

Chapter 4

Japanese Grassroots Museums for the 21st Century: Museums for Cross- Cultural Communication

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ABSTRACT

As Japan is about to welcome many immigrants, what role is expected for young people to play in creating and imagining a culture of peace, given that history education that encourages patriotism is viewed critically in Japan? Globalization creates a conflict between the need for migration (connectivity-multiple belongings) and the patriotic history education imposed (nationalism-homogeneity) in early 21st century Japan. What can we do to ease this conflict? The answer is better utilization of museums. Our thesis is that Japan has not only imposed national history but diverging history/memories existing in the public spaces passed through oral history. History and memories are the cause of discord in international relations in Northeast Asia. As such, we believe that this thesis will contribute to the broadening of the scope of peace studies, including museums, on the creation and imagining of a culture of peace in 21st century Japan that cannot be explained only by conventional policy and textbook content analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this study was to understand how the Japanese grassroots history museums promote the development of students' critical thinking skills through a non-normative educational approach and explore the potential of such an approach in enhancing historical education in Japan. The chapter explores the 21st century history of the aims of Japanese grassroots museum exhibitions regarding World War II history. This study employs the educational theoretical framework of devolution, giving the students the responsibility of learning to provide a comparative perspective of secondary school education based on the French case. While this theory provides a comparative perspective proposing the need for Japanese education to adopt a more global approach, it cannot truly illustrate why Japan could avoid wars and the escalation of extreme nationalism in the 21st century. Therefore, the chapter suggests the use of a grassroots museum to non-prescriptive teaching Japanese secondary school students. The research argues that Japanese secondary school history education remains relatively nationalistic due to the competitive nature of the university entrance exams, which favors elitist establishments. The government intends to teach students to develop their historical thinking skills. However, it simultaneously evaluates secondary school students' competency based on their capacity to memorize the contents of the history textbooks for the university entrance exams centralized by the state government.

Therefore, this study investigated the evolution of the aims of Japanese grassroots museums in the 21st century to provide comparative perspectives to Japanese compulsory history education based on French educational unity and Japanese grassroots museums. For this purpose, six representative museums in Japan have been surveyed: the International Peace Museum at Ritsumeikan University, the Hiroshima Peace Museum, the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum, the Fireworks Movement – Peace Museum, the Women's Active Museum, and the Yushukan. The aim was to better understand the evolution of the educational policy and educational methods to improve secondary school students' historical thinking skills in relation to museums as alternative approaches to Japanese secondary school history education. This helps policymakers, educators, and diplomats understand the public use of the history of World War II.

With the historical discourse analysis, this research attempted to interpret others' history and memories exhibited in the grassroots museums' multimedia installations to develop students' historical thinking about their national identity. Specifically, this chapter contributes to the understanding of Japanese mainstream attitudes toward others and how students' museum visits can help them develop their historical thinking skills regarding the gap between the cohabitation education policy and patriotic secondary school history education. Thus, a need exists for a concerted shift

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