
Reflections on “Memories of War”: Project-based Learning among Japanese-as-a-Foreign-Language (JFL) Students at a Malaysian University

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This study examines Malaysian learners’ reflections on the discourses of the Asia-Pacific War in Malaysia and Japan after engaging in “Memories of War” project. The project, which was implemented in an advanced Japanese-as-a-Foreign-Language (JFL) class at a Malaysian university, aimed to improve learners’ ability to grasp power relations underlying the social discourses on the Asia-Pacific War. It also sought to help them develop a more critical and comprehensive understanding of the war as responsible global citizens. The study finds that learners’ exposure to the wartime experiences of Japanese citizens largely prompted learners to view Japanese citizens as victims and war leaders as victimizers, though multiple victim-victimizer relationships were also identified among the citizens at the time. Learners also came to realize that race, social-economic status, and gender influenced Malaysian locals’ experience of the war. The discovery of disturbing, “unfair” facts by students in the ethnically mixed class often brought about uncomfortable categorizations of self and others as victims, betrayers, or bystanders. Nevertheless, awareness often remained unspoken, and the mere appreciation of the status quo was expressed. The author consequently argues that the teacher has an important role to play in guiding learners to connect the past and the present.

INTRODUCTION

This study examines Malaysian learners’ reflections on the discourses of the Asia-Pacific War (1941-1945) in Malaysia and Japan after they engaged in the Memories of War Project in an advanced Japanese-as-a-foreign-language (JFL) class at a Malaysian university. This project is aimed to develop the learners’ ability to grasp the power relations and ideologies underlying social discourses on the Asia-Pacific War and to form a more critical and comprehensive understanding of the war from the perspective of a responsible global citizen. This is an example of content-based language learning as it allows learners to explore a certain theme while developing the linguistic knowledge and skills (e.g., grammar, semantics, voice, and language varieties) necessary for content learning.

The Asia-Pacific War was selected as the target content for several reasons. Firstly, learning about the Asia-Pacific War could affect the Malaysian participants’ identities as Japanese language learners, whose country underwent the atrocities of the Japanese occupation during the war and has passed down the memories to this day through its history school curriculum. The process of forming a more critical and comprehensive perspective of the war might allow the participants to be more thoughtful in what they want to do with the

Japanese language and how they intend to use it in the course of building relationships with Japanese people. Secondly, war narratives are good examples to use in order to teach the multiplicity of perspectives on international events and to recognize the influence of official state discourses on people’s knowledge, feelings, and attitudes. Lastly, the Asia-Pacific War was chosen as the topic of this project in order to resist the historical revisionist movement, which has emerged in Japan since the 1990’s and tends to deny or minimize the war crimes of the Imperial Japanese Army in Asia and even attempts to justify their occupation and colonization of the area.

In this project, history textbooks, manga comic books, survivors’ narratives, and museums in both countries were used as sources for critical examination; and the participants engaged in essay writing and video production as a means to express their newly constructed perspectives on the war. This study attempts to analyze how the Malaysian JFL students’ perceptions of the Asia-Pacific War developed and how they reflected on the social and individual discourses on the war through the course. In the following sections, the outline of the Memories of War Project is described followed by the presentation of the findings. At the end, the study explores the pedagogical implications of addressing historical perspectives in racially mixed classes within an Asian context.

MEMORIES OF WAR PROJECT

Prologue

To explain why this difficult theme was explored in a Japanese language class at a Malaysian university, I must begin by conveying the mixed feelings that I used to have about the narratives of the war in Malaysia and a regrettable incident that happened during my attempt to tackle the issue almost fifteen years ago.

Malaysia is a so-called multi-racial country, which consists mainly of *Bumiputra* (Malays and indigenous peoples) (68.6%), Chinese (23.4%), and Indians (7.0%) (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2016). Malaya, the predecessor of Malaysia, was subjected to colonial powers since the early sixteenth century: colonies were established first by the Portuguese, then by the Dutch in the middle of the seventeenth century, and then by the British from the late eighteenth century until the Japanese came in 1941. The Imperial Japanese Army occupied Malaya for three years and eight months until it lost the war in 1945. The history textbook for third-grade students of Malaysian secondary schools allocates nearly forty pages to descriptions of the process and scale of the Japanese occupation, its administration, and people’s lives during the period (Ramlah, Abdul, & Muslimin, 2010).

On Malaysian Independence Day at my university I had observed a dramatic student performance recounting the Japanese army’s atrocities and exploitations against local people. It depicted the terrifying experiences Malaysian people had endured prior to achieving independence from colonial powers. Occasionally, Malaysian television would broadcast documentaries and dramas, and cinemas would play movies on the Japanese invasion of Asian countries. The war stories were defined implicitly or explicitly as the Malaysian experience for the Malaysian audience. The media constructed collective memories and perspectives of the war and the nation’s independence and helped maintain Malaysian people’s national identity as victims of the Japanese invasion. What the war had been like for common Japanese citizens was hardly reported in the Malaysian media.

Japan, on the other hand, was full of stories that emphasized its victimhood rather than the oppression its army brought to Asian neighbors. Apparently, the two war narratives were so alien to each other that the Malaysian and Japanese people’s knowledge, interpretations, and feelings about the war were radically different. This difference could be one of the underlying causes of the current disputes about post-war compensation and territories, not to mention racial prejudice among the Japanese and former Japan-invaded countries. If one has the chance to know the discourse of the other, might she be able to refrain from prejudice and engage in constructive discussion and action to overcome some of these problems? With such an expectation, I shared with my students *Hotaru no Haka* [Grave of the Fireflies], a Japanese animation film about a memory of the war narrated from a Japanese point of view.

Written by Akiyuki Nosaka, *Hotaru no Haka* is a fictional story about a brother and his younger sister who struggle for survival after their parents die in the Asia-Pacific War. While watching the film, some students were moved to tears, especially in the scene where the younger sister dies of malnutrition. Later, when asked to voice opinions about the film, most students sympathized with the brother and sister, and condemned wars for victimizing the weak. However, one female Malaysian student of Chinese origin said, “I am not sorry for the two children, because many children and adults were murdered by the Japanese in Malaysia during the war.” Her words shocked me and later provoked disapproval. Her obstinate refusal to feel compassion for even child victims was implausible. She seemed to claim that Japanese nationals, including children, must receive retribution for starting the war and destroying many people’s lives. Her logic was based on the premise that an individual belongs to a nation and therefore is subjected to and responsible for the nation’s decisions. I also contemplated why she assumed that my intention in showing this film was to promote sympathy for Japanese war victims. To this student, my showing of hardships experienced by Japanese civilians seemed a selfish act and downplayed Japan’s responsibility for the harm it caused her country.

My intention in showing the film was to “inform” students of other “factual experiences” of Japanese citizens, which are likely not well known to Malaysians. However, the student criticized my insensitivity with regard to the impact of the narrative, labeling the Japanese as the victim to avert the audience’s thoughts and responsibilities from Japan’s war-time deeds. This episode proves that simply juxtaposing the dominant discourse of the other (e.g., America’s bombing and the Japanese suffering from starvation) vis-à-vis the popular position of the self (e.g., the Malaysians suffering from Japanese Occupation) is not enough. When exchanging war memories, both parties might easily fall into positions of nationalistic ideologies. Then, how can one listen to another’s story and tell hers without falling into such a trap? The desire to answer this question drove me to explore divergent historical perspectives in a critical content-based Japanese language classroom.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

What is the rationale for addressing perspectives on historical events in foreign language classrooms? An individual’s historical perspective is significantly influenced by public discourses in the local community. In any language community there are predominant discourses of historical incidents, and educational institutions play an important role in reconstructing and standardizing historical perspectives. In Japan, for example, class content in elementary and secondary education is regulated by the state as the Ministry of Education

requires textbook publishers to pass screening before publishing their textbooks. History textbooks, in particular, reflect the government’s perspectives on both its domestic and international politics.

Kramersch (2011) argues that discourse signifies an established understanding of the self and the other through vocabulary and grammatical constructions and reveals human intention in its effect. The meaning of words is constructed diachronically through the intertextual relations across discourses—each of which reflects social identities, individual and collective memories, emotions, and aspirations. Pedagogically, Kramersch (2009) proposes that teachers and learners should develop “symbolic competence” to envision “alternative ways of remembering an event, of telling a story, of participating in a discussion, of empathizing with others, of imagining their future and ours, and ultimately of defining and measuring success and failure” (p. 201). Obviously, “symbolic competence” is necessary for everyone to redefine identities and experiences of the self and the other in order to construct mutually respectful relationships based on the acknowledgement of one another’s equal human rights.

As an example of the symbolic dimensions of language and discourse, let us take the issue of *jūgun ianfu* [comfort women serving in the war], a Japanese word which has been used to name the women who were mobilized from Korea, Taiwan, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia to provide sexual service to Japanese soldiers during Japan’s military aggression in Asia from 1931 to 1945. Nowadays, those women are more likely to be called “sex slaves” by English speakers who consider these words more accurate. (The former translation has been enclosed in brackets to criticize Japan’s view of those women.) The word *ianfu* [comfort women] reveals male-centered conventional ideals that women are supposed to provide comfort for men (and especially for the men who serve their country). Similarly, the word *jūgun* [serving in the war] gives an impression that these women had voluntarily played the role and conceals the war crime of the Imperial Japanese Army in its effect. Only in the last few decades have these women started to re-identify themselves as victims of sex crimes in order to formally denounce the Japanese government.

As the above example shows, words are neither objective nor neutral tools to represent materials and events around us. Therefore, language classrooms should provide opportunities for learners not only to learn the normative linguistic forms and meanings in the target culture but also to reflect on them critically and explore alternative ways of understanding events and experiences. In such a classroom, both teachers and students are required to question why someone employs the words/perspectives they do, whose interests the words/perspectives serve, and whether there might be any alternative way to define the reality. In other words, we need to critically reflect on our taken-for-granted worldviews and to envision alternatives from different positions.

Such a process might allow one to discover hidden problems in her society and assume her share of the responsibility. The aforementioned issue of *ianfu* [comfort women] has been considered as an international problem between Japan and the Asian countries it invaded. From another point of view, however, this issue can be understood as the manifestation of paternalism that imposes the institutionalization of men’s superiority and control over women. The paternalistic view of women as inferior to men and in need of men’s protection and control brought about the Imperial Japanese Army’s violent exploitation of the women who had been marginalized in the local communities of the Japan-occupied areas (Pak, 2014).

In regard to post-war compensation, Japan and its neighboring countries agreed that the government of the wronged country renounced its claim to reparation for individuals' damages and sufferings in exchange for economic cooperation (Yano, 2006). Due to the agreement, which is paternalistic indeed, the suffering of the sex crime victims had until the late 1980's been considered resolved by both governments. It was in 1991, in response to the call of feminist groups in South Korea, that Kim Hak-Sun testified about her experience as a former “comfort woman” and filed a lawsuit against the Japanese government for apology and individual compensation (Ueno, 1998). The lawsuit claimed that the problems had not been “resolved” for the individual victim. The series of lawsuits against the Japanese government indicate that communities, especially women, have the power to redefine victims' experiences during the war—and long enforced silence after the war—as a multiplicity of unbearable harm caused by the paternalism of both countries. Kubota (2012) points out that past power struggles between dominant and subordinate groups in terms of gender, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic status continue to exist and can be observed to this day. This points to the importance of addressing our historical perspectives as relevant to our consciousness and lives in the present, and exploring and building more just, ethical, humble, and respectful relationships with others based on mutual acknowledgement of equal human rights.

Freire (1995) argues that critical education entails learning “to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 17). In the context of developing a critical approach to content-based Japanese language instruction, Sato, Hasegawa, Kumagai and Kamiyoshi (2013) propose that this involves “nurturing the mind and attitudes to question the existing social and customary premises and to actively get involved in the preservation and transformation of those premises” (p. 84).¹ In this view, learners' critical reflection on discourses as well as their actions for transforming them should be promoted by educators in order to pursue the well-being of society.

Then, what kind of practices would promote learners' effort to transform social discourses? To answer this question I drew on the poststructuralist approach to language and power (Norton, 2000; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001; Weedon, 1997). Its founding insight is that discursive practice constitutes social reality. Drawing on the notion of performativity (Butler, 1997), Pennycook (2009) claims that “identities are formed in the linguistic performance rather than pre-given” (p. 17). This implies that creative and strategic use of language would open the possibility for one to transform her identity and existing power relations. In this approach, dialogue is naturally emphasized as an action for self- and social transformation.

Chizuko Ueno, a sociologist, suggests in her book *Nationarizumu to gendā* [Gendering Nationalism] (1998) that every one of us would be able to participate in the reviewing and revising of history:

History is ‘continuous reconstruction of the past in the present time.’ We are no longer able to believe that history tells unvarnished truth of the past. If there is only one ‘truth’ to be told by history, once the definitive edition of ‘history’ is written, whether it is the French Revolution or the Meiji Restoration, there is no need of revised editions. The past, however, has been constantly ‘revised’ according to the interests and concerns of the

¹ This is the translation offered by the authors of the article. The original Japanese text reads as follows: 社会

present time. (p. 11, translated by the author)²

The past has been told along with the current interests and concerns. It is crucial for us to be able to identify whose interests are being served by such a narrative and to assess its democratic and ethical value. At the same time, I should participate in the “site of discursive struggle” (Ueno, 1998, p. 12) while inspecting whether my narrative is not oppressive to those who have different stories, and whether my interest contributes to making a more democratic and ethical society. The significance of addressing historical perspectives in foreign language classrooms lies in such practices.

Kubota (2012) discussed how content-based instruction with a focus on the memories of World War II in Japan could be carried out for an advanced Japanese language course in Canada. The study proposes employing victim-victimizer perspectives, or *kagai* [causing harm] vs. *higai* [suffering from harm] relationships as a means to explore historical perspectives in the foreign language classroom. Kubota (2012) argues that even when a group plays a *kagai* role in a series of events, it often emphasizes its *higai* position as an implicit strategy to evade its *kagai* responsibility. For example, the dominant narrative of war memories in Japan is from a *higai* perspective as represented in the narratives of the atomic bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in spite of Japan’s aggressions toward neighboring Asiatic countries. The *higai-kagai* relationship exists not only in inter-country events but also in narratives within a nation, signifying local structures of power. For example, many atomic-bomb survivors have experienced discrimination from other Japanese citizens in employment and marriage after the war. Kubota (2012) contends that despite the fact that victims experience diverse forms of suffering, they are often homogenized when victimhood is romanticized and elevated to a patriotic narrative of reconstruction. Thus, scrutiny of *kagai-higai* relations is essential to discovering issues that have either been unsaid or forgotten, and also to exploring solutions without being constrained by existing frameworks.

However, the victim-victimizer perspective might not always be useful especially when a racially mixed class engages in war narratives of their own country, which experienced racial segregation and discrimination under the imperialism of another country. This task may become all the more difficult if unequal relations among the racial groups still exist, officially or unofficially. Indeed, some learners were resistant or uncomfortable when applying the victim-victimizer perspective to understand the relationships among their predecessors during the Japanese occupation. It is problematic indeed to simply introduce a dichotomized perspective to understand relationships of racially segregated people, including victims of severe persecutions, uninvolved spectators of such persecutions, and even collaborators in such persecutions. It is also important to view the system of imperialism as a fundamental evil within which these complex relationships were built in the occupied or colonized countries. In analyzing reflections on the Memories of War Project, this study attempts to provide more plausible perspectives and useful pedagogical activities to help participants and the teacher to understand complex war experiences of their predecessors and to promote

² The original texts read as follows: 歴史とは、「現在における過去の絶えざる再構築」である。歴史が過去にあった事実をありのままに語り伝えることだというナイーブな歴史観は、もはや不可能になった。もし、歴史にただひとつの「真実」しかないとしたら、決定版の「歴史」は—「フランス革命史」であれ、「明治維新史」であれ—一度だけ書かれたら、それ以上書かれる必要がなくなる。だが、現実には、過去は現実の問題関心にしたがって絶えず「再審 revision」にさらされている。

discussion about individual responsibilities in an Asian context.

Outline of the Project

Social Context in Which the Memories of War Project is Situated

From 1511 to 1945, there had been power struggles among local racial groups in Malaya under the hegemony of the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, and the Japanese. Currently Malaysia is a Malay-dominant multi-racial nation under elective monarchy. Government sectors are dominantly occupied by Malays, while the Chinese have relatively greater influence in commercial sectors. To defuse inter-racial tensions, the Malaysian government has implemented *Bumiputra* [Son of the Land] Policy since the 1970s, which gives priority to Malays and indigenous peoples in education, employment, finance, taxation and so on. The national language is Malay and it is taught in every public school, yet there are Chinese and Tamil public primary and secondary schools where mother-tongues are used respectively as the medium of instruction.

In the 1980s, the fourth prime minister, Mahathir Mohamad, announced the Look East Policy to learn work ethics, practices and policies from Japan and South Korea that have helped these two nations advance in various industrial and economic sectors. Under this policy, twelve thousand students and civil servants have been sent to Japan to study courses in industrial, technical, executive and commercial sectors (Embassy of Japan in Malaysia, 2012). In line with this national policy, Japanese language programs had been established at more than one hundred and thirty-three high schools and eighteen national universities by 2014 (Japan Foundation, 2014). Mahathir made Japanophile comments during his career as Prime Minister such as “Learn from Japan,” and “Japan does not need to repeat apology about the war” (Shibata, 2013).

To obtain a developed nation status by 2020, the current government has carried on *Wawasan 2020* [Vision 2020], a Malaysian ideal policy introduced by Mahathir in 1991. To achieve the goal, the government emphasizes national unity and racial harmony by spreading the slogan “*Satu Malaysia* [One Malaysia]” in the mass media and educational institutions.

Under the circumstances, social problems and public policies associated with race have been considered taboo in educational institutions. In Malaysian public universities today, both staff and students are formally forbidden, except with permission from their respective vice-chancellors, to publicly express opinions, write about, or organize or participate in forums about politics, religion (particularly Islam) and education (Hunter, 2015). Upon employment or entrance, all university staff and students are required to take a pledge to heed all existing and future government directives and orders.

History Education through Schooling in Malaysia and Japan

History textbooks are the primary media for a nation to spread a unified historical perspective among its citizens. In Japan, since textbook publishing is under state control, it is influenced by both domestic and international politics to a great extent. For example, references to “comfort women” were prompted in junior and senior high school textbooks after the Japanese government finally acknowledged the Imperial Japanese Army’s involvement in the administration of comfort facilities in 1993. However, a rightwing

conservative group called *Jiyūshugi Shikan Kenkyūkai* [Liberal-View-of-History Study Group] criticized the existing history textbooks as “masochistic” for including references to Japan’s wartime crimes. In this conservative turn, references to “comfort women” were erased almost completely through the publisher’s self-censorship (Kubota, 2012).

In Malaysia, the government designates school textbooks and the state history textbook has always been controversial because of its Malay-centric orientation. Ting (2014) censures the predominant depiction of Malaysia as a Malay-dominated, Islam-based multi-ethnic nation. Ting (2014) shows how an emphasis on inter-racial cooperation can be used as a narrative of legitimization to preserve the status quo by the governing political coalition. In regard to the Japanese occupation, the history textbook for third-grade students of Malaysian secondary schools points out the impact of the propaganda of the Imperial Japanese Army “*Asia Untuk Orang Asia*” [Asia for Asian People] on local people’s awareness of independence, while it still emphasizes the locals in Malaya as the victim of the Japanese imperialists’ lie (Ramlah, Abdul, & Muslimin, 2010). In the reflection on Malaya’s failure in resisting the Japanese, the authors refer to the “scattered” “national spirits” of Chinese and Indian residents in Malaya and somehow forcibly draw a conclusion that racial unity is the key to maintain national independence from foreign powers:

The national spirits were scattered during the Japanese occupation as each race had a different direction, anchored to the respective country of origin. The national spirit among the Indians was directed to achieve national independence of India, while the Chinese were inclined to be anti-Japanese due to the war between China and Japan.... We also learn a lesson that we should achieve national independence and maintain harmony in the nation without entirely depending on other countries. (p. 32, translated by the author)³

Course and Participants

The Memories of War Project was conducted in an advanced Japanese language course within an undergraduate minor Japanese program at a Malaysian university. The fifteen-week course provided three two-hour lessons per week (90 hours per semester). Twenty-three lessons (46 hours) were allocated for this project. Thirty-nine students aged from twenty-one to twenty-seven participated in the project. It was a mixed class of Malaysian students of Malay and Chinese descent, as well as Mainland-Chinese students, from various departments such as Management, Humanities, Biological Science, Chemical Science and so on.

³ The original texts read as follows: Semangat kebangsaan yang bersemarak semasa pemerintahan Jepun mempunyai haluan berbeza mengikut kaum dan berpaksi kepada negara asal masing-masing. Semangat kebangsaan di kalangan orang India adalah untuk memerdekakan negara India. Sementara itu, semangat kebangsaan di kalangan orang Cina pula lebih bersikap anti-Jepun kesan daripada Perang China-Jepun... Kita juga mendapat iktibar bahawa untuk mendapatkan kemerdekaan dan mempertahankan kedaulatan negara, kita tidak sepatutnya hanya bergantung pada negara lain.

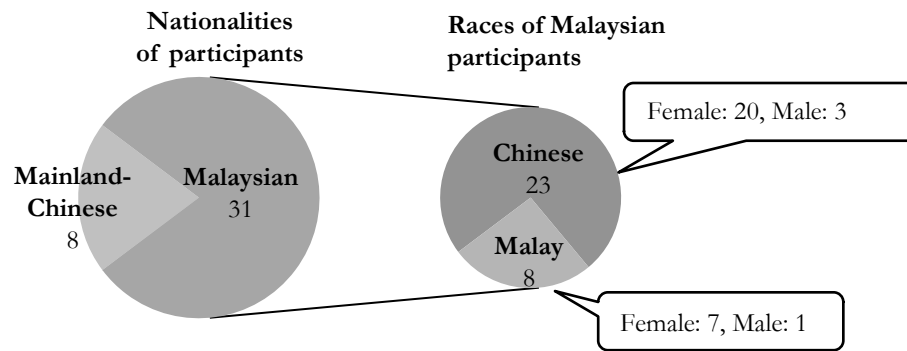


Figure 1. Demographics of Participants

Content of the project

The project consisted of a series of activities: reading texts, visiting a museum, conducting interviews, producing videos and writing essays. Table 1 shows the sources, activities, time allocated, and objectives (including how the objectives were met).

Table 1
Content of the Memories of War Project

Time	Sources	Activities	Objectives (how they were met)
4 hrs.	Excerpt from Nakazawa (1973), <i>Hadashi no Gen</i> [Barefoot Gen] (comic) ⁴	1. Read the comic and identify war slogans and people’s beliefs. 2. Identify victim-victimizer relationships depicted in the comic. (See Appendix)	1. To understand how people’s beliefs are formed through discursive practices. (Guided questions were given and answered in groups.) 2. To become aware of multiple structural victim-victimizer relationships inside Japan. (Participants referred to <i>bikokumin</i> [traitor or disloyal citizen] vs. <i>kokumin</i> [loyal citizens] and locals in Okinawa vs. Japanese soldiers to identify victim-victimizer relationships.)
4 hrs.	Excerpt from Kôno (2004), <i>Yûnagi no Machi, Sakura no Kuni</i> [Town of Evening Calms, Country of	1. Read the comic and discuss feelings of atomic bomb survivors in Hiroshima.	2. To understand complex feelings of victims. (In group discussion, the main character’s feeling of guilt for surviving the atomic bomb was pointed out to explain her reluctance to accept her co-worker’s love.)

⁴ *Hadashi no Gen*, a comic series by Keiji Nakazawa, depicts the vigorous struggle of a six-year old Gen Nakaoka, based on the author’s own experiences as an atomic-bomb survivor. It describes complex social realities in those days when various forms of injustice were carried out.

	Cherry Blossoms] (comic) ⁵		
4 hrs.	Excerpt from Satoi et al. (2013), <i>Chūgakusei no rekishi</i> [History for Junior High-school Students] (from the Great Depression in 1929 to the end of World War II)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify key historical incidents and the Japanese government’s policies for mobilizing its citizens to war. 2. Discuss the ways in which certain historical incidents are described (word choice, content, and amount). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To gain background knowledge in the Asia-Pacific War (Guided questions regarding incidents and government policies were discussed and answered correctly in groups.) 2. To identify the textbook’s stance on historical incidents and the political nature of history textbooks. (The Japanese word, 進出 [advancement], was criticized for downplaying Japan’s aggressions in Asian countries. The description of the Nanjing Massacre was also criticized for its lack of details.)
3 hrs.	Penang War Museum, Penang, Malaysia ⁶	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visit the museum. 2. Exchange feelings and thoughts on the exhibits. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To increase knowledge about the war in Malaysia. (From the exhibits and explanations, it was learned how the facility was used by the Japanese as a prisoner war camp during the occupation.) 2. To identify the museum’s political stance. (In class discussion, the museum’s inadequate supporting documents and biased comments on the Japanese soldiers were pointed out.)
20 hrs.	Six Malaysian survivors of the Japanese occupation (Three Chinese men, one Malay man, one Chinese woman, and one Malay	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare interview questions in groups. 2. Each group interviews one or two survivor(s). 3. Translate the transcript of the interview into Japanese. 4. Each group edits a 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To understand the survivors’ experiences and perspectives. (Most students referred to survivors’ experiences and perspectives in their essays.) 2. To develop awareness of one’s role as mediator between Malaysian war survivors and Japanese audience. (Its achievement was not confirmed.)

⁵ *Yūnagi no machi, Sakura no kuni* is a comic about a young working woman, Minami, who suffers from the terrible memory of her father, sisters and thousands of people dying in the massive destruction of the atomic bomb. Unable to understand why she was left alive, Minami cannot accept love from her co-worker and dies at the age of 23 of the effects of radiation exposure.

⁶ The Penang War Museum, opened in 2002, restores an original military fortress built on the southeast of Penang Island in the 1930’s by the British and utilized by the Japanese as a prisoner war camp during its occupation period.

	woman) Internet/book articles, pictures and videos related to the Asia-Pacific War	documentary video based on the interview.	
8 hrs.	--	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write an essay to reflect on how the perceptions of the Asia-Pacific War developed throughout the project and how relevant the theme is to the participant’s life. 2. Peer-review the essay in groups. 3. Revise the essay based on peers’ comments. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To identify how the perceptions of the war developed throughout the project. (All participants were able to identify it in their essays.) 2. To develop critical awareness of unequal relations in communities that have continued to exist to this day. (Some pointed out in their essays that similar power imbalances exist today among genders, races, and social and economic groups.)

METHODOLOGY

The research questions that this study attempts to address are:

1. How did the Malaysian JFL students’ perceptions of the Asia-Pacific War develop throughout the course?
2. How did the Malaysian students reflect on the social and individual discourses on the war throughout the course?

The analysis is based on the following data:

1. Essays written by the thirty-one Malaysian participants.
2. Transcripts of semi-structured interviews with five Malaysian participants.

The essays were written in Japanese by the participants at the end of the course. The participants were asked to include in the essay their answers for the following questions: (1) How do you think your perceptions of the Asia-Pacific War developed throughout the course? (2) What concerns or difficulties did your group encounter during video production? (3) How relevant is the theme of this project to your life?

Two weeks after the semester ended, the author contacted the whole class via Internet social media to seek volunteers to be interviewed. The interviews were intended to investigate the background of the opinions presented in the essays. The class was informed that what they said in the interview would not affect their course results since their grades

had already been submitted to the university. Four students agreed to the interview (three females of Chinese descent, one male of Chinese descent). Since there was no Malay volunteer, I invited one Malay female participant and she accepted. The individual interviews were conducted in English. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted about forty minutes to an hour per interviewee. In addition to investigating how each participant formed his or her opinion, the interview included questions about what had been learned during the course. Participants were also asked to share any issues that may have been too difficult to discuss in class. Furthermore, participants agreed that the author would secure anonymity when citing their essays and interviews in her research paper.

A discourse analysis of the participants’ Japanese essays was conducted to “discover important patterns and themes inductively” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 393). The participants’ essays were segmented first into different topics, and subcategories were made to represent varying opinions. The topics related to the development of their perceptions on the war were largely categorized as: (1) participants’ personal feelings and perceptions about the war that they claimed to have possessed before the project, (2) victim-victimizer relationships captured in the project (3) diverse forms of being victimized in Malaysia learned through the course, and (4) thoughts about the independence and current state of Malaysia. The subcategories of each topic include scattered factual information, which is followed by participants’ divergent reactions and/or their cause-effect analysis. In this study, the author reports popular perspectives presented by participants but also highlights student reflections that seem to achieve critical examination of discourses. In addition, the author focuses on the participants’ comments that require further critical exploration by the teacher and participants.

FINDINGS

Malaysian Participants’ Feelings and Perceptions of the Asia-Pacific War that They Claim to Have Possessed Before the Course

Japanese as Victimizer

All Malaysian students reflected on the narratives of their parents, relatives, teachers or the secondary school history textbooks that focus on the Japanese occupation of Malaya to recall their previous perspectives of the Asia-Pacific War. The participants cited the narratives about the Japanese soldiers’ atrocious behaviors, locals’ fear, and starvation as having a significant impact on the development of negative views.

子供とき、よくお爺ちゃんとお婆ちゃんから、日本人が一番悪い人ですや、日本人は最低の民族ですや、その話をたくさん聞きました。だから何時も、日本人は本当に悪い人だと思っていました。[When I was young, my grandfather and grandmother often told me that the Japanese are the worst people and they are the most horrible ethnic group. Thus, I always thought the Japanese are really bad people.]⁷ (Participant P, Chinese, male, essay)⁸

⁷ The excerpts from the students’ essays are translated by the author.

⁸ Inside the brackets are the pseudonym, gender and race of the participant and the source cited.

中等学校の間、歴史のクラスで日本がマラヤを占領に関するプロジェクトをやっていた。図書館で多く写真や情報を発見した。その時、日本人は非常に残酷だと思います。[When I was in high school, I conducted a project about the Japanese occupation of Malaya for a history class. I found many photos and information in the library. I thought the Japanese were so cruel at that time.] (Participant Y, Chinese, female, essay)

私は子供時に、戦争のためにおばあさんから家族をなくしたストーリーをたくさん聞きました。両親は残酷な日本兵について私に話しました。たとえば、戦争の情報のために、日本兵はマレーシア人の胃に水を汲み入れしました。両親はその時の日本人はとても意地悪いと言いました。マレーシアの歴史教科書は日本軍が侵略の理由と方法を学生に教えました。日本軍はたくさん兵法うまく使ったので、戦争を勝利しました。私たちは日本の占領時の苦しんだ日も勉強しました。その時に、私は本当に苦しんで、死んだ国民に強い悲しみの気持ちがあります。私はどうしてその時の日本兵は残忍非道ができることがわかりません。[My grandmother told me a lot about how she lost her family during the war. My parents also told me about how cruel the Japanese soldiers were. For example, they tortured a Malaysian man by pumping water into his stomach to make him tell war-related information. My parents said the Japanese of those times were very mean. History textbooks in Malaysia taught us students why and how the Japanese army had invaded Malaya. The Japanese army was successful because they had many good strategies. We also learned the hardship of local people during the Japanese occupation. At that time, I felt strong sorrow for the citizens who suffered terribly and died. I couldn't understand why the Japanese soldiers had been able to commit such inhumane brutality.] (Participant S, Chinese, female, essay)

To name the subject of the cruel deeds, participants used “the Japanese” [日本人], “Japanese soldiers” [日本兵], or “the Japanese army” [日本軍]. These phrases seem to have no distinction in their meaning within the above contexts. In the third quotation above, these three phrases are used interchangeably.

Reluctance to Learn War History

Participants sympathized with the emotions expressed by survivors and their relatives when they shared their war memories, but four of them confessed that they had been rather reluctant to learn about the war at the beginning of the course. They expressed disinterest in war facts because it had felt unreal to them and they admitted that their knowledge of the war was consequently limited.

私はこのプロジェクトの前アジア太平洋戦争についてあまり知りません。戦争ははげしくてざんこくだと思うから、戦争について聞くのは嫌いでした。このきっかけは私のアジア太平洋戦争のちしきが高校の歴史の教科書にかぎられました。[I did not know much about the Asia-Pacific War before we conducted this

project. I hated to hear about the war because it is so severe and cruel. Therefore, my knowledge of the Asia-Pacific War had been limited to what was said by the history textbook.] (Participant I, Malay, female, essay)

私は、このプロジェクトのまえに戦争はあまり考えません。自分国の戦争のれきしを勉強したのに。戦争のぎせいしゃの痛み、苦しき、きょうふと飢餓は全然かんじていませんでした。[I had not thought much of the war before the project, although I learned about the war history of my country. I could not relate to the pain, suffering, fear, and hunger of the war victims.] (Participant M, Malay, female, essay)

Victim-Victimizer Relationships Captured in the Project

Japanese Citizens as Victims

By reading the Japanese school history textbook and the comics during the project, participants gained knowledge of war-time life experiences of Japanese citizens as impacted by the government’s control of speech, information, and food, as well as the conscription of youth for military and other services imposed by such domestic policies as the National General Mobilization Act. Through these readings, many participants came to understand the ways in which “Japanese citizens,” “Japanese families,” or “young (Japanese) men” were “forced” to cooperate in the war effort, and as a result “suffered” from or “were destroyed” by the war.

戦争は幸せな日本の家庭を破壊しました。彼らは軍隊に参加したくなかった。しかし、政府は彼らに強制しました。誰が恩恵を受けた人、誰が犠牲者だと検討する必要があります。[The war destroyed happy Japanese families. They did not want to join the army. But the government forced them to. We need to examine who the beneficiaries (of the war) were and the victims.] (Participant G, Chinese, female, essay)

とくにまんがから、日本の国民は戦争にもくるしんだをわかりました。日本のせいふが日本の国民にもうそやプロパガンダをついたり、若い男性は戦争に戦されたりしました。こういうじょうほう私は前に知りませんでした。[I learned especially from comics that the war tormented the Japanese citizens as well. The Japanese government spread propaganda and false information to mobilize young men to the war. I did not know about that.] (Participant I, Malay, female, essay)

The mentalities and feelings of “Japanese citizens” during the war were also observed by participants. Six participants expressed that the majority of Japanese citizens in those days were “not well informed” of the atrocities of the Japanese army overseas and believed the government’s propaganda. Four participants confessed that they did not know that some Japanese people opposed the war and were persecuted by the government and their communities, as it is not mentioned in Malaysia’s school history textbook.

一部分の日本平民は戦争は嫌いです、参加することもやりたくないです。で

も日本政府は強制した。日本人は戦争の時、いつもそのメッセージが新聞やラジオで聞きました。政府は媒体の放送を制御します。偽のメッセージを受けるから、何も知らないです。[A part of Japanese civilians hated the war and did not want to participate in it. However, the Japanese government forced them to. During the war, the Japanese newspapers and radios distributed misleading messages to the citizens. The government controlled the media. The Japanese were ignorant as they received such messages.] (Participant K, Chinese, female, essay)

「はだしのゲン」のまんがから私は日本人で戦争のことを支援しなかった人があるを見つけます。マレーシアのテキストでこのことを書きません。学校時、私の考えは全日本は戦争のことをしえんしました。[I learned from the comic, *Hadashi no Gen*, that there were people who did not support the war among the Japanese. Our history textbook does not mention it. When I was in school, I thought all the Japanese supported the war.] (Participant A, Malay, female, essay)

America as Victorizer

Learning about the massive destruction by the United States’ atomic bombs and their long-term damage to the physical and psychological health of survivors made many participants question the popular perspective of the Japanese as victimizer. Malaysia’s school history textbook mentions the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of the chapter on World War II and does not provide any information about the aftereffects of the bombings. Three participants expressed doubt about Malaysians’ general view of the atomic bombs as a means to end the war and condemned the atomic bombings as “genocide” after learning of the survivors’ suffering from the aftereffects of radiation exposure.

プロジェクトビデオを作っている時、アメリカが原爆を使うことがいいでしょうかと考えていました。原爆は広島と長崎全体を破壊して多くの平民は殉じました。アメリカが日本で原爆を使って、多く人を殺した。でも外の国の歴史本はそれを大虐殺と述べませんでした。それから今はたくさん人が戦時原爆を使うの必要性について考えていません。それは日本にほんとに不公平と思います。[When I was making the project video, I kept questioning if it was right for America to use the atomic bombs. The atomic bombs destroyed the whole Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the lives of people there. America killed many Japanese people by using the atomic bombs. However, the event has not been called genocide in history books in other countries. So, few of us question the necessity of having used the atomic bombs during the war. I think that is not fair for the Japanese.] (Participant Y, Chinese, male, essay)

Exposure to the hardship and suffering of Japanese locals resulted in the emergence of a perspective that positions “Japanese citizens” as victims as opposed to “war leaders” and victimizers. In this perspective, 日本国民 [Japanese nationals], 日本の市民 [Japanese citizens] and 日本の平民 [Japanese commoners] were referred to as victims. On the other hand, the following agents were labeled as the victimizers: 権威 [authority], 政府

[government], 支配者 [ruler], 国家の指導者 [national leader], 天皇 [Emperor], 政治家 [politicians], 戦争の扇動者 [warmonger], and 軍隊 [army]. In four participants' opinions, this perspective is synchronized with the implicit or explicit view of America/American political leaders as another victimizer based on its nuclear use and ground battle against Japanese locals.

アメリカは日本にげんばくをおとしましたから、日本人は家がなくなってしまいました。だから、日本の全体じゃなくて、日本のせいふと戦争のリーダーだけがかがいしゃでした。そして、日本の国民はマラヤの国民と同じ、ひがいしゃでした。[Since America dropped the atomic bombs on Japan, the Japanese lost their homes. So, I would say it was not the whole Japanese but the Japanese government and war leaders who were the victimizers. Japanese citizens were victims like the people in Malaya.] (Participant I, Malay, female, essay)

日本とアメリカの指導者は戦争の加害者、国民は被害者と思います。例えば戦争の後期、日本政府が日本国民に「玉砕」を命じて多くの日本国民は殉じました。[I think the leaders of Japan and America were the victimizers and the citizens were the victims. For example, the Japanese government ordered their citizens to commit *gyokusai* or honorable suicide which many followed. This translates into “jade shards” from Japanese.] (Participant Y, Chinese, male, essay)

However, were the Japanese locals mere victims? Looking into the ways in which Japanese citizens participated in the war, some people proactively contributed to the war in certain occasions. For example, *Hadashi no Gen* depicts neighbors and schoolteachers bullying those who opposed the war, calling them *bikokumin* [非国民 betrayer of the country]. The Japanese history textbook introduces the fact that schoolteachers and parents justified Japan's invasion of China to students. How are these facts received by participants? A participant concludes that controlled education and mass media “brainwashed” the Japanese.

漫画を読みまして、私はよく「どうして日本の大多数国民は『天皇のために敵地でみごと死んで参る』のことが信じられます」を考えます。「どうして日本兵は罪悪感がないで、たくさん生命を殺させます」と「どうして日本兵は罪悪感がないで、たくさん人を拷問できます」も考えます。後で、私は日本の教育が日本人の信念に影響を与えたと思います。教育が日本人の信念を洗脳すると思います。何が教科書で書きまして、それも信じました。学校で、先生も学生に大きな影響を与えられると思います。メディアも重要だと思います。日本の国民が情報がもらえたら、多分彼らは影響を受けにくいでしょう。[When I was reading the comic, I kept questioning ‘why could many Japanese citizens accept “dying for the Emperor in the enemy’s land” (from *Hadashi no Gen*, p. 103)?’ and ‘why could the Japanese soldiers torture many people without feeling guilty?’ Later I came to think that education influenced their beliefs. I think the Japanese were brainwashed by education. They believed what was written in the textbooks. Teachers also became great influence to students. The media also played an important role. If the

Japanese citizens had been given more information, they would probably not have been so vulnerable.] (Participant S, Chinese, female, essay)

Criticism of Malaysia’s School History Textbook

Participants’ criticism was directed at Malaysia’s school history textbook, too. They argued that the textbook emphasizes the victimhood of Malaya and provides little information on the events that occurred in Japan, the state Japanese citizens were in, or their “feelings.”

日本が他の国を侵略した時、私は日本で戦争がないと思っていました。マレーシアの歴史教科書は、マレーシアで起こったこと書くだけです。マレーシア人が苦しむだけであると思っていました。アメリカが原子爆弾を広島と長崎に落とすという事だけ知っています。(略)しかし、「はだしのゲン」と「夕風の街桜の国」を読んだ後、日本がアメリカによっても攻撃されたという事実を知っています。[I used to think that the Japanese only invaded other countries and did not experience battles in their homeland. The Malaysian school history textbook only mentioned what happened in Malaysia. That is why I used to think that only Malaysians suffered. I only knew that America dropped atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki... After I read *Hadashi no Gen* and *Yūnagi no Machi, Sakura no Kuni*, I learned that Japan was attacked by America.] (Participant A, Malay, female, essay)

マレーシア歴史の教科書の中でどうやって日本はマラヤに来て占領しました、さらに、マラヤの人々は日本軍の攻撃に苦しむを記載します。(略)でも、日本がアメリカに降伏した後は全然書きません。日本軍と彼らの家族の気持ちも全然わかりません。[The Malaysian school history textbook tells how the Japanese came to Malaya and occupied it and that the people in Malaya got hurt by the attacks of the Japanese army... However, it does not mention what happened to the Japanese after they surrendered to America. We do not know the feelings of the Japanese soldiers and their families.] (Participant E, Chinese, female, essay)

In conclusion, Japanese citizens of the days during the Asia-Pacific War were perceived to be helpless, naive, and vulnerable due to an absence of information or misleading information. Viewing Japanese citizens as passive and uncritical beings, participants seemed to disregard the responsibilities citizens had back in the days of war.

Course Exposure to Diverse Forms of Victimization in Malaysia

Participants learned details about the Japanese occupation of Malaya through interviews with six Malaysian survivors and the subsequent documentary video production task. Students learned about the persecution and torture of anti-Japanese suspects, who were mainly Chinese locals, and about the coercion of money and property in exchange for “good-citizen certificates.” Locals in Malaya were forced to use “banana money,” or the Japanese military currency that turned valueless and inconvertible after the war. Students also learned about the sex slaves known as “comfort women,” the use of forced labor to build the Burma

Railway (or the “Death Railway”), the enforcement of Japanese language regulations, and the compulsory obedience to the Emperor of Japan and the Imperial Army.

The Haves and the Have-Nots

In search of war experiences, participants learned that there were different levels and forms of victimization among the Malaysian locals. One of the attributes linked to particular types of victimization was socio-economic status. Those who had property and skills to provide for the Japanese army were able to acquire a “good-citizen certificate” and avoid abuses and mistreatments, while those who did not faced the threat of persecution.

(インタビューで) Cさんの意見を聞いて、私たちは便利な人々が戦争中に生き残ることができることを知っています。たとえば、Cさんの（お父さんはエンジニアとして日本軍に協力し、）家族は日本軍にしたしむので、嫌がらせをされていません。時々、私たちは安全のために、状況に適応する必要があります。それは一定の権力に従うこと。私たちの利益のためでなくても。[I learned from (the interview with) Ms. C that those who were useful (to the Japanese) managed to survive the period. For example, Ms. C’s father cooperated with the Japanese army as an engineer and made friends with them so that his family was not ill-treated. There are times when people have to adapt to the situation to be safe. That is to obey the authority, even if it is their loss (in terms of money and property).] (Participant N, Malay, female, essay)

Gender

In addition to economic status and occupational skills, participants learned that gender was also linked to a particular kind of victimization by the Japanese army.

日本兵がいた時、平民は毎日ドキドキで生きてる。特に女性、毎回家をでなければいけない時、変装しなければいけません。日本兵を見たなら、強姦、慰安婦をなることの可能性がある。[When the Japanese were around, locals lived every day in fear. The women, especially, had to disguise as a man when they came out of their homes. If seen by Japanese soldiers, they could be raped or made comfort women.] (Participant K, Chinese, female, essay)

Race – Chinese as the Most Devastated Victims

Race was another factor that greatly contributed to differing experiences of the war. As China had been at war with Japan (1937-1945), many Chinese locals in Malaya voluntarily provided financial and material supplies to China and joined the Chinese army to fight against the Japanese. Therefore, many Chinese residents in Malaya were tortured and killed by the Japanese army once they were suspected of being anti-Japanese elements.

民族的見地から、マラヤは日本軍に侵略される時、中国人のほうが他の民族

より迫害を受けました。肅清事件で中国人は大多数の被害者です。中国は日本軍に侵略される時、抗日運動を支持しますから、たくさんマラヤ中国人は募金を行いました。募金は中国に送られました。だから、日本軍は中国人が嫌いです。[As far as ethnicity is concerned, more Chinese were persecuted than other racial groups by the Japanese when Japan invaded Malaya. The major victims of the persecutions were Chinese. When China was invaded by Japan, they collected donations to support anti-Japanese movement. That was why the Japanese army hated the Chinese (in Malaya).] (Participant L, Chinese, female, essay)

生存者の L さんによると、マラヤに来た日本軍は、インディアンとマレー人に害を与えないように（兵士に）言ったが、中国人に害をしても大丈夫です。[According to Ms. L, one of the survivors, the Japanese army told their soldiers not to harm the Indians and Malays, but told them it was OK to harm the Chinese.] (Participant M, Malay, female, essay)

The fact that the Japanese military persecuted Chinese locals more severely than any other racial group is mentioned in the Malaysian school history textbook and, therefore, participants had already been aware of this. During the project, however, they were able to learn more details about the various persecutions—including the number of victims and methods of persecution.

Criticism of Japan's School History Textbook

Through interviews with survivors and library research, participants were able to broaden their perspectives about the war and take a critical stance toward the Japanese junior high school history textbook with its scarce description of the oppressive realities Asian countries in Japan's occupied territories faced in those days. For example, many participants found it particularly disturbing that the Nanjing Massacre was explained only in three sentences and that the persecutions of the Chinese in Malaya and the topic of “comfort women” were not mentioned at all. This was understood by participants as the manifestation of the Japanese government's denial of their wrongdoings and their irresponsibility towards victims.

慰安婦について考えて、私は日本軍が大嫌いです。あの女性たちは太平洋戦争で一番苦しみました。彼らは日本軍に利用されて、虐待されました。あの女性たちは強制的に性奴にさせました。でも私がもっと怒った事は、日本の政府はその事件を否定しました。戦争の事も日本の歴史教科書にあまり書いていません。如何して日本の市民に知らせませんか？[I hate the Japanese army because of the comfort women issue. Those women suffered the most during the Pacific War. They were utilized and abused by the Japanese army. Those women were forced to be sex slaves. Moreover, what makes me angry the most is that the Japanese government denied the event. Only little is mentioned about the war in the Japanese history textbook. Why are the facts hidden from the Japanese citizens?] (Participant T, Chinese, female, essay)

各国が書かれたくない歴史を持っていることは理解します。しかし、日本政

府は戦争中の被害者を尊重しなければなりません。過去に起こったことを認める、そして、被害者に謝罪すべきです。[I understand every nation has a history that they want to erase. However, the Japanese government ought to show respect to war victims. They ought to admit what happened in the past, and then apologize to the victims.] (Participant H, Chinese, female, essay)

Among the critical comments, some expressed that reading the Japanese school history textbook solved their question of why many Japanese are “ignorant” about war facts held outside their country.

There was also critical awareness of the language employed by the textbook writers that downplayed Japan’s responsibility—such as using the word “advancement [進出]” to describe Japanese military aggression in other countries.

異なる語りと異なる言葉は様々な感情を持っています。例えば「進出」と「侵略」。「進出」は親善と栄光の代表、でも「侵略」は凶悪と残虐の代表です。テキストや言葉は、筆者の感情を伝えると思います。[Different narratives or different words carry different feelings. Let’s take ‘advancement’ and ‘invasion’ as an example. ‘Advancement’ represents goodwill and prosperity, whereas ‘invasion’ connotes atrocity and cruelty. I think texts or words convey the writer’s feelings.] (Participant O, Chinese, male, essay)

Participant O added in his essay that he and his group members worried that their biases might affect the Japanese wording when translating their interview with a survivor, so they worked hard to translate the text as faithfully as possible.

Criticism of Malaysia’s School History Textbook

Participants questioned why there is no reference to “comfort women” and mass persecution of the local Chinese as anti-Japanese elements in the Malaysian school history textbook. Participant X, a Malaysian of Chinese descent, posed a rather indignant question about the absence of factual information regarding the persecution of Chinese in Malaya, comparing the situation to China where “everyone knows about the Nanjing Massacre.”

プロジェクトを書いて時、どうしてマレーシア歴史本で粛清がありませんかと思えます。インターネットで、マレーシアの粛清の写真は少しです。でも、Tさんによると、ペナンで、二つ粛清がありました。反日本の人々を逮捕のために。歴史教科書に少しのデータしかない理由を考えていました。華僑が重要じゃない？歴史教科書でたくさん他の事を書く必要がありますか？（略）解らない。でも、中国には粛清データがたくさんあります。中国で、每人は南京の粛清を知っています。[While doing this project, I was wondering why the Malaysian school history textbook does not mention the purges of Chinese locals. There are few pictures of the purges that happened in Malaysia on the Internet, either. According to T, the Japanese conducted two major purges in Penang. They arrested anti-Japanese locals. I was wondering why there are only few data on the purges in our history textbook. Is that because Chinese Malaysians are not important? Or is that because there

are many other things to write in the history textbook? I don't know the answer, yet. But in China, there are many data about the purges conducted by the Japanese. In China, everyone knows about the Nanjing Massacre.] (Participant X, Chinese, female, essay)

“Are Chinese Malaysians not important?” This question is posed for the authority tasked with deciding what facts are important or beneficial to include in Malaysia's official historical record. Comparing and contrasting the descriptions of the Asia-Pacific War in Japanese and Malaysian school history textbooks, participants became skeptical of their neutrality and comprehensiveness and gained awareness of biased content and expressions. Reflecting on her own experience of producing a video interview featuring a war survivor, a participant pointed out the political nature of historical narratives, whether the narrative be individual or public.

インタビューの時、Lさんがたくさん話しましたが、いくつか言ったことをビデオに入れなくてねがってました。そしてビデオを作る時、グループでどれのじょうほうを入れますか入れませんかを選びました。歴史はじっさいの出来事のはずと思いましたが、今は歴史は誰かが伝えたい事だけだと思います。[In the interview, Ms. L told us many things, but she asked us to keep some parts off the record. While editing the video, we had to decide which information to be included in the video. I used to think that history should tell facts, but now I think it only tells what someone wants to tell.] (Participant I, Malay, female, essay)

Thoughts on the Independence and Current State of Malaysia

Diverse Perspectives on the Independence of Malaya

Five out of the six Malaysian survivors interviewed referred to the independence of Malaya after Japan's withdrawal and expressed either current or past thoughts on independence. The survivors' perspectives about independence were divergent, and some participants found them unfamiliar and disturbing. For example, Ms. C, a woman of Chinese-descent who spent an affluent childhood under the British rule, recalled that she had wished for the British to return to Malaya rather than for Malaya's independence after Japan's withdrawal. This comment aroused objection from a Malay participant:

Cさんによると、イギリスがあったから、ラッキーです。私はびっくりしました。どうしてCさんはその考えがあるかと思っています。1500年代以来、マレーシアは植民地化されています。私の意見はマレーシア人が植民地化されることに慣れていました。だから、（植民地主義を手放しに受け入れる）思考のようなものが存在します。[Ms. C said they were lucky because they had the British (as their ruler). I was shocked. I wonder why she had such an idea. Since the 1500's, Malaysia had been colonized (by superpowers). In my opinion, Malaysians were used to being colonized. That is why there is such an idea (that accepts colonialism).] (Participant N, Malay, female, essay)

To Ms. C, a young girl then, the ruler would not have been a part of her day-to-day reality.

Rather, affording a peaceful and affluent life would have mattered more. Participant N criticized Ms. C for having been “used to being colonized” and therefore, desensitized to exploitation. This critique oddly overlaps with the state discourse that takes the nation’s (Malay-led) independence for granted.

Furthermore, Mr. D, a survivor, mentioned that the Japanese occupation was a “blessing” to the people in Malaya because the experience “woke them up” and doubled their zeal for independence. Mr. D has been a high-profile figure in a Malay-centric political body since the nation became independent. The above perspective of Mr. D is neither unique nor new. The Japanese occupation has often been referred to as a type of significant turbulence for Malaysians to have to unite against and overcome. Memories of overcoming the Japanese aggression may evoke pride in Malaysians. In reaction to the perspective of Japanese occupation as a blessing, the participants expressed a range of opinions.

(Dさんの考えは) 私の考えを変更しました。日本の侵略は良いと悪いことをもたらしました。しかし、戦争は私たちを強くしました。それは私たちに、今日の独立性をあたえます。 [(Mr. D’s opinion) has changed my thoughts. The Japanese invasion brought good things and bad things. Fighting against them made us strong. It brought about today’s independence of the country.] (Participant B, Chinese, female, essay)

Dさんは日本が来たおかげで、私たちは独立のために戦うことが大切だと思うようになったと言いました。「もし、日本が侵略したことがなかったら、マレーシアは、今も独立を取得することはできない」と思っています。この質問は正しい解答を持っていません。 [Mr. D said we started to recognize the importance of fighting for independence because of the Japanese aggression. He thinks Malaysia would not have achieved independence if Japan had not invaded it. On this point, no one has the true answer.] (Participant H, Chinese, female, essay)

“We Can Forgive, But We Cannot Forget”

The direct contact with survivors who shared their memories of fear and pain created empathy among participants and made them realize that some survivors still suffer from unhealed wounds. After the interviews, some participants found survivors’ expressions unforgettable. One such expression was “We can forgive (the Japanese), but we cannot forget (what they did to us).” This phrase was uttered by two survivors, Mr. S, a Malaysian of Chinese descent and former mechanic who worked for the Japanese army when he was fourteen to sixteen, and Mr. T, a Malaysian of Chinese descent who as a child witnessed Japanese brutality. This one phrase was cited in essays and videos in three out of the five groups.

Tさんは「私たちは許すことができますが、忘れることができません。それが歴史です。」と述べました。私はこの声明を同意します。 [Mr. T said “We can forgive, but we cannot forget. That is history.” I agree to his statement.] (Participant D, Chinese, female, essay)

Mr. T and Mr. S have, for many years, been making grassroots efforts to “forgive” Japan by including Japanese language education in their community-based cultural exchange programs. When they uttered the statement with “we,” not “I,” as the subject of “forgive” and “cannot forget,” it represented a collective emotion and determination.

Oddly, this statement is consistent with Malaysia’s official stance to aspire to amicable relations and economic cooperation with Japan, and in parallel, highlight the Japanese occupation as a vital learning theme in history class at school. In regard to Malaysian state policy, such a position does not support individual victims nor bereaved families in claiming compensation for damages (Blackburn & Hack, 2012). Instead, the position conciliates victims by recording part of their personal memories as public and passing down the narratives to later generations studying in secondary schools. The fact that the above statement was delivered by war survivors themselves indicates that the official position has a profound impact on individuals.

Uncritical Appreciation of “Peace”

In the context of relating the war to their lives, many participants expressed that they are “appreciative” that Malaysia is now at “peace.”

多くの生命は現在平和な生命を成し遂げるために犠牲にします。私は、我々が現在持っている平和な生活に感謝すべきだと思います。[We achieved the current peace at the price of many lives. I think we should appreciate the peace we enjoy today.] (Participant F, Chinese, female, essay)

このプロジェクトで私は平和な時に生きているからかんしゃになりました。たしかに、自分の国の戦争歴史を学ぶと自分の国に愛国的な気持ちが生まれます。怒っている感じも生まれられます。自分の国を平和にしたいから。でも、私は自分の生活が戦争の時の生活とあまり関係していません。戦争歴史を学ぶと国を守りたい、そしてかんしゃする感じが生まれるけど、毎日の生活はあまり変えませんと思います。[While I am doing this project, I felt appreciative to live in this peaceful time. Learning about my country’s war history makes me feel patriotic and also upset as I want my country to be in peace. However, I cannot relate my life to the war. Although learning the history makes me want to protect my country and appreciate peace, it doesn’t affect how I live my daily life.] (Participant I, Malay, female, essay)

Ten participants (six Malays and four Chinese) deemed the peace Malaysia now enjoys as needing to be valued more highly. However, except for two, participants did not mention how peace could be secured and what is needed for that. This attitude might indicate that participants deemed the war something of a collateral accident of the past.

Ethnic Unity and Strong National Defense as the Means to Peacekeeping

Among the few participants who extended the discussion on how to maintain the “peace,” a distinctive opinion is that Malaysian citizens should “unite” and “strengthen

national defense against invaders.”

みんな団結していなかったら、戦争時、侵略者に対してできません。マレーシアの国民は団結したら、強い国になると思います。[If all of us do not unite, we won't be able to fight against invaders in war. If Malaysian citizens unite, the country will be strong.] (Participant W, Chinese, male, essay)

失敗事例をもって勉強すべきだ。なぜ失敗したか自分なりに分析します。例えば日本のマラヤを占領した歴史。なぜ簡単に日本がマラヤを占領した。多分国防の弱さは主な理由です。我々は失敗から学ぶ事ができます。そこから学んで次は同じ失敗をしないように活かすことができればいいのです。[We should learn from our failure. We should analyze the cause of the failure. Take the example from the Japanese occupation of Malaya. We should question why Japan managed to occupy Malaya so easily. The main cause was the insufficient national defense. We should learn from our mistake and try not to repeat the same mistake.] (Participant L, Chinese, female, essay)

After producing a video on the persecutions of local Chinese, Participant W said that it was “unfair” that Chinese locals became victims of Japanese persecution much more than any other racial group, and that he wanted to know what Malay classmates thought about the fact. Obviously, he was indignant over the fact that it was the Malay locals who naively believed the Japanese propaganda saying Japan would support the independence of Malaya from the colonial powers and welcomed its advancement into Malaya. His claim of racial unity seemingly stemmed from the regret that some Malay locals cooperated with the Japanese, and therefore stood back while Chinese neighbors were persecuted as anti-Japanese elements.

“Unity” is the ideology that Malaysian educational institutions and mass media advocate daily as key to the country’s future development and its sustainability as a multi-racial nation. Similarly, “national defense” has been considered as the means to peacekeeping and the rationale for Malaysia’s possession of military forces. Since 2003 the federal government has implemented the national service training program that consists of randomly selecting 18-year-old youths from all racial backgrounds to undergo physical and mental trainings for three months, with the aim of enhancing unity amongst multi-racial communities.

The perspectives of the two participants of Chinese descent quoted above seem to overlap with Malaysia’s official discourse and policies, which emphasize racial unity and national defense as the means to national peacekeeping. However, as seen in the discussion about Malaysia’s school history textbook, the official advocacy of racial unity is based on the regret for lacking “national spirit” on the side of Chinese and Indians, rather than regret for the victimhood of the Chinese over the other racial groups—as Participant W claims it should be.

Concerning the persecution of the Chinese and the Malays’ reluctance to stand up against it, Participant N, a Malay female, shares a moment of frustration with her Chinese group mates:

I said (to my Chinese group mates), ‘I don’t want to offend you. I am just curious. Don’t

you hold any grudge towards us? ... We were not really sure how to face this. We didn't do anything. We didn't help them as a federal citizen when they (the Chinese) were suffering.' But, they didn't give a straight answer. They said, 'What happened is in the past. We don't want to think about it anymore.' They didn't give their own opinions... So maybe in their hearts, there must be something unforgivable. I don't know. (Original)

There is the possibility that the Chinese classmates were afraid of making Participant N feel blamed or personally responsible for the past event, or perhaps they were simply worried about breaking the taboo of discussing a racial issue on campus. When asked by the author why Malay participants did not voice their thoughts on the event, Participant N replied:

Maybe it is because we didn't feel like we were really involved in it when they (Chinese classmates) talked about the persecutions. We have that kind of sense of (racial) separatism, which I think is not really good for the Malaysians. Now there are a lot of people thinking about racial issues, which scares me. I am really scared that something else may happen. (Original)

Participant N senses the Chinese classmates' discontent about the injustice and her predecessors' responsibility for it. However, she avoided further discussing the issue, with a sense of ambivalence. She feared evoking the “grudge” of the Chinese, which is thought to be a definite no-no for “racial unity.”

IMPLICATIONS

While many students accused Japanese “war leaders,” the responsibility of Japanese citizens back in those days was rarely questioned in their essays. To some participants, it was the “brainwashing” or the fear of persecution that lead many Japanese citizens to participate in the war efforts. Constructing the view of citizens as vulnerable and oppressed beings might be tempting because it allows participants to avert their attentions from their own individual responsibility for social welfare in the present. To nurture one's proactive attitude to take responsibility for social direction, it would be necessary for a participant to recognize the continuity of similar forms of injustice to this day and her involvement in them. And guiding participants to connect the past and the present would be an important role of the teacher in charge of this project.

In Malaysia, the wartime power relations among racial groups still exist to this day and governing authorities produce official discourses that justify unequal relations between dominant and subordinate groups under the name of racial unity. Such official discourses influence individual perspectives of the war; the perspective of the Japanese occupation as a blessing, expressed by a Malay survivor in the student interview, supports the independence of Malaysia as a Malay-led country. This statement exemplifies the symbolic dimensions of discourse (Kramsch, 2011): the meaning of words (about the Japanese occupation) is constructed diachronically through the intertextual relations across discourses (history textbooks, politicians' statements, etc.) and they reflect social identities, individual and collective memories, emotions, and aspirations (a painful path to seize glory, national independence). The perspective of the Japanese occupation as a blessing needs to be looked at skeptically in critical literacy education because it prioritizes a nation's independence at the

expense of individual victims, and implicitly justifies the current political state; participants could analyze divergent perspectives on independence among survivors and also examine the course of events leading to Malaya independence in order to redefine the meaning of the Japanese occupation vis-à-vis independence. It could then be investigated when, by whom, and in what context the “Japanese occupation as a blessing” discourse was produced.

Similarly, the survivor statement “We will forgive, but we will not forget” indicates that the official discourses on diplomacy and national identity have a profound impact on individuals. The Malaysian government has officially forgiven and settled Japan’s war crimes as a whole, despite the fact that there are individual victims who still suffer physically, psychologically, or financially (Blackburn & Hack, 2012). This generous but evocative statement might have carried conviction when delivered by war survivors. However, when it is cited empathetically by project participants, it seemingly contributes to supporting and maintaining current state policy. Should we not critically examine such sorrowful and personal statements coming from victims? Who should possess the right to “forgive” Japan’s war crimes? Whose memories should be preserved and “not forgotten”?

As this study shows, discussing wartime racial relations in a racially mixed class from the mere victim-victimizer perspective caused uneasiness and tension for some participants. The victim-victimizer perspective logically led participants to view Malay predecessors as the victimizer since they accepted the Japanese advancement into Malaya, which resulted in the persecutions of Chinese locals. They seldom stood up against the Japanese to defend their Chinese neighbors and some of them even cooperated in the persecutions of the Chinese under the Japanese command. In what way, then, could we talk about predecessor responsibilities as well as responsibilities of us individuals who live today in the racially unequal reality? Further yet, from the perspective of a global citizen? Probably, the imperialism (of war-time Japan) needs to be more greatly emphasized as the fundamental evil it was, and roles such as “the bystander” and “the collaborator” need to be identified and situated within the oppressive imperial system. In order to provide an opportunity to explore individual citizens’ responsibilities in class, the teacher could observe participants’ responses to roles of the bystander and collaborator through interviews and comment-writing. Participants’ expressions of thoughts or feelings in response to the teacher’s initiative should be embraced by the teacher and peers first with sympathy and then through open dialogue. Questions might not be resolved, yet the dialogues would allow participants to recognize diverse perspectives and feelings concerning the issue, and would enhance their sense of responsibility when engaging in the issue as it defines current relationships amongst races in Malaysia.

To develop the ability to understand the thoughts and feelings of other groups of people, some imaginative activities could be introduced. For example, participants could imagine being one of the characters of a war story and belonging to a different racial group, then writing a letter to convey their character’s worries, regrets, and hopes. Such creative activities might help participants answer their own questions of how to reshape relationships with those who have a different background or perspective, and what responsibilities they presently hold for the unsolved problems of the past.

CONCLUSION

The Memories of War Project aimed to develop students’ ability to grasp the power relations and ideologies underlying social discourses on the Asia-Pacific War, and to form a more

critical and comprehensive understanding of the war from the perspective of a responsible global citizen. Before conducting the project, Malaysian participants had categorized the Japanese in those days unitarily as the victimizer and Malaysians as the victim. At the end of the project, participants were able to identify complex power relations within both countries as reflected in the war discourses in history textbooks, survivors’ narratives, museums, and comics. Among them were multiple relationships of victim and victimizer within war-time Japan. The most distinguished one captures Japanese citizens as victims and war leaders as victimizers. Viewing Japanese citizens as passive and uncritical beings, participants were inclined to disregard the responsibility of Japanese citizens back in those days, while criticizing war leaders for the brainwashing and oppression. This points to the necessity of discussing the possibilities and responsibilities of citizens in preventing wars.

In Malaysian discourse, various forms and levels of victimhood were identified and such individual differences were attributed to their socio-economic status, gender, and race. Race was the significant factor that divided Malayan people’s lives under Japanese occupation and still does today (both officially and unofficially). Therefore, associating war experiences with race caused uneasiness and tension in a racially mixed class within an educational institution under state control. To address the complex relationships in the occupied or colonized areas during the Asia-Pacific War, this study points to the necessity of emphasizing imperialism as a fundamental evil and identifying roles such as bystander and collaborator as members of the oppressive system of imperialism. It also proposes imaginative activities as a means to raise awareness of responsibilities and reshape relationships with others in the present.

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APPENDIX

1. Description of the Lesson

Source	Excerpt from <i>Hadashi no Gen</i> [Barefoot Gen] (pp. 103-128)	
Supporting materials	(1) Wordlist and synopsis (2) Worksheet	
Activity	Before lesson	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Distribute the excerpt from <i>Hadashi no Gen</i> [Barefoot Gen], wordlist, synopsis and worksheet. 2. Tell participants to answer the questions in Section 1 on the worksheet after reading the excerpt.
	During lesson	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Divide into groups of four and share what they understood about the story in groups. 2. Pay attention to features of Hiroshima dialect. 3. Pay attention to passive voice in the texts. 4. Review in groups the answers for the questions in Section 1. 5. Each group presents the answers to the class. 6. Share thoughts/feelings/questions on the discussed matters in class. 7. Pay attention to the passive voice used in the comic. 8. Discuss in group the questions in Section 2 and present their answers to the class. 9. Share thoughts/feelings/questions on the discussed matters.

2. Questions on Worksheet

Section 1

- Q1: What were family members and neighbors supposed to say aloud when bidding a public farewell to a soldier heading to the war front? What does the phrase mean?
(兵士を戦争へ送り出す時、家族や近所の人、何と言いましたか。)
- Q2: Why does Kôji, Gen’s elder brother, volunteer to join the navy?
(どうして元のおんちゃん(おにいさん)の浩二は海軍に志願しましたか。)
- Q3: What does *bikokumin* (p. 104) mean? Why do neighbors call Gen’s family *bikokumin*?
(「非国民(p.104)」とは何ですか。どうして元の家族は近所の人に「非国民」と呼ばれますか。)
- Q4: What are people supposed to do when the air-raid alarm is sounded?
(空襲警報がなっているとき、何をしなければいけませんか。)
- Q5: According to the comic author, what did the US intend to achieve by dropping atomic bombs on Japan?
(作者によると、何のためにアメリカは日本に原子爆弾を落としましたか。)
- Q6: Near the end of the war (April, 1945), the US army landed on Okinawa, Japan and fought severe ground battles with the Japanese army. Why did the women and children there commit suicide? (p. 116)
(戦争の終わり(1945年4月)に、アメリカ軍が沖縄に上陸し、大きな戦闘がありました。どうして沖縄の女と子供たちは自殺しましたか。)
- Q7: Near the end of the war, when Japan was air-raided, what did the political leaders do?
(戦争の終わりに日本が空爆をうけていた時、戦争指導者は何をしていましたか。)
- Q8: What is *senninbari* (p.117)?
(「千人針(p.117)」とは何ですか。)

Section 2

- Q1: What slogans do you find prevailing in Japan during the war?
(戦争の時、日本にはどんなスローガンがありましたか。)
- Q2: What beliefs did many Japanese people have during the war? In what way were the beliefs formed among the Japanese?
(戦争の時、多くの日本人はどんな信念を持っていたと思いますか。その信念はどのように日本人の中に作られたと思いますか。)
- Q3: Do you find any victim-victimizer relationships in the story? What are they?
(話の中に、いくつかの被害者と加害者の関係があります。どんなものですか。)