

Educational Theory of “Hiroshima” after the “Memory Turn”: Summary of the Symposium and Moderator’s Comments

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Dealing with Memories of “Hiroshima” in Education and Pedagogy

75 years have passed since World War II. What should we have in mind when trying to reconsider the issue of remembering “Hiroshima” and reconciliation in relation to education? While various answers could be offered to this question, the fact that a significant change has taken place, especially since the mid-1990s, should not be overlooked. The “memory boom” of that time changed theoretical approaches to “Hiroshima” that can be called, from today’s perspective, a “memory turn.” The two reports presented in the symposium show the different possibilities of the “Hiroshima” educational theory after the turn. The first presenter Jong Song Kim demonstrated the possibility to involve education in the process of generating representations of “Hiroshima.” The second presenter Lothar Wigger gave us the opportunity to observe representations of “Hiroshima” in education in the broader context of other “Hiroshima” discourses.

The “memory boom” refers to an academic and international development that discusses actively how catastrophic events, including wars, were collectively memorized and, how this shapes the cultures remembering such events. In addition to academic and public discussions, the “memory boom” also included various practices that actively promote the formation of collective memories. Further research not only endeavored to find out what were the facts in the past, but also how past events became to be remembered collectively as “facts,” to begin with. The term “memory turn” refers to a series of theoretical and practical changes in the consideration of memory and recollection regarding the latter issue. It offers, in other words, a second order observation of the events in the past.

We often hear the word “実相 *jissō*” in the praxis of recollecting memories of the

atomic bombing in Hiroshima. “Hiroshima” theory before the “memory turn” mainly aspired to succeed in investigating the “*jissō*” of the event. At times, the “*jissō*” was a testimony of suffering by a survivor and at times, it was a relic or remains with traces of the atomic bombing. At other times, it referred to the accumulation of data and information of the terrible damages. In any case, before the “memory turn,” the “*jissō*” was often treated almost synonymously with “truth” or “facts.”

What are the features of “Hiroshima” theory after the “memory turn”? As for the practices of recollection in relation to the atomic bombing, there are no significant changes in the understanding and appreciation of the “*jissō*” considered as “truth.” However, the testimonies, relics, or things left, documentaries, and historical descriptions as “*jissō*” also have representational aspects and cultural components. The “*jissō*” in this case is regarded as a kind of product resulting from the continuous shaping of representations of the atomic bombing as an unimaginable event. Since then, it has been critically investigated in which conditions such cultural constructions are created and what kind of social and personal effects they have.

Lisa Yoneyama is a key expert of the “memory turn” in the field of “Hiroshima” research. She argues that even the testimonies of survivors in Hiroshima are constructed through rhetoric, such as modifications, metaphors, and plotting, regardless whether they themselves attempt to depict historical events of the atomic bombing according to accurate facts (Yoneyama, L, 2005, *Hiroshima - Politics of Memories*, translated by Hiroaki Ozawa et al., Iwanami Shoten: Tokyo, p. 290). From this viewpoint, she investigates the possibilities of “memories of Hiroshima” as a critical knowledge. Following her publications, “Hiroshima” theory attempted to interpret the political dynamics in a broad sense as a process of generating representations of “Hiroshima.” Even historiography, which professes to elucidate “facts” of the past, has to position itself vis-a-vis the insights in collective memories. Research in cultural memory offers critical challenges but also opportunities for the discipline of historiography.

When reviewing the two reports of the symposium in the above context, they offer concrete examples for the educational theory of “Hiroshima” after the “memory turn.”

Characteristics of Kim’s Report: Pedagogy Participating in the Generating Process of the “Hiroshima” Representations

One of the prominent features of Kim’s approach is that the practitioners (educator and the educatee) as well as the researchers themselves join in and exchange educational

practices in the process of creating the representations of “Hiroshima” and their media. At the same time, it interprets such practices and derives further “designing principles” for educational practices. Such an approach in research, called “design-based research,” is a consequence of the critique of the binary differentiation of theory (observation) and practice (action). Kim’s report refers to research about museum exhibitions (The “Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum’s ‘the Last 10 Feet’ Redesign” Project) and a research project concerning schoolbooks (The “Improved ‘Hiroshima’ Textbook Creation” Project).

According to Kim’s report, a textbook is a “nation’s narrative.” It is a social instrument that creates the national citizen’s collective memory and is itself the product of such a collective memory. There have been studies criticizing the relationship between such textbooks and collective memory from an observer’s viewpoint. However, Kim’s research features an attempt to improve the communication between people across different countries. He focuses on descriptions in textbooks about the case of “Hiroshima.” After acknowledging that the conceptual “framework used for Hiroshima” and the defined meaning of “Hiroshima” differ across countries, such as Japan, South Korea, and the United States, he criticizes that a “nation’s narrative” may trigger incomprehension and intolerance between the people from diverse countries. He then proposes ways to lead following generations in a direction of “nurturing citizens who are open to other people’s narratives” through educational activities that co-create the representations of “Hiroshima.”

One of the specific measures introduced to attain this purpose was the attempt of creating an “authentic dialogue” about the representation of “Hiroshima” in schoolbooks by Korean and Japanese students. Both parties in this dialogue share the results of the discussion of their own groups with the other group and receive the answers given by the other party. Through direct but also genuine confrontations accompanied by discomfort or unpleasant feelings, each participant attempts to redraw or overcome the boundaries in engaging with “others.” In this way, they search for ways of “creating public spheres that surpass nations” and enable “reconciliation” through dialogue. Of course, “reconciliation” in this case does not simply mean finding the middle point between both parties. It is rather described as a continuous and dynamic process toward mutual understanding.

Another project related to museum exhibitions reported by Kim also has features similar to his textbook project. On one hand, there are cultural memories (textbooks and museums) as collective media, and on the other hand, there appear personal memories that are also influenced by such media. Kim’s research projects are nothing less than

pedagogical projects to change people’s thinking regarding other countries through communicative activities based on cultural memories.

Kim’s project requires careful preparation for its implementation. As Wigger pointed out, an “authentic dialogue” also harbors the risk to unintentionally sharpen awareness that they are indeed facing “someone else” and thus reinforce boundaries. Consequently, “educational protection” appears necessary in order to realize the learner’s affirmative change in the specific conflicts. How is such an “educational protection” possible for researchers who serve as planners, instructors, and observers of the ensuing dialogue. In the symposium discussion, I asked Kim this question in the role of the moderator.

Based on his experiences, Kim mentioned three aspects of “educational protection.” Firstly, the environment in which the participants work together toward a common goal—creating museum exhibitions or textbooks—may decrease or even avoid extremely negative conflicts. Secondly, communication is structured so that people clearly see each other, effectively eliminating anonymity. This situation may have restraining effects on violent speech and behavior. Thirdly, it becomes easier to keep a safe communicative space for educational intervention by placing a medium (museum or textbook) between people who engage in the dialogue. In addition, Kim pointed out that a person attempting to conduct educational interventions should be self-reflective and may also want to decentralize him-/herself.

Features of Wigger’s Report: Replacing Education in the Spread of “Hiroshima” Representations

Wigger’s Report presented another possibility of pedagogy concerning the representation of “Hiroshima” after the “memory turn.” To begin with, Wigger expressed a great sense of crisis arguing that the serious threat of the atomic era is not passed on sufficiently to the younger generation. Wigger’s sense of crisis was caused by, what he perceived as, an insufficient description of “Hiroshima” in German history textbooks. Why has the significant meaning of “Hiroshima” not been sufficiently conveyed in this education? Wigger first surveyed the meanings of “Hiroshima” in the various discursive practices in the news, politics, academic theories and public opinion after World War II. Then, he interpreted the characteristics of “Hiroshima” descriptions in German textbooks in relation to the spread of “Hiroshima” representations outside of the educational field.

Wigger first outlined the specific process by which the representations of “Hiroshima” came to have a special meaning in Germany. He described how the name of ‘Hiroshima’

had become “the symbol for the first atomic bombing in human history and the horror of over 100,000 deaths and the longstanding suffering of the survivors” in the political and military context of the Cold War in his country. “Hiroshima” also had become a keyword to warn people of the danger of a new nuclear war in the future. Concerning the issue of nuclear weapons, philosophers like Picht, Litt, Anders and Adorno made an appeal that the development of such a technology held the potential of a catastrophe for the entirety of humankind. Such statements inspired peace movements in Germany. However, Wigger analyzed the current state, especially after the dissolution of the Cold War structure as the following: “For the younger generations, the period of the Cold War and the fear of a nuclear war is a closed past, without significance for present life and the future.”

Wigger’s report suggests that one reason for the insufficiencies in the descriptions of “Hiroshima” in history textbooks is their very character. I would like to call this a conflict of “memory economy.” German textbooks prefer the topics of German and European history, centering on the event of National Socialism. When compiling a textbook, it is unavoidable to gauge which knowledge should be attributed more importance for students in the context of their lives. Wigger conceded, the fact that “German and European history occupy a large part of school lessons and that the 20th century and the debate about National Socialism in particular carry great weight is understandable.” Nonetheless, he criticized that the world-historical significance of the dropping of atomic bombs is downplayed by contributing a large number of pages of textbooks to NS-history.

In his concluding remarks, Wigger emphasized that textbooks should deal with the history of “Hiroshima” in a more differentiated way and give the subject a more prominent place in the classroom. According to him, to inspire responsible action it would be more important to create not abstract knowledge (*Kenntnis*) and information about the atomic bombs and their effects, but rather a comprehensive and concrete knowledge (*Wissen*) of the events. During the symposium, I had difficulties to capture Wigger’s differentiation between “*Wissen*” and “*Kenntnis*,” highlighting the significance of the former. As the moderator, therefore, I asked him to clarify this point of his argument.

According to Wigger, “*Wissen*” features a nuance of scientific (*wissenschaftliches*) knowledge, in contrast to an excessively constructivist worldview. The idea that “reality” is in the eye of the beholder does not accord with this understanding of facts. Such an idea is also philosophically incorrect and politically dangerous. Wigger argued furthermore that it belongs to the perpetual tasks of “Hiroshima” theory after the “memory turn” to reflect on “*Wissen*” itself from the perspective of “*Wissenschaftstheorie*” (=science studies), constantly to investigate “facts” based on

historical materials, and to properly transmit the verified “Wissen” from a pedagogical perspective to the next generation. Lastly, Wigger highlighted that it would be necessary to pursue an “ethical basis” for imagining others and the coexistence with them.

Discussions and Remaining Issues

During the questions and answers session after the presentation of both reports, Yasuo Imai asked a question regarding Wigger’s warnings against constructivist thinking. Imai shared his opinion, yet although Kim’s project has a constructivist position, it should be esteemed highly as an important endeavor. He underlined that Kim’s project filled the gap of negotiating “Hiroshima” representations from different observers with different backgrounds. Imai asked if it could be the feature of “Hiroshima” theory after the “memory turn” to entrust hope to the continuous dialogues to negotiate across differences despite the definitive difficulty of ever reaching an agreement.

First, Kim commented on Imai’s question. Kim acknowledged that he held a constructivist viewpoint. While confirming that his project aspired to what Imai had summarized, he also agreed that an extreme affirmation of constructivism should be avoided today, in the era of “post-truth.” He also said that he wanted the students participating in his project to think and behave as if they were historians. His opinion seemed to resonate with Wigger’s critique of a radical constructivism. Then, Wigger expressed that he also had certain expectations regarding the interactions with others across differences, as Kim had attempted. In this regard, Wigger again emphasized his claim that such attempts harbored unpredictable outcomes, as they are not only open to the possibility of reconciliation, but also to further conflicts. This is exactly the reason, Wigger said, why “Wissen” and ethics concerning “Hiroshima” are indispensable.

Next, Nobuko Morita commented that mutual understanding and historical recognition might not necessarily coincide, although they relate to each other. She then asked how it would be possible to connect the two parties through education. Following her question, Kim commented that he had not been conscious of the possible differences between the two issues Morita had discussed. He then suggested that his project put more emphasis on the aspect of mutual understanding. To this Morita suggested that Kim’s project potentially attained both mutual understanding and historical recognition. Following Morita’s response, unfortunately, there was no time left for Wigger to respond. I would have been interested to hear Wigger’s answer, because Morita’s opinion seems to resonate with Wigger’s emphasis on working toward historical recognition with ethics.

Educational theory of “Hiroshima” after the “memory turn” should not entrust the reality of Hiroshima to the arbitrary eye of the beholder, just as Wigger cautioned. At the same time, it is not enough merely to convey the “truth” justified by academics as information. Educational theory of “Hiroshima” is involved in the extremely challenging issue of understanding what others have experienced. To tackle this challenge, Kim placed the difficulties of such recollection at the center of his project. In this vein, the project participants attempted to co-create media of “Hiroshima” representation. Of course, this should not be taken to mean that everything is acceptable. People were to fall into the pitfall of excessive constructivist thinking, if it would not matter what they created. As Morita suggested, the goal of aiming for a “better” historical recognition should be kept in mind. However, how is the education of catastrophic memories possible, if there are no decisive methods to “understand” the experiences of others and no measures to “know” them appropriately? In order to further dive into this issue, it may be necessary to evaluate in detail how this issue could possibly relate to the respective elements, such as “proficiency in (historical) recognition/empathy,” “knowledge/ethics,” “research/education” and “science/wisdom.” It is indeed the Philosophy of Education which can contribute to tackling this task in relation to the educational theory of “Hiroshima” after the “memory turn.”

Some comments after the Symposium

After the symposium, I asked myself anew what “peace education” means. Then I came up with the working definition that “peace education” is an educational approach that tries to enable a “better” life for individuals and society by promoting the recollection of catastrophic states (= the opposite of peaceful states) that have occurred in the past.

“The Plague” (1947), written by Albert Camus, suggests that forgetting should be feared the most in an era following a catastrophe. Is it however meaningful to remember catastrophic events that could potentially destroy the whole meaning of the world? As is well known, Camus suggested that “absurdity” was the fate of humans who did not cease to seek the unfulfilled meaning of the world. He likens this absurd destiny of humans to Sisyphus who was fated to push a giant rock to a mountaintop as the punishment for angering the gods. The giant rock rolls down to the bottom of the valley just before it reaches the mountaintop. Sisyphus is destined to go back and forth from the mountaintop to the valley for the task that he will never achieve. Sisyphus is an excellent metaphor for humans who never cease to seek the meaning of the world, having no choice but to seek

it, while also knowing that such meaning cannot be sought out.

However, the author of this absurdity paradoxically attempts to find hope and happiness for humans in the sight of Sisyphus. The giant rock mercilessly rolls down the valley at once, from a place where it almost reached the mountaintop. “At that subtle moment when man glances backward over his life, Sisyphus returning towards his rock, in that slight pivoting, he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which becomes his fate, created by him, combined under his memory’s eye and soon sealed by his death.” (Camus, A., 1975, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, translated from the French (1942) by Justin O’Brien, Pinguin Books: London, p.110). Camus concludes the passage as follows: “The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.” (ibid., p.111).

Recalling catastrophes is one of the specific ways to live with “absurdity.” “Peace education,” as defined above, is a permanent activity on this way. It must continue indefinitely because humans cannot run away from their fate of living with “absurdity,” even if a certain catastrophe seems already to have passed.

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