

Research Questions and Methods

Four concerns guided this research.

To characterize the public purposes inherent in school sponsored visits to war memorials, battle sites and military/historical museums.

To learn which specific displays, narratives and group activities attract student audiences in the field.

To discover how students describe the learning after the event.

To seek out differences in student learning and behavior at similar sites in different nations.

Methods

All phases of this research, in Japan, the U.S. and Korea used the same methods:

(a) Examination of websites, texts, images and site-specific layout at museums and memorials, to illuminate the stance adopted by the official agencies responsible for their management.

(b) Surveys administered to high school and college students covering their experiences on school sponsored group field trips to war memorials, museums and other historically significant sites that might have war or peace associations. (Copies of the surveys in each language are posted at blogs.evergreen.edu/meyerknh.)

(c) Video and photos collected at memorials and museums and also on journeys to and from the site, to illuminate the behavioral circumstances surrounding the learning which occurred.

Research strategies and data sources.

1) Site Selection. I selected the observation sites on the basis of two criteria: their real significance in the public memory of recent wars and conflicts, and popularity as destinations for school visits. Thus, in Japan the project centered on memorials and museums in Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Okinawa, and on war and peace museums in Kyoto, Tokyo and Osaka. In the United States, survey pre-tests demonstrated that by far the most common single destination for school trips was Washington DC. War-related

destinations there include Arlington National Cemetery, the memorials on the Mall and the Smithsonian Museums, both National Air and Space and American History. Given the importance of Pearl Harbor to U.S. narratives of World War II, and its significance to Japanese/ U.S. relations today, it too has been a research venue even though more of its visitors arrive as family and senior citizen groups than through their schools. In Korea World, War II has relatively little significance as a discrete event, however the colonization of Korea by the Japanese which ended in 1945 is central. Sites which related to that period and to Korean independence, and by extension to democracy, were central.

- 2) Behavioral observations in the field: Most of the time was spent at memorials and museums. At most sites observation took place on at least two separate occasions. Each visit lasted several hours. Records were also made of student travel on planes, buses and trains, and of meals and shopping on site. Video recording and photos allowed for detailed analysis of student behavior, including exploring where students focused their attention. Sound allowed the recording of guides' explanations.
- 3) Official websites and documentation: Official guides and brochures with particular focus on handouts and fliers aimed at school groups were collected at each memorial or museum. From time to time materials that described student reactions to the site were also available. At indoor museums, photographs of the displays are sometimes prohibited, in which case I took written notes. While my Japanese is only rudimentary and my Korean just beginning to exist, a combination of on-line electronic dictionaries and the rather crude translation facilities on the web itself enabled me to gauge the basic content of the official web-sites associated with the exhibits and memorials. Some web sites in all three countries were replete with specific curricular suggestions as well as historical data about the site its mission.
- 4) Media coverage relating to the construction and exhibits: The national sites honoring the dead in each country overtly link public memory and national identity. In all three countries there is both domestic

and international scrutiny of how the sites represent the past and relations with former enemies. Some have been recently constructed, the Showa-Kan in Tokyo for example and World War II memorial on the Mall in Washington DC. This project also included examining media coverage of debates their construction and also about school-based education about the past, the school textbook controversies for example, and contemporary debates about the sites and their meaning.

5) Surveys: In all three countries I collected responses to over 250 surveys. The collection process was not based on formal sampling techniques, thus the quantitative analysis indicates the values and attitudes of those particular people. Surveys reached students at publicly funded and at privately funded institutions and at both high schools and colleges. The students were given nearly identical surveys about their tours, presented in their own language. The questions relating to preparations, to activities while away and to participation by others were in multiple-choice format. Students were free to identify their destinations in any terms they chose and at the end of the survey they were given three spaces for open-ended comments on what they learned. In Japan, the surveys asked only about one particular kind of tour, the shugaku ryoko, which is a whole-class activity. The U.S. sees relatively few such trips but many others are organized for bands and sports teams etc. so those trips were specifically included.¹ Japanese families also travel with their teenagers, but schools dominate trips to Hiroshima etc. Korean student travel patterns resemble the Japanese more closely. The Korean survey followed the Japanese model, focusing entirely on school related travel, though it differed in that this particular survey was bi-lingual which encouraged some students to answer in English. The Japanese and Korean surveys were translated by students in my classes who are native speakers in those two languages.

¹ The U.S. survey also contained a section on family travel, with its own multiple choice segments on planning choices and its own open-ended questions about what was learned. This section revealed that there is little difference between the learning outcomes or the behavioral descriptions in the two kinds of travel.

Analysis

This work is interdisciplinary, in that the information being collected is intended to shed light on more than one area. In terms of academic disciplines, the major research concerns -- institutional approaches to history and education, the culture of public memory and historical consciousness, and the personal lives, moral posture and social preferences of teenagers in three different countries -- derive from history, communications, education and political psychology and they reach into the applied fields of museum education and active learning pedagogy. The work is also interdisciplinary in the kinds of data being collected, which include video and photo documentation of behavior and interactions, photo documentation of museum texts and the original documents themselves, quantitative and qualitative survey responses, and media coverage and scholarly writing about the sites and their pedagogical purpose.

In some ways this work is analogous to the study of history textbooks which continue to be surprisingly important and controversial issues in all three countries, as domestic and international challenges erupt repeatedly about the legitimacy, accuracy and propaganda purposes of particular texts. One can find echoes in equally intense (though usually purely domestic) confrontations about the building and uses to which war memorials and history museums are put. The most significant difference lies in the fact that this work attends not only to what the museums and memorials say, but also to what their intended audience says and does. Communication theorists suggest that an interaction cannot be called complete unless the sender receives feedback which shows what was heard. This work attempts to do just that, to link the story told at memorials and history museums with the learning in school field trip participants.

Active learning theory undergirds this entire research design, in its claim that when students entire situation relates to the learning at hand, then the material conveyed is actually absorbed.