Japanese, too, seem to enjoy history. Perhaps the reason they do is that the Japanese civilization took shape alongside its Chinese counterpart, and was significantly influenced by it. Emperor Tenmu ordered the compilation of the *Chronicles of Japan*, which was completed in 720. The work is clearly modeled after Chinese dynastic histories. But there is another important reason: due to the influence of Shinto, there is a strong predilection for revering one's ancestors.



Both cultures have a liking for history, but for different reasons.

Chronicles such as *Spring and Autumn Annals*, *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*, as well as what are referred to collectively as the *Twenty-Four Histories*,<sup>16</sup> official histories like *Records of the Grand Historian* being one of them, are historical accounts that outline the historical perceptions of a people and their nation with a focus on history.

There is a wealth of historical accounts in the Chinese cultural sphere. But the word *history* in its current meaning comes from the Japanese word *rekishi*, which the Japanese created from Chinese characters. Its meaning is not the same as the word used in China. Inhabitants of the Chinese culture have the words *li* (*reki* in Japanese) and *shi*, but the words put together and construed as an objective view of history based on historical fact are an import from Japan. In other words, the *hanzi* civilization records a great many historical accounts, but it has never sat back and thought philosophically about the meaning of history.

## 6. The role of the self in historical perception

If history and historical perception are human acts motivated by self-preservation, when we contemplate the meaning of history, we must confirm most of them with the realization that historical perception is directed toward the self.

Historical perception can be focused on the history of living organisms, of the Earth, or of natural science. But the sort of history about which we ask, "Exactly what is history?" is the perception of past events relating to humans. Furthermore, in the great majority of cases, whether the topic at hand is an individual or a nation, the focus is the self, in other words, the historical perception of oneself as an individual, or one's own nation.

Why do we place such emphasis on the historical perception of the self? The answer is that because this is history based on self-preservation, our historical perceptions confirm our pasts, establish our identities, and decide upon our future direction.

If this is a self-centered historical perception motivated by self-preservation, we must be aware that every person's historical perception is colored or biased by selfishness and self interest. We must recognize the fact that with self-oriented historical perception, it is normal to be greatly influenced by differences or biases stemming from subjectivity and egotism.

When egotism comes into play, it is not uncommon for us, in our historical perceptions, to tend to maximize past events of which we are proud, and to minimize those that make us feel inferior.

Of course, if we are thinking about our futures, it is sometimes necessary to maximize negative events we might prefer to deny. If we fail to do that, we will not have learned from history. But normally we prefer to emphasize our strong points and overlook our weak points.

If we believe that it is necessary to emphasize aspects of ourselves that are positive and affirmative in order to shape a healthy personality (for survival), we must recognize in a positive manner that distortions arise from a self-centered, subjective historical perception.

Since a subjective historical perception can engender even more aberrations or biases, we cannot speak favorably of such a perception. But since it is a historical perception, a self-

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<sup>16</sup> *Ershisi shi*.

awareness for the purpose of survival, we see that humans must be tolerant of deviations that arise from subjectivity.

Even if we are discussing not personal history, but a nation's history, the citizens of the nation in question must perceive its history patriotically. The Chinese historical perception is a mass of egotistical superiority. It is, after all, the product of Chinese thought. The notion of stubbornly forcing "correct historical perceptions" on others is, unmistakably, Chinese thought. That is fine for those who live in China, but it is wrong to force the Chinese historical perception (i.e., the "correct historical perception") on other ethnicities or nationalities to the point where their own patriotism is threatened.

## 7. Why comparison is necessary to find meaning

Most historical perceptions are self-oriented, but most perceptions of self derive meaning from comparisons with others. It is important to consider this when contemplating the meaning of history.

A historical perception intended to establish an identity must involve a perception of one's own characteristics in the past. Those characteristics typically come to the surface when we make comparisons with those of others.

Let us look not at individuals, but at national units. What kind of characteristics would you ascribe to your country? As mentioned earlier, Japanese history textbooks contain accounts of a great many conflicts: rebellions, disturbances of various kinds, and battles. If we focus on them, we are left with the impression that Japan has had nothing but conflicts. Comparing Japanese history with Chinese and Korean history, we realize that Japanese conflicts have been far fewer in number, and much smaller in scale. Japan has had a calm history. If there hadn't been any conflicts in China or Korea, only peace and serenity, we would have had to conclude that Japan has had a conflict-ridden history, even if we omit none of the events in its past.

It is likely that the decisive Battle of Sekigahara, waged at a crossroads in Japanese history, involved 150,000 combatants (70,000 in the Eastern army and 80,000 in the Western army). The forces were equivalent to the number of White Wolf (Bai Lang) bandits, gangs of marauders who stormed through North China in 1913-14, in the early days of the Republic of China. In Chinese history the famous Battle of Red Cliffs (208-9), which determined the fate of the Three Kingdoms, and the Battle of Fei River (383), which determined the fate of the Northern and Southern dynasties, each involved one million men on the north side alone. In the civil war during the Republic of China era, the Central Plains War, which pitted Yan Xishan's Peking government against Chiang Kai-shek's Nanjing government, a total of 1.5 million men were mobilized. Several million men fought in the three strategic battles waged during the post-WWII Chinese civil war. Warriors fulfilled the principal roles in Japan's conflicts; common people were sometimes present, but mainly as onlookers from a safe distance. Chinese wars were rough-and-tumble affairs, involving every single citizen. With fewer combatants, casualties in Japan were fewer as well.

If we study Japanese history in a vacuum, i.e., without comparing it with the history of other nations, we cannot describe its characteristics or peculiarities. We might conclude, after a desultory glance, that Japanese history has been a never-ending series of wars.

But globalization has progressed, and we are expected to examine Japan through a global lens. Japan's failure to use a comparative approach in history education is a serious shortcoming that

must be corrected.

Lu Xun (1881-1936), who is considered the father of modern Chinese literature, often said, "Unless we make comparisons, we cannot distinguish the good from the bad." Relentless boasting about one's own nation is bound to produce an ignorant citizenry.

Today we are seeing new comparative academic disciplines crop up. We have not only comparative literature, but also comparative music, comparative culture, and comparative civilization. Why should history, and history alone, be shielded from comparison.

We find different national traits in different cultural; ethnic customs differ also by region. Nations must make an effort to grasp those differences. The philosophy of totalitarianism embraced by the Chinese states requires everyone to be in agreement, and every decision to be unanimous. Accordingly, the state insists that all textbooks be approved by it or the ruling party. This is what they call a correct historical perception, which they force on not only their own people and nation, but also on other people and other nations, in a display of extreme rudeness.

Admitting that there are as many opinions as there are people is the starting point of the most fundamental thought. It is the point at which Japanese and Chinese thought diverge on the subject of historical perception. The starting point begins with the question "Do we seek harmony or sameness?"

The difference between Japan and China lies in whether we choose to tolerate pluralism and diversity, or insist on worldwide uniformity.

Early in the Edo period a Japanese military strategist and Confucian scholar named Yamaka Soko (1622-1685) wrote a book entitled *Actual Facts about the Central Realm*, in which he compared Chinese and Japanese history. In it he maintains that China was never stable because of its emperor-ordained revolutions. Japan, on the other hand had no such revolutions, and with its unbroken line of emperors, Japan was the real Middle Kingdom. A comparison of the two cultures will help us understand, immediately, that because of its revolutions, China's cultural evolution stagnated, and many of its people suffered greatly. Then we will be able to describe the characteristics of Japan's history.

Now I would like to address the flaws in Japanese history education. From my viewpoint as a Taiwanese looking in from the outside, they are obvious.

According to the current *Curriculum Guidelines* for middle schools, the goal of Japanese history education at that level is to deepen affection for Japan's history and by doing so, foster in the students an awareness of themselves as Japanese by informing them about major trends in Japanese history in the context of world history, familiarizing them with the characteristics of each historical era and, their horizons now broadened, having them think about Japan's traditions and culture. The goals prescribed by the guidelines seem very appropriate.

But in their actual studies the students engage in no activities designed to teach them the characteristics of Japanese traditions. Nor are there provisions for activities intended to deepen affection for their nation's history. Educators are encouraged to show their students how to express themselves and to participate in active learning, but they are not told how to motivate them in that direction. As a result, students are acquiring information about history, but they are not learning its distinctive characteristics because no comparisons are made. Therefore, the goals of history education, i.e., learning the true nature of their country, are not being achieved. I often hear that when students of other nations are boasting about their countries, the Japanese

students find themselves unable to emulate them. This is the result of flaws in Japanese history education. I have also been told that Japanese students are completely unable to describe the role of the Japanese emperor.

## 8. The deeds of people influenced by historical perception

Historical perception has a strong connection with the formation of our identities, and a significant influence on our historical activities. These then become important elements in the formation of a nation's historical characteristics. I would like to illustrate this argument by citing an example in which I compare Chinese and Japanese history.

Early in the middle ages there lived a priest named Jien (1155-1225). He was the son of senior regent Fujiwara no Tadamichi. In 1220 Jien produced the first political commentary to appear in Japan, a book entitled *Jottings of a Fool*.

Jien wrote that in studying Chinese history, he had noticed that all dynasties had a certain lifespan, and that every dynasty led by an emperor was destined to crumble. But Japan's dynasties did not perish.

The Hogen and Heiji rebellions inspired Jien to write *Jottings of a Fool*. Here is some background about the Hogen Rebellion: Emperor Sutoku, Japan's 75<sup>th</sup> emperor, assumed the throne at the age of five. When he was 23, Sutoku was forced to abdicate and yield the throne to Emperor Konoe (1139-1155), who was then three years of age. When Konoe died at the age of 17, Sutoku was hoping to return to the throne or to have his son, Crown Prince Shigehito, crowned emperor. Sutoku's hopes were dashed, however, when his younger brother Goshirakawa was installed as emperor. The disappointed Sutoku did something unimaginable in Japan: he raised an army and attempted a coup d'état. But the coup failed and Sutoku was exiled to Sanuki (present-day Kagawa prefecture). This political crisis gave rise to conflict between the Taira and the Minamoto, which in turn gave rise to the Kamakura Shogunate, established in 1192 and ruled by the Minamoto.

Jien thought that reason had prevailed at that time, that the dynasty beginning with the Yamato Court had a finite life span and was vulnerable.

But at about the same time, in 1221, the Jokyu Rebellion erupted. Emperor Gotoba raised an army to overthrow the Kamakura Shogunate, believing that Hojo Yoshitoki was a tyrant. The Shogunate forces emerged victorious, but the Shogunate did not destroy the Court. It dethroned Emperor Chukyo, installed a new emperor, and exiled three retired emperors to a distant backwater.

Here we have unprecedented events: a person who ranks below the Emperor, but who received the rank of Shogun from the Emperor, exiles an emperor (the person with the highest authority) and even higher-ranking persons (retired emperors). They could have meant the ruin of the imperial. However the Regent Shogun, Hojo Yoshitoki, realized that he had received his political power to control politics from the Court, and made no attempt to destroy it. If he had, it is easy to imagine the repercussions. Armies would have been raised to defend the Court. No movements resembling the Chinese and Korean dynastic revolutions (decreed by Heaven when the current emperor is found to lack moral virtue) ever took shape in Japan.

During the battle, there was a particularly Japanese aspect in the comportment of the combatants on both sides.

Regent Shogun Hojo Yoshitoki appointed his son Yasutoki commander in chief of the forces destined to battle the Court army. In response to a question from Yasutoki, Yoshitoki replied that if the Court army displayed the emperor's flag, and retired emperors were leading attack troops, he would remove his helmet, cut his bowstrings, make gestures of profound respect, and entrust his fate to the retired emperor. Otherwise, if attacked, he would risk his life and fight until his 1,000 men were reduced to one.

The historical perception that results from an examination of Japan's history shows us that at that historic moment, the Kamakura Shogunate's warriors behaved as they did because they had great respect for the Court, unlike the soldiers of China and Korea. That respect became a Japanese tradition and exerted influence on the actions of subsequent rulers.

When a cultural climate persists for a long time, history and tradition are formed, and it becomes very difficult to change those traditions.

In a different sense, tradition was also strong in China, the land of dynastic revolution (dynastic cycles). The Chinese refer to political reform as "revision of the law." Since the first Qin emperor unified China in 221 BC, not one revision of the law has been successful. Even more famous reforms, like the New Policies of Wang Anshi (1021-86) in the Song dynasty (960-1299), and the Hundred Days' Reform (1898), ultimately foundered.

Even when the Chinese empire met its end with the Xinhai Revolution in 1911, the Republic of China made an effort to create a nation-state, which backfired and instead resulted in an unprecedented civil war. The Peoples' Republic of China, established after the Chinese Civil War, about 20 years later, launched the disastrous Cultural Revolution (the decade of turbulence) in 1966.

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century dawned, China made the transition from an empire to a republic, and then a people's republic. The nation's structure and regime had changed in so many ways, but the outcome was not good.

There was no more emperor, no more ruler with a heavenly mandate. Since the Chinese had lost the gods that had dwelled in their minds, they became uneasy and rudderless. For that reason the Republic's first president, Yuan Shikai, revived the imperial system for a time. He reinstated the last emperor of the Qing dynasty, Puyi, as emperor in Manchuria. China is not the only nation where this happened. Even after the French Revolution, the storms of the Ancien Régime continued to rage. PRC President Xi Jinping is reviving Maoism because he feels the need to respond to the concerns of the people who feel unsettled in the absence of an emperor.

From time immemorial Japan has had a long line of emperors, all blood relations; they have become both history and tradition. Even though some powerful men came to the fore (Fujiwara, Minamoto, Hojo, Ashikaga, Oda, and Tokugawa), they were unable to effect a revision of the law. The most they could accomplish was to effect a division of authority between the Emperor and the Shogun. Therein lies the power of history and tradition, which stemmed from the unbroken line of emperors.

## 9. How geopolitics affects historical events

However, there are other factors beside history and tradition that affect important historical events. We must keep the influence of geopolitics in mind.

When we look at a nation's history, we realize that geopolitical influence is a decisive factor.

Surrounded by water as it is, Japan is one nation with geopolitical conditions that make it nearly impossible for a foreign invasion to succeed. When a nation is landlocked, invader can easily enter it, even though it is at peace and has no wish to wage war. If an armed group or bellicose nation rises up and attacks, the victim nation becomes a war zone. That was certainly the case with China and the Korean peninsula. The northern part of Korea bordered China, and the remainder of it was surrounded by water. Therefore, Korea was not nearly as likely to be invaded by a foreign enemy as the inland areas of China. That is why Korea had far fewer dynasties than China. Korea had only three unified dynasties: Silla (57BC-935AD), Goryeo (918-1392), and Joseon (1392-1897). Moreover, the transition from Silla to Goryeo did not involve a military conquest by Goryeo. Instead, Silla yielded. Only Joseon toppled the preceding dynasty through military force and established a new one, effecting a change of dynasty. Therefore, Korean history could not proceed the way Japanese history did, i.e., without any dynasty change.

A close examination of the history of the Korean peninsula reveals that in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Goryeo General Yi Seong-gye (1335-1408) was faced with an imminent invasion by the Ming, who had destroyed the Yuan dynasty and become a rising force in China. But when Yi realized he had no hope of defeating the Ming forces, he turned back and surrendered the Goryeo capital, toppled the Goryeo dynasty and established Joseon in 1392. The Goryeo dynasty enjoyed a great deal of support from the Korean people. If Yi, who was only a general, had effected his coup d'état in Japan, an armed force would have risen up to aid Goryeo, and the coup would have been aborted. But Yi's reality was different: waiting in the wings were the powerful Ming forces, who had just established a new dynasty. Even if Yi had raised an army to defend Goryeo, he would certainly have been defeated. The Koreans had no choice but to let Yi do as he pleased. There was a precedent: Silla's collaboration with the Tang dynasty (618-907), resulting in the unification of Silla in 676. In other words, the Koreans succeeded by using foreign armed forces. This historical perception tells us that Yi could not have acted as the Japanese warriors did. When General Yi overthrew Goryeo, many soldiers were angry with him, but they were helpless. Geopolitical conditions facilitated the invasion of foreign forces, and prevented justice from prevailing.

Even the name "Joseon" was received from Ming Emperor Hongwu. Yi Seong-gye had asked him to name the new dynasty, Joseon, a tributary state.

Here geopolitical conditions were the deciding factors. The people of Korea were not enthusiastic about a dynasty created by military force. Political power was destroying the Korean culture, which could not evolve naturally, only diminish.

In Korea under the Goryeo dynasty, the Buddhist culture blossomed. Buddhism, valued so highly by the Goryeo dynasty, did not sit well with the Yi (Joseon) dynasty, which opposed and suppressed it. Consequently, Buddhism was banished from Korea, leaving a huge void in Korean culture.

When Silla unified the Korean peninsula in 676, Buddhism was more entrenched in Korea than in Japan. Not long before the unification of Silla, a priest named Wonhyo (617-686) went to China, and decided he wanted to study Buddhism, and set out on a journey. At one point he was living in a mountain cave. In the middle of the night, Wonhyo awakened, thirsty. He reached for a bowl of water, and drank from it, marveling at its wonderful taste. The next morning when he awakened, he discovered that the bowl that he had drunk from was actually a skull. A wave of nausea overcame him, but then in a flash he realized that everything in this world depends on

one's perspective. When he discovered that the water that had tasted so delicious the night before was contained in a skull, he felt sick. Wonhyo grasped the nature of Buddhist enlightenment, i.e., that everything depends on one's perspective, in that moment. Realizing that he didn't need to go to China to learn Buddhism, he returned to Silla, where he continued his studies.

Buddhism and Buddhist culture had flourished in Silla and Goryeo, but during the Joseon dynasty temples were destroyed, priests were driven away, and Buddhism disappeared. The Joseon dynasty converted Buddhist temples to Daoist structures. Instead of Buddha, the Koreans worshipped the Ming emperors, Sun Wukong (the Monkey King), Zhu Bajie (a character in *Journey to the West*). The disappearance of Buddhism must be described as a loss to the cultures of North and South Korea.

What would have happened if Yi Seong-gye's coup had not involved the destruction of the Goryeo dynasty, but the establishment of a shogunate, like that in Japan, under the emperor of the Goryeo dynasty, and he had continued to hold the reins of power?

After the Joseon dynasty was established, it killed the last Goryeo king, and though it promised to provide a safe island where the royal family, then in hiding, could live in peace, it lured them out, sunk the boat they were sailing in, and killed every last one.

The Korean geopolitical situation made it possible for General Yi to effect a typical change of dynasty.

Even the Great Wall could not stop the southward advance of the northern nomads or hunter-gatherers. During the Six Dynasties period (220/222-589), which succeeded the Han dynasty, the Five Barbarians drove the Han Chinese farmers southward into the territory of the Baiyue. Nearly 2,000 years before that nomads had established several dynasties within the Chinese sphere. And about 1,000 years earlier the Song and Ming dynasties had tried to revive China, but were defeated by the Yuan (Mongolians) and Qing (Manchurians). Han-Chinese China essentially disappeared from the map of history in Eastern Eurasia and the Far East.

For several thousand years, beginning in Confucius' time, the Chinese made a clear distinction between themselves and barbarians, whom they considered no better than beasts. But in fact, the Han were not able to assume a dominant role in the Chinese world. After the Han and Jin dynasties, barbarians continued to control China and East Asia. The Han Chinese were their subjects.

Xi Jinping repeatedly makes pronouncements about the Chinese people's dream of a great revival. Perhaps he is hoping that the third time will be the charm (the Song and Ming dynasties being the first and second times, respectively).

Will the dream of great revival enable the Chinese to extricate themselves from the laws of history or the snare of the history of Chinese civilization? Geopolitical destiny will surely become a factor here.

## 10. Historical theory and historical perception

In this chapter I have stated that historical perception is not the perception of a past event, but something that reflects the circumstances of the perception, and is therefore vulnerable to bias and discrepancy. Furthermore, historical perception of the self contributes to the formation of

identity (self-perception). Therefore, it is colored by self-love, and thus bias and discrepancy.

That makes us likely to conclude that historical perception is nonsense and completely arbitrary. But that is not the case. We are simply restricted by past events.

On the basis of what I have written thus far, I would now like to pursue historical theory and historical perception.

If historiography's role is to highlight events that took place in the past, then historians must collect resources pertaining to those events. But for events that are now part of the past, it is often difficult to find resources or proof in sufficient quantity to enable us to arrive at a judgement. We need an explanation of exactly what happened in the past. In that case, historians must use their imaginations to fill in the blanks left by the lack of evidence and resources. The portion left to the imagination will result in a wide variety of visions. We call these historical opinions or theories.

Some scholars are of the opinion that in the absence of evidence and resources, historians should maintain silence. But when the topic at hand is a historically significant incident, that will not suffice. For historically important incidents, even when proof and resources are absent, the imagination must be enlisted to provide explanations.

Here is an example from Japanese history.

Before dawn on June 2, 1582 the Honnoji Incident occurred. There are no resources available to us that would reveal the state of mind of Akechi Mitsuhide, the instigator of the incident. But the history of Japan would have been different if this incident had not occurred, and Oda Nobunaga had not been killed. Toyotomi Hideyoshi would never have been ruler of Japan, and there would have been no Tokugawa Shogunate.

In that case, we want accurate information about Akechi Mitsuhide's motivations. But there are very few historical records that could serve as proof.

Some scholars believe that Mitsuhide started the revolt to protect the Court. It is very important to have evidence to support this opinion, but there are no sources that state this specifically. At first Nobunaga made lavish contributions to the Court, and demonstrated his allegiance to it. But ultimately, he did not seek a government appointment from the emperor. Also, he pressed Emperor Ogimachi to abdicate, and interfered in the naming of the next era. His personality was unusual for a Japanese. He could be cruel, and like Chinese emperors, tended to resolve disputes with military force.

This may be why Mitsuhide, who venerated the imperial household, risked everything to accomplish a coup d'état.

Even so, it is very strange that the ever-cautious Nobunaga allowed himself to be present, defenseless, at Honnoji.

To discover what was on Mitsuhide's mind, we must backtrack to March 1582, when the successful assault on the Takeda forces in Koshu (present-day Yamanashi prefecture) took place. After the battle, in front of a great many warriors, Nobunaga shoved Mitsuhide's head against a railing and shouted invective at him. Also on May 15, Mitsuhide was rebuked while in charge of entertaining Tokugawa Ieyasu, and was ordered to go with reinforcements to aid the lower-ranking Hideyoshi at Bishu Takamatsu. At that time, Mitsuhide may have recalled a two-year-old



incident in Nobunaga cruelly banished Sakuma Nobumori (1528-82), who had served the Oda for a long time.

Shouldn't Nobunaga have considered the possibility of rebellion on the part of Mitsuhide? And if he did not, we would certainly like to know why.

It is possible that Nobunaga was more concerned about entertaining Ieyasu than about anything else. Now that Takeda was dead, Ieyasu might have thought that Nobunaga wouldn't need him anymore. To prove that wasn't the case, Nobunaga invited Ieyasu for an evening of entertainment, but Ieyasu might have felt uneasy and feared for his life. If Nobunaga guessed what Ieyasu was thinking, Nobunaga would have to convince Ieyasu that entertainment was his only objective. But that wouldn't be possible with ordinary entertainment, since Ieyasu was the suspicious type. For that purpose he assigned Mitsuhide to entertain Ieyasu, and he rebuked Mitsuhide, intentionally, in Ieyasu's presence. Then Ieyasu could believe that Nobunaga really intended to entertain him. That would mean that Nobunaga, preoccupied with Ieyasu, didn't realize that Mitsuhide might have had a change of heart.

No matter how curious we might be about the Honnoji Incident, there are many aspects of the event that we cannot know. If we don't use our imaginations to flesh out the story, we cannot come up with a full description of the incident. Therefore, it is up to us to apply our imaginations historically. But everyone imagines differently. We end up competing for the scenario that imagines an event that is closest to historical fact. Those differences in imagination give birth to historical theory.

But historical theory isn't a matter of letting our imaginations run wild. We are constrained by the past, and must compete with each other to arrive at a conclusion that most closely reflects the past event as it occurred.

Next we have historical perception, meaning not a perception seeking the truth about individual historical facts, but a comprehensive opinion that we construct, which includes specific points of view, when we synopsise history. When I say "specific points of view," it doesn't seem that I am speaking objectively. But we are inserting subjectivity to arrive at an entirety.

Since historical perceptions are formed subjectively, it is acceptable to synopsise history in a patriotic manner when the perception of one's own nation's history is involved. If we are discussing the perception of our personal histories, it is acceptable to view them arbitrarily. In other words, we may create a synopsis of history that has subjective aspects, to a certain extent. But we are constrained by the truth of history. Some historians, when confronted with something that is not historical fact, and shown evidence proving that it is not, will insist to the bitter end that it is a historical theory and that it is true. What those people claim is theory or historical perception is neither, at least in the context of historiography. And we cannot call them historians.

Once again, since we view history from a special historical perception, historians must not believe that historical facts that do not exist, or that it is all right to demonstrate only those historical facts that match a special historical perception. Historical perception is constrained by past events, and historical perceptions to which we do not apply such boundaries is not an allowable historical perception, but one that must be discarded.

I often hear the term "materialistic historical perception" when historical perceptions are under discussion. This is a historical perception that uses materialism as defined by Karl Marx as a benchmark. But though looking at history with materialism as a gauge may be tolerated, often

facts about past events are distorted, or disregarded; this means that it is a warped view, and an unacceptably biased historical perception.

In Japan there is an IMTFE historical perception. This is an attempt to synopsise Japanese history to agree with the judgment handed down at the Tokyo Trials. But the proceedings were forced on a defeated nation by the victors; it was not a fair trial and the resulting historical perception must be scrapped.

Additionally there is the “masochistic historical perception.” Since history should by rights be intended to form one’s identity, the practice of looking at one’s own history from a masochistic viewpoint must be eliminated.

Among historical perceptions, there is a type whereby someone maintains that his historical perception is accurate, and infallible. Needless to say, the Chinese historical perception falls into this category. This is Chinese historical perception, which has its roots in Chinese thought. It is the one and only correct historical perception — all others are erroneous. Within the Chinese sphere we hear these claims made in all seriousness, but we must ask how many lives this historical perception has ruined. A historical perception, normally, must be free, and premised on diversity. The Chinese historical perception must be discarded.

Chinese history as recorded is riddled with errors and, in many cases, spurious. Not until the Qing dynasty was historical research done in earnest, but after that a great many historical facts were uncovered.

The *Book of Documents*, one of the Five Classics and considered to be the oldest, was the subject of controversy: which was authentic, the new-text version or the old-text version, both dating from the Han dynasty? Finally, during the Qing dynasty, the old-text version was exposed as a fabrication on the part of Kong Anguo, a descendant of Confucius.

Several schools of thought formed, each arguing its position concerning the Chinese classics, and the discipline of authentication studies began to blossom.

Chinese history per se was created from monstrous lies. Without the knowledge afforded by historical research and authentication studies, we would not be able to show what is true and what is false. According to Zhang Zhidong’s *Words of Youxuan*, if we insist upon knowing what is true and what is not, then we must throw away half of the Chinese classics.

There are so many false theories, false sutras, and false historical accounts because Chinese culture is intended to deceive; it is based on a culture of deception. Even today we hear former Prime Minister Zhu Rongji lamenting, “Everything is false. The only genuine article is the swindler.”

Therefore, about the historical perception of the “correct historical perception” in the eyes of the Chinese, I say reverse perception, reverse hearing, reverse reading.” This is decidedly not my idea of a paradoxical rhetoric. Those lies are disseminated for a purpose. The Chinese create countless fake histories with a political motive. Such fake histories must be exposed if we are to know the truth and avoid being deceived.