

Reading School Textbooks as a Cultural and Political Text

Representations of Asia in Geography Textbooks Used in the United States

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Introduction

The number of a Korean's legs is: 1) two 2) four 3) six 4) eight

IT WAS WHEN I SAW THIS QUESTION used in United States Army Intelligence Tests in World War II that, for the first time in my life, I wondered about my identity and position as an Asian male.¹ As a first-year doctoral student excited by a new life in the U.S., it was quite shocking for me to see this question. Is this how Americans think about Koreans? What made this question possible? Is this part of past racism, or is this kind of social perception still prevalent? I felt as though I was being denigrated because of my ethnicity, a feeling that had been foreign to me while living in Korea.

However, when I thought about racial minorities in South Korea, I came to realize that racial bias is not just a problem in Whites' recognition of others or relevant only to the context of the United States but is rooted more deeply in our sense-making system. In South Korea in 2005, there were more than 300,000 immigrant workers from South Asian countries such as India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Vietnam who suffered from unfair treatment and racial discrimination. Arabs are almost invisible in Korea, and many Koreans' recognition of Arabs seems to be largely influenced by what Edward Said (2003/1978) called *Orientalism*—bizarre, mystic people who are obstacles to world peace, but who unfortunately have oil. It was not only an eye opener but also a painful realization to see that racial minorities' suffering in Korea must be incomparably more serious than that caused by an old, IQ test question.

This experience and the subsequent deliberations reminded me that the question which Edward Said (2003/1978) raised almost thirty years ago still remains significant today, namely “How can one study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or a non-repressive and non-

manipulative perspective?” (p. 24). In particular, as the influences of globalization become more apparent inside and outside schools, one of the challenges of education becomes how to teach global awareness and cross-cultural understanding so that students can live ethically and responsibly with people of different colors, ideas, beliefs, and cultural standards (Case, 1993; Kirkwood, 2001; Merryfield, 2001). This new environment requires that curriculum scholars pay more attention to how school curriculum engages students with diverse peoples and cultures in the world. It has been argued that school curriculum, primarily history education, contribute to creating and maintaining a public memory about the national past (Frisch, 1989; Seixas, 2000; Wineburg, 2001). However, school curriculum is not just about “us” but also about “others.” Through school curriculum, students get a sense that somehow they know about diverse peoples and cultures beyond national borders, most of whom they are not likely to encounter personally. In this sense, school curriculum not only maintains a public memory about “who we are” but also creates and transmits collective knowledge about “who they are” and how to respond to “them” emotionally and behaviorally. Nonetheless, this latter aspect of school curriculum does not seem to have received enough attention from curriculum scholars.

In light of this need, this study examines how Asia is represented in American textbooks and what kind of political and cultural frameworks are embedded in those representations. As “official knowledge” (Apple, 1993) constructed and organized for the next generations, textbooks are a clue to how a wider society wants students to make sense of Asia. By investigating the textbook construction of Asia, this study posits that curriculum scholars need to investigate how school curriculum produces collective perceptions about “others” and to how to rethink the representation of others’ diverse cultures and societies in the school curriculum.

While Asia is a vast continent made up of diverse peoples and cultures, East Asia, which typically includes China, Japan, the Koreas, Mongolia, and Taiwan, was chosen as the major unit of analysis. This is not only because I, as a Korean, am more familiar with this region, but also because Asians or Asian cultures tend to be primarily represented by these countries in America (Harada, 2001; Oehling, 1980). Consequently, in the following pages, Asia, Asians, or Asian cultures are limited to the area of East Asia.

Theoretical Frameworks

In this study, cultural studies provides a lens to see school textbooks not only as a pedagogical text but also as a cultural text, while postcolonialism helps to investigate the political messages underlying the textbook portrayal of Asia. According to cultural studies, culture is more like a society’s meaning-making network or system than physical artifacts or historical relics that the society produces (Grossberg, Nelson & Treichler, 1992; Hall, 1997). Stuart Hall (1997) argues that people give meanings to objects, other peoples, and events by the specific frameworks of interpretations they bring to them. This framework of representing the world is not decided by a few sources but is produced, reproduced, and revised inter-textually through various kinds of socio-cultural apparatuses, which Hall (1997) collectively calls “a system of representation” (p. 17). Meaning-making practices are not individual, nor are they flowing from a center to other parts of a society. Rather, various cultural sectors are interacting with each other to maintain, circulate, and expand more-or-less shared ways of making sense of the world. Hall (1997) underlines that this system of representation not only “rules in” certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, but it also “rules out” other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it (p. 44).

This brief summary of cultural studies provides two significant points relevant to this study. First, however we may define Asia, it is a meaning and not a tangible artifact. This is because what we have are diverse meanings of Asia constructed through various types of cultural texts, not a fixed Asia by which we can assess the correspondence of each framework. As Barnes and Duncan (1992) argue, meaning is produced from text to text rather than between text and world (pp. 2–3). Even the fact that I am a Korean does not guarantee that my understanding of Asia is more *correct* than those held by others. My perception of Asia is just one among various potential ones and has largely been influenced by Korean culture, which is quite nationalistic and ethnocentric. As such, the major task of this study is not comparing the Asia represented in American textbooks with a *real* Asia which is *out there*, but investigating a meaning-making system underlying the textbook representation of Asia. In this sense, this study is more about the American construction of Asia and its politics than about Asia itself.

Second, cultural studies open up a possibility of reading school textbooks as a cultural text. Textbooks are the primary pedagogical tools used in classrooms and are one of the significant sources of classroom knowledge (Apple, 1993; Wade, 1993). However, textbooks need to be investigated as a cultural text as well, considering their unique position in a society and the commonsensical perception that textbooks should transfer a society's *so-called* mainstream values to the next generations and that they consist of official and public knowledge (Apple, 1992, 1993). For this reason, researchers have treated textbooks as significant objects of analysis to see how societies make sense of specific topics and events (Anyon, 1979; Loewen, 1995; Sleeter & Grant, 1991).

Like many “post-” isms such as postmodernism and poststructuralism, postcolonialism is far from being a unified field but has been a contested terrain among different voices and approaches (Kanu, 2006; Williams & Chrisman, 1994; Xie, 1997). In particular, if we interpret “postcolonialism,” as the dash implies, as an interest in something that is occurring “after” colonialism, we may miss the major point of its original ideas. This is because, as many people argue, colonialism is not over yet but is still present in the world through more subtle and elaborate forms such as global capitalism and cultural domination (Parry, 1995; Xie, 1997). Indeed, postcolonialism argues that the colonial framework of recognizing other peoples and cultures still remains and influences Westerners' perception of non-Whites even after the colonizers moved back to their countries (Said, 2003/1978; Willinsky, 1999). In other words, according to postcolonialism, colonialism became possible not just through physical exploitations but also by ideological manipulations, with the latter still prevalent in more articulated and refined forms even after the former was over.

For example, in his classic work, *Orientalism*, Said (2003/1978) investigates how violence toward, and domination over, the Orient by Westerners were (are) justified by a symbolic distinction between us, Westerners and them, Orientals. According to Said, this binary opposition is never neutral, for they, Orientals, should be irrational, fallen, and abnormal because we, Europeans, are rational, mature, and civilized. Under this distinction, we are “normal” and thus obliged to “emancipate” the ignorant and uncivil others. However, Said contends that this colonial epistemology is arbitrary and asymmetrical since:

Imaginative geography of the “our land-barbarian land” variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for “us” to set up these boundaries in our own minds; “they” become “they” accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from “ours” (p. 54).

In particular, we need to consider that as social institutions, schools have often been used as an apparatus to shape young students' minds with colonial perspectives. Merryfield (2001) and Willinsky (1999) argue that not only do students bring into schools stereotypes and biases formed through exposure to mass media but also that school curriculum contributes to legitimizing specific perspectives and positions with regard to other cultures and societies. Accordingly, school curriculum can be a source of recruiting students to share knowledge, demarcations, stereotypes, horrors, and fantasies about people who have different colors and cultures. As Willinsky (1999) states, "it would be amazing if, after a single generation or two since imperialism ended, such a legacy could be left behind" (p. 112).

If cultural studies enables us to see textbooks as a cultural artifact and to explore the representational system conveyed in them, postcolonialism asks us to investigate the textbooks as a colonial text. Building on the latter, another point of the current study is to decolonize the textbook representations of Asia. Decolonizing the textbooks would include investigating how the differences between Asia and the U.S. are constructed in textbooks, what kind of perceptions and positions American readers are encouraged to take up with regard to Asia, and how the textbooks represent Asia to inscribe, maintain, and reinforce colonial messages. In this sense, this study can be regarded as an attempt to disclose the "imperial legacy in education" (Willinsky, 1999, p. 1).

Method

To investigate representations of Asia in textbooks used in the United States, secondary geography textbooks were selected as the major units of analysis. As seen in the five themes—*location, place, human/environment interaction, movement, regions*—which have been greatly influential on geographic curriculum, geography is the major school subject in charge of addressing places, cultures, people, and global movements and issues. In particular, secondary textbooks were chosen because the Eastern Hemisphere, which includes Asia, is mostly taught in secondary schools.

Using the method of purposeful sampling (Patton, 1980), four textbooks which have been adopted in Texas and California were selected for analysis, since these two states are the biggest and most influential marketplaces for textbooks. To see potential changes in treating the same countries or topics, the publication dates of the selected textbooks vary from 1997 to 2005. The four texts are Glencoe's *World Geography* (National Geographic Society & Boehm, 1997), Prentice Hall's *World Geography: Building a Global Perspective* (Baerwald & Fraser, 2000), McDougal Littell's *World Geography* (Arreola, Deal, Peterson, & Sanders, 2003) and Holt, Rinehart, and Winston's *People, Places, and Change* (Helgren, Sager, & Brooks, 2005). For the sake of convenience throughout the argument, these textbooks will be designated as *Glencoe*, *Prentice Hall*, *McDougal Littell*, and *HRW*.

In analyzing the textbooks, content analysis was used since it has been a major method of examining how specific groups or themes are treated in textbooks (Wade, 1993). To perform guided content analytical research, Wade suggests that researchers have a clear definition of the categories of analysis, examine both qualitative and quantitative aspects of the given texts, and have peer reviewers to enhance the validity of interpretation.

Following the first suggestion, the current study is based on three categories of analysis: representations of each country (How is each country described in the geography textbooks under review?); representations of Asia as a whole (How is Asia represented as a whole?); and positioning (How do the textbooks position American readers within the relationship between the

U.S. and Asia?). Werner (2000) provides useful guidelines for investigating qualitative features of textbooks. He suggests that researchers need to focus on such aspects as representation, gaze, voice, intertextuality, and absence. Even though not all of these aspects were investigated, they were generally considered in examining qualitative features of the textbooks. In addition, the quantitative construction of the textbooks was also analyzed, including frequency counts and features of images showing people and cultures of Asian countries.

To cross-check the validity of the categories of analysis and interpretations of the data, two graduate students who are working on their doctoral degrees—one from China and the other from Japan—were involved in this study as peer reviewers. They participated in developing the three categories of analysis and coding the quantitative data used in this study. Originally, I devised the categories and performed initial quantitative and qualitative analyses of the selected textbooks. Then, the peers reviewed the draft paper and gave me feedback on the analytical categories and initial interpretations. Based on discussions with them, I elaborated the analytical categories and revised the quantitative codification. Finally, the Chinese reviewer double-checked, one-by-one, my classification of quantitative data to enhance the reliability of initial classification.

Findings

Allocating Different Images to Each Country

As I noted in introducing cultural studies, “Asia” is not an objective substance but a socio-cultural construction. Indeed, how to define a geographic boundary of Asia and which attributes belong to the Asian world have been changed throughout historical contexts, especially according to the relationship between the East and the West (Lewis & Wigen, 1997; Said, 2003/1978). For example, in terms of physical geography, it is more valid that Europe is considered as an extension of the Eurasian landmass than as a self-contained continent. There is no physical or objective boundary that separates Europe and Asia into different continents. However, being conflated with Asia was not acceptable to many Europeans who believed that they had a distinctive cultural unity (Lewis & Wigen, 1997). As a result, upon the emergence of modern geography in the late nineteenth century, the division between Europe and Asia became a convention, and today most people believe that the two regions are separate continents.

As this illustration shows, Asia was not defined through a consideration of whether there were any socio-cultural and racial commonalities among its constituencies; rather, its definition has been subjected to how Europeans identify Asian boundaries (Said, 2003/1978). Asians became Asians because they were not or should not be Europeans. Consequently, people often assume that there is something common among so-called Asians, when in fact, Asia consists of tremendously diverse peoples and cultures which have nothing to do with each other in many cases. Even the term *East Asia* is arbitrary, as the Islamic, northwest quadrant of China, a country which has been taken for granted as an East Asian country, more properly belongs to Central Asia (Lewis & Wigen, 1997).

Not only how to define Asia but which countries represent Asia and how each country is perceived is also subject to a recognizer’s cultural framework. In other words, all the countries in East Asia do not receive equal attention nor are they perceived with the same images. This is not only because of Asia’s cultural and ethnic diversities but, more importantly, because each country has different symbolic and political positions in American society. Therefore, however Asia is defined, some countries will receive more attention whereas others are marginalized; some

topics will be centered whereas others are skimmed. Textbooks in this study also illustrate these unequal treatments and differentiated portrayals of individual Asian countries.

Table 1 shows the frequency of each country’s photos or pictures in the four textbooks and how many of them illustrate traditional or modern images. These images include visual materials that can be categorized into either past, primitive, and exotic images or more modern, westernized, and civilized images. For example, photos of a samurai warrior or of Mongolians in front of a yurt were regarded as traditional images, whereas those of female workers in front of assembly lines, in a crowded street in Tokyo were regarded as modern images. In the table, traditional images—e.g. a Buddhist temple—do not necessarily mean that they do not exist any more in Asia. Rather, they can be counted as images associated with “traditional” perceptions—exotic, strange, past, bizarre—which Westerners have about Orientals (Marchetti, 1993; Shah, 2003), whereas the modern images can be counted as westernized and more familiar to American readers.

Table 1. Traditional and Modern Images

China		Japan		The Koreas		Taiwan		Mongolia	
Tradi- Tional	Modern	Tradi- tional	Modern	Tradi- tional	Modern	Tradi- tional	Modern	Tradi- tional	Modern
38	23	14	29	5	10(2)*	1	7	8	0
61		43		15(2)*		8		8	

*Two images of North Korea

First of all, the table shows that China and Japan are more frequently represented in the textbooks than the other countries. This seems to be consistent with the social trend that the Asian culture is often represented by China and Japan and that the two countries are considered to be the most significant Asian partners of the U.S. strategically and economically (Harada, 2001; Lutz & Collins, 1993; Oehling, 1980). Another notable finding in the table is that China and Mongolia are represented as having more traditional images, whereas Japan, the Koreas (mostly South Korea), and Taiwan are portrayed as receiving more modern images. In more detail, if China and Mongolia are located at the end of the pre-modern, oriental, and traditional stage, Japan is located at the other end of the industrialized, modern, and civilized stage. Within this hierarchy, South Korea and Taiwan are depicted to be closer to Japan. If we narrow our analysis down to the two most frequently represented countries, China and Japan, the overall image of each country appears to be largely different in the textbooks.

To begin with, China is often described as the past regional leader but now lagging behind the wave of modernization because of its irresponsible leaders and outdated political and economic systems. For instance, all the textbooks start explaining East Asian cultural geography from China’s influence on regional countries in the past. However, most of the descriptions of Chinese history stop at Mao Zedong, often described as an irresponsible leader who endangered many Chinese people’s lives. Only one textbook, *Prentice Hall* (2000), describes Chinese history after Mao in somewhat more detail and the Chinese government’s proactive efforts to improve the quality of living of the Chinese. In many descriptions, the Chinese government is described in negative tones. *HRW* (2005) says, “the Chinese government tries to control many aspects of

everyday life” (p. 609) without explaining what those aspects are. Dealing with irrigation schemes in China, *Prentice Hall* quotes “one Canadian expert” who insists: “They [Chinese leaders] will go ahead with these schemes, because to them it will be the simpler solution to increase the supply of water rather than manage the supply through conservation. That is the typical Communist Party solution” (p. 620).

If China is represented to be a traditional and rather insensible country, Japan often receives positive and modernized images. It is described as having had busy highways since the 1600s; outside Japan, few East Asians own cars (*Glencoe*, 1997, p. 577). Japan is said to have been successful at “balancing its traditional styles in art, theater, music, and architecture with influences from the West,” and the Japanese people are represented as “educated and disciplined” (*McDougal Littell*, 2003, pp. 654–655). The only picture in the four textbooks showing Americans and Asians together is a photo of Japanese and American all-star, baseball players in a Japanese stadium (*HRW*, 2005, p. 630).

Exploring the root of this special treatment of Japan is beyond the range of this study. Nonetheless, what I drew from the textbooks is that the U.S. is described as having played a significant role in opening up and civilizing Japan. It is also the U.S. that aided Japan’s post-World War II restoration and introduced democracy for the first time to Asian countries:

In 1853, U.S. commodore Matthew Perry’s warships sailed into Tokyo Bay. Perry displayed U.S. naval power and brought gifts that showed the wonders of American technology. Perry’s arrival convinced the Japanese that they needed to become as politically strong as the Americans and Europeans. . . . After World War II, the United States occupied Japan until 1952. With U.S. aid, Japan began to rebuild into a major world industrial power. Japan also established a democratic government. (*HRW*, 2005, p. 627)

In the above script, the U.S. is said to have given “gifts” to the Japanese, “aided” them to rebuild, and the Japanese have been following the U.S. leadership without much resistance. It is stated as if Japan could only have emerged as part of the civilized world “thanks to the help of the United States” (Burns, 1999, ¶ 15). However, treating Japan as an American Oriental ally under its tutelage has not been the case from the beginning but constructed within a specific historical context. For example, Burns (1999) contends that Japan had been an exotic, far away, and reclusive country in Americans’ perceptions by the early 19th century. Then, after Commodore Perry’s expedition, there emerged a belief that, in Perry’s words, the United States represented the “civilized world” whose mission was to “kindly take Japan by the hand and aid her tottering steps” (cited in Burns, 1999, ¶ 10). The textbooks’ favorable treatment of Japan seems to reflect the unique cultural and political position that Japan occupies in Americans’ minds.

Representations of Asia: How is Asia Described as a Whole?

Even though each country is portrayed with distinctive images in the selected textbooks, it is also true that people of these countries are still conceived as “Asians” and their cultures as “Asian cultures.” “Asia,” “Asians,” or “Asian cultures” have a unique mythical status in American society which cannot be entirely reduced to any specific country. Therefore, admitting the differentiated treatment of each country, we still need to investigate how the textbooks represent East Asia as a whole. Indeed, many scholars have examined how Asians and Asian cultures are represented in America and what kinds of cultural and political assumptions are underlying the social representation of Asia. For example, investigating adolescent fiction and high school his-

tory textbooks, Harada (1994, 2001) argues that Asians tend to be depicted as obedient people lacking leadership in history. According to her, Asians are likely to be perceived to be “sinister, mysterious, expressionless, heathen, sly,” who are striving to be like their white counterparts (Harada, 1994, pp. 50–51). Other studies show that Asians tend to be perceived as a homogenous group of people who are different from Westerners, who are quiet, unfamiliar, and inscrutable (Chen, 1996; Marchetti, 1993; Shah, 2003).

Many elements of these broader perceptions of Asians were found in the textbooks. They tend to portray East Asian countries as largely homogenous and static, neglecting internal diversities, tensions, and dynamics. In many cases, they are depicted as rather strange and exotic societies whose mode of life is quite different from that of the West. For example, *HRW* (2005) states:

Most Koreans marry someone they meet through their parents. Most families still value sons. This is because only a son can take over the family name. Only a son can lead the ceremonies to honor the family’s ancestors. Some couples who do not have a son adopt a boy with the same family name. This is not too difficult because there are few family names in Korea. (p. 637)

Referring to the entire country, this description does not provide any reliable source except rhetorical expressions such as “most,” “only,” “some,” and “few.” As a matter of fact, a survey performed by a national institute shows that the occurrence of arranged marriages among newly wedded couples was 24.4 percent between 1991 and 1994. Also, it is known that the number of family names in Korea is more than 250, far from “few,” even though the most frequent 10 family names consist of 60 percent of Koreans’ last names.² Another message embedded in the above statement is that Korea is such a male-dominated society that some couples even adopt a boy with the same family name. However, what is absent in this account is that, spurred on by feminist arguments, Koreans have strived to change a male-centered tradition, which has already disappeared in many social sectors and in the younger generation, even though much still needs to be changed for gender equality.

Pictures of people are another resource to see how Asians are depicted in the textbooks, as pictures are the most direct materials through which students get a concrete sense of Asians. Table 2 shows a general trend of images of people in the four textbooks. Pictures whose major subjects are human figures are categorized by similar criteria used in Table 1. In this codification, traditional images include Chinese workers pulling a boat ashore along the Yellow River and a Korean man practicing calligraphy wearing a traditional costume. In contrast, modern images include a Taiwanese worker at a semi-conductor assembly line wearing a white coat or a Japanese office man and woman working at a stylish, modern office.

Table 2. Images of People

China		Japan		The Koreas		Taiwan		Mongolia	
Traditional	Modern	Traditional	Modern	Traditional	Modern	Traditional	Modern	Traditional	Modern
22	16	12	21	2	4(2)*	1	6	7	0
38		33		6(2)*		7		7	

*Two images of North Korea

In the table, we can see a similar trend to that found in Table 1. Chinese and Japanese are more frequently represented; more modern images are assigned to the Japanese, while older and traditional images are assigned to the Chinese. Photos on North Korea seem to illustrate that the photo selection in the textbooks was determined by socio-political considerations. Among the two pictures on North Koreans in the four textbooks, one shows a big, golden-colored statue of Kim Il Sung, the former leader, and the other is a newspaper cartoon of Kim Jong Il, a son of Kim Il Sung, caricatured to be a childish, ill-tempered, and dangerous boy hitting President Bush with a missile (*HRW*, 2005, p. 638, 641). By having a dictator represent the whole country, these images teach students what to remember, what to see, and what kind of feelings and reactions to have with regard to this country. This limited representation ultimately supports the U.S. hardliner policy toward North Korea, without considering how it might impact more than 20 million civilians in that country.

Further analysis of the pictures in humanistic terms revealed that, among the ninety-three total human images, only eleven show smiling and friendly persons. Most of the photos show expressionless, deep-wrinkled, exotic, somewhat mysterious, or even frightening images of Asians. As such, the textbooks are more likely to perpetuate stereotypical and Oriental perceptions of Asians, instead of helping American readers develop more humanistic and friendly understandings.

Textbooks' Positioning of Readers

A text not only delivers information about subjects but also implies a specific way for readers to relate to the subjects and to position themselves within that relationship (Wortham, 2001). In particular, investigating how the textbooks relate American readers to Asia has a special significance for this study, since it will demonstrate whether the textbooks maintain the colonial hierarchy between the West and Asia or provide an alternative, more equitable relationship between the two sides. It has been argued that Western academic disciplines and school curriculum have contributed to creating and reinforcing the colonial distinction between the West and the non-West, the civilized and the uncivilized (Hurren, 2000; Kanu, 2006; Willinsky, 1999). Especially, as a discipline of dividing, defining, and classifying people, landscape, and culture, geography had (or has) contributed to essentializing cultural stereotypes of the non-West that are conducive to colonial concerns (Barnes & Duncan, 1992; Hurren, 2000). It is notable that it was a prominent member of the British *Royal Geographic Society* who insisted that “The indolent sun-loving people of the Southern latitudes have everywhere proved more easy to dominate than those nurtured in a cold atmosphere” (Willinsky, 1999, p. 142). For this reason, Merryfield (2001) points out that the curriculum about other peoples and cultures has been inevitably influenced by the colonial framework. She insists that, to avoid the resurgence of the colonial epistemology in the 21st century, educators need to deconstruct the colonial legacy in school curriculum and explore new ways of inviting other peoples and cultures into school curriculum.

Unfortunately, textbook descriptions of the relationship between the U.S. and Asia seem, in many cases, to be dominated by the colonial framework. We have already seen that the U.S. is represented as having modernized and civilized Japan by giving “gifts that showed the wonders of American technology” (*HRW*, 2005, p. 627). Further, the U.S. is often portrayed as having played a significant role in shaping modern Asian cultures and lifestyles. In one of the textbooks,

for example, culture is described as flowing from the U.S. into other parts of the world, making American standards and cultures dominant in the world:

Since the end of World War II, the fads and fashions of the United States have spread across the globe. American television, American businesses and industries, and American products have greatly influenced today's global culture. (Glencoe, 1997, p. 82)

The same textbook shows a picture of a Japanese teenager, singing in a rock band performing on a street, and another of a McDonald's in Tokyo, Japan. Then, in a review question, the textbook asks students "What are the main features of the global culture?" (p. 83). After stating that South Korea has been influenced by Confucianism, *McDougal Littell* (2003) continues to say: "However, in addition to traditional ideas and ways of life, there is a strong Western influence in South Korea. This can be seen in the Western clothes worn by these students as they enjoy an outing..." (p. 649). Beyond these general descriptions of the unilateral influence from the West to Asian countries and superficial examples such as clothes and foods, it seems hard for students to think about how the West and Asia have interacted and how the new wave of westernization causes conflicts and controversies among Asians who have different responses to the growing influence of Western cultures. Also, largely missing in the textbooks is Asian countries' contribution to global cultures and economies. As a result, American readers may not get a sense that Asia is actively involved in the current multi-directional stream of globalization and not just a passive recipient of Western cultures.

In addition to rare chances to develop multiple perspectives and a sense of interconnectedness, chances to develop a feeling of compassion seems is also minimal in the selected textbooks. According to Nussbaum (1997), compassion originates from the recognition that people can suffer from pain or misfortune in a way for which they are not, or not fully, to blame. By imagining that one could suffer from the similar misfortunes of people in different cultures or countries, one can have an awareness of "common vulnerability" with others as an imperfect human being (p. 91). Based on this awareness, students can realize that human beings have to take care of each other regardless of differences in culture, race, and nationality. However, in one textbook, a rare opportunity to develop such a humanistic tie with Asians is used to position American readers as rescuers, instead of asking them to stand with the sufferers.

After showing a picture of a bus teetering on the edge of a highway torn apart by a 1995 earthquake in Kobe, Japan, a teachers' edition of *McDougal Littell* (2003) recommends that teachers "Ask students what aspects of a city could be affected by such a natural disaster [roads, buildings, power supplies, overtaxing of hospitals, police, and rescue workers]" (p. 660). Instead of inviting students to share Japanese people's sorrow and pain, the textbook asks a rather formal and dry question. In the next page, the textbook shows another picture of an elderly woman being carried from a burning and collapsing building during the earthquake. A question related to this pictured situation asks students, "What damage is apparent in the photograph?" (p. 661). Through these questions, the textbook is likely to make American students take the role of public agency officials or rescuers with regard to the natural disaster that occurred in Japan.

More deeply, what seems to be underlying the textbooks' positioning of American readers is a hierarchical order between the U.S. and Asia, or more broadly between the U.S. and the world. That is, American cultural norms and standards are described to dominate other parts of the world, while Americans are positioned to be protectors and rescuers of people in problems. Through this positioning, textbooks seem to imply a message that American cultures are global

norms and Americans play a leading role in international affairs, a trend that Pike (2000) found in global teaching in American classrooms. Comparing global teaching in Canada, Britain, and the U.S., Pike argues that American teachers tend to put more emphasis on the political and economic role of the U.S. in the world than on empathy and personal engagement.

Conclusion

Using the lenses of cultural studies and postcolonialism, this study has interrogated the cultural and political assumptions underlying the descriptions of Asia found in geography textbooks used in American classrooms. Major findings show that different Asian countries receive unequal amount of attention and different perceptions according to their cultural and political significance to the U.S. Meanwhile, Asia as a whole tends to be portrayed as a homogenous and static world lacking dynamics and inner diversities, with all Asians being portrayed as strange, exotic, and unfathomable people. Furthermore, the textbooks appear to maintain the colonial hierarchy between the U.S. and Asia, or more broadly between the West and the non-West. Western cultures and lifestyles are depicted influencing Asia, whereas Asian countries' influences on global economics and cultures tend to remain unmentioned.

These findings suggest the need for curriculum scholars to rethink the curriculum about others within a global context. As the world rapidly interconnects and our planet faces many serious challenges which require global attention and collaboration, helping students make an informed sense of the world and build relationships with people in different cultures and societies has become an important task for educators (Kirkwood, 2001; Merryfield, 2001). This requires that curriculum scholars pay attention to how others are brought into school curriculum, what socio-cultural and political considerations are embedded in the curriculum about others, and how the curriculum is aligned or at odds with wider social representations of certain peoples and cultures.

Cultural studies and postcolonialism, the two lenses used in this study, are relevant in addressing this topic. Cultural studies help a researcher examine the curriculum about others not just as a pedagogical text but also as a cultural text. It helps to disclose the cultural frameworks underlying the curriculum about other peoples and other cultures, revealing the arbitrariness of the dominant representational system. As Barthes (1998) points out, if the essential function of the dominant discourse is turning the current representation of others into natural and making itself given and innocent, cultural studies attempts to *denaturalize* it by troubling the underlying power and ideology.

The other lens, postcolonialism, specifies what kinds of ideological and cultural concerns are especially problematic in teaching and learning about other cultures and peoples. Postcolonialism argues that, as long as the colonial framework in recognizing the world remains in school curriculum and in wider society, colonialism is not really over. Following this contention, another task of curriculum scholars in this globalizing world is *decolonizing* the curriculum about other peoples and cultures. Curriculum scholars need to interrogate the colonial legacy in teaching and learning about others and explore non-colonial, more equitable, and humanistic ways of engaging students with people who have different cultural norms, beliefs, and value systems.

Indeed, there is a growing attempt to investigate school curriculum as cultural practice (Kanu, 2006) and explore what Willinsky (2006) calls “postcolonial supplement” to deconstruct the colonial message in school curriculum (see also Hurren, 2000). By troubling the textbook portrayal of Asia, this study intends to join these efforts. Major findings and arguments in this study, however, need to be supported by further research on how the curriculum about others is developed

and implemented in practice. Sample questions to explore would include the goals for teaching about Asia; how textbooks are used, revised, or skimmed in practice and why; the kinds of conceptions and knowledge of Asians and Asian cultures produced through the teaching about Asia; and how classroom teaching about Asia is connected with wider social discourses on Asia. In particular, considering that this study is limited to textbook analysis, more diverse data is required to address these topics, for example: teacher interviews, classroom observations, student interviews, and the investigation of curricular materials and popular culture.

Given that this study focuses on the treatment of Asia in American textbooks, some readers may get a sense that the major contentions of this study only apply to American or Western curriculum about the non-Western world. This claim is partly true, since it is undeniable that the latter has been victimized by the Westerners' cultural biases and misunderstandings. However, as I noted in the introduction, racial bias is not just a problem in Whites' recognition of others but is rooted more deeply in our sense-making system. It is ironic that we observe growing nationalism and cultural patriotism in many parts of the world in the stream of globalization. While people, cultures, and commodities are frequently crossing national borders, we also observe widespread attempts to reinforce cultural borders and manipulate resentments against people in different cultures and societies (Volf, 1996). Therefore, rethinking the curriculum about others in a global world is not in the hands of a few teachers in specific countries but has a universal significance.

NOTES

1. The question was used in Army Intelligent Test during World War II.
2. This is partly because Koreans have lived in their land for thousands of years. Through a long history, bigger family lines have emerged who have more descendents.

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