

Processing Together

Learning together and creating a common history video textbook (South Korea and Japan)

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Until I came to the U.S. and made friends with people from South Korea, I was insensible to the fact that Japan, the country where I was born and raised, annexed Korea from 1910 to 1945. Many Korean friends have told me that they would never forget what Japan had done to their country, whereas I barely remembered a paragraph describing it briefly in my high school history textbook. I often felt a huge gap between our societies in our knowledge and understanding of our common past.

The Japanese government's approval system for junior and high school history textbooks has been the cause of disputes both domestically and internationally for allegedly distorting and downplaying Japan's imperialist history. The depiction in Japanese history textbooks of military aggression, forced labor, comfort women, and the legality and brutality of the annexation are a source of conflict between Korea and Japan even 66 years after the end of the War. Because Korean and Japanese students learn about the shared history of the two countries in contradicting ways, this obstructs efforts to bringing people together and to establish mutual understanding.

Processing Together will provide an opportunity for Korean and Japanese high school students to learn about this part of their history (1910-1945) together, and to create a common video textbook to be shared with both societies.

Eight Japanese high school students from 15 to 18 years old will join eight Korean students from the same age range in South Korea for a one week creative study program. At the beginning of the week, group activities will enable the students to get to know each other and prepare to work together in an open and respectful environment. The students will learn about the shared history of their countries interactively, by visiting museums, interviewing people, and through group activities and discussions. The museums will include The Independence Hall of Korea, the National Museum of Korea, and Seodaemun Prison. Interview subjects will be experts and people who experienced the occupation, such as former comfort women at Nanum House near Seoul. Interviews with individuals residing in Japan will be conducted using Skype. Volunteer Korean to Japanese or Japanese to Korean translators will facilitate the interviews. All the museums have displays, tours, and/or audio guides in Japanese and English.

In order to foster the process of learning together, filmmaking is a highly effective way. As filmmakers, the students will explore various ideas and materials from conception of idea, through preparation and shooting, to editing. The process requires participants to play different roles, such as director and camera operator, to create a piece. Inexpensive consumer cameras and simple editing systems, such as iMovies and Windows Movie Maker, will allow the students to make high quality videos easily.

In parallel with their museum visits and interviews, students will learn basic filmmaking techniques and skills, including the distinction between fiction and documentary filmmaking, cinematography, interviewing on camera, and video editing. Using two consumer cameras and rotating roles, students will film their activities, visit to museums, interviews, and any other material they need. With the filmed footage, students will create a video history textbook. The

content of the video textbook will be determined by the students through group discussions and editing sessions. Thus the resulting video textbook reflects their experience of learning together and how they come to see this period of their shared history, rather than being molded by other people's opinions about what is historically accurate and politically correct. This video textbook will be subtitled in Korean, Japanese, and English, and made widely available to teachers and students for classroom use and beyond on YouTube and websites related to the topic.

The ultimate goal of Processing Together is to initiate interaction between young Korean and Japanese students to work towards mutual understanding of the past, and to build genuine friendships. In addition, students will learn initiative, active, and creative learning techniques as opposed to passively absorbing content from textbooks.

The Japanese government conducts examination and approval of textbooks every four years, and 2011 is the year for junior high school textbook approval. Organizations, such as Peace Boat and Coalition for Peace in Asia and History Education, have advocated the introduction of a shared history textbook, and the video textbook created through Processing Together could be used to emphasize the importance of working together to resolve the history textbook disputes.

The curriculum for this creative program will be moderated by myself and Su-Kyoung Hwang, an adjunct member of the Faculty of Korean Studies at Emory University and alumna of the International House of Chicago. Hwang is an expert on Korean culture and history, and will advise the project and help to organize the week. Verbal communications for group activities and discussions will take place in English with help from Hwang, who is fluent in English and Korean, and myself. Taeju Kim, a PhD. Candidate in History at University of Chicago, is also advising this project, and has connected me with potential supporting organizations. He has researched Korea-Japan common history textbook initiatives, and is fluent in Korean, Japanese and English.

The Japan-Korea Cultural Foundation (www.jkcf.or.jp) will advertise the project on their website to recruit student participants in both Korea and Japan. The organization will also connect us with potential experts and individuals whom students may interview. Children and Textbooks Japan Network 21, a network of organizations working towards producing textbooks that help lead children to a future without a war, will help us disseminate the *Processing Together* video textbook to organizations in their network.

I am aware of the potential logistical challenges, such as travel and accommodation, and in the process of communicating with Peace Boat Japan (www.peaceboat.org) which has hosted many student training and exchange programs globally, and supports the creation of common history textbook in East Asia through its Asian History Project Team. I hope to bring them onboard as advisers and to provide practical support for the project. Youth Center for Cultural Exchange and The Independence Hall of Korea, located less than 1 hour from Seoul, are both being considered as options for accommodation and facilities with computer access.

Through Processing Together, I hope to provide young students with an opportunity to build friendships that are unobstructed by history and politics, and an experience that will be valuable in any field of work they choose in future.