

ABSTRACT

The ICU-COE North East Asian Dialogue (NEAD) Project, 2005 & 2006
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In February of 2005 the first International Christian University Center of Excellence (ICU-COE) North East Asian Dialogue brought together Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Russian students and civil society members to address the question, "What are the obstacles to intercultural communication in North East Asia?" Besides diversity at the nation-state level, the participants were chosen to capture sub-national diversity as well. Using a computer-assisted structured dialogue process the participants identified 78 major obstacles to intercultural communication in North East Asia. Eleven obstacles were selected as being of fundamental importance, and of those, the issue of contested history was seen as the "root cause" or fundamental obstacle. If this obstacle could be addressed, it would positively affect the ability to address all the other obstacles.

The second Dialogue in 2006 was, thus, organized to begin to address the historical issues in the region. Much care was taken to create an atmosphere in which both a "wide" and "deep" view of history could emerge. The vehicle for doing this was the ICU campus itself which is simultaneously a Jomon era archeological site and the site of the Nakajima Aircraft Corporation in the World War II era. In between it was home to generations of local farmers. So, we began our gathering with a ceremony carried out by Ainu participants (the indigenous people of Japan) on the university grounds, a greetings to all participants amidst Meiji era textiles on the second floor of our museum, and a presentation by students on artifacts found in a WW II bomb crater on campus. Participants then divided up into four Dialogue Circles, each of which represented the diversity of the overall group. Each participant contributed a twenty-minute historical narrative generated from his or her specific socio-cultural-historical point of view. The other participants in the Circle had an opportunity to ask clarifying questions about each narrative. All the narratives were video taped and are being archived (eventually with translations of the texts into five languages - Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Russian and English) on a website that is being developed to accompany this project. This virtual dialogue space is meant to provide a venue so that interaction between the participants can continue at the civil society level independently of government funding support in the future.

The Circles recorded 30 hours of videotaped narratives, and there is a videotape of the whole three-day event as well. Sometimes, after participation in the Dialogue, people were not satisfied with their initial text. Sometimes people shared things in the small group, "community" context of the Dialogue Circle that they would be uncomfortable sharing in the more public virtual space of the internet. Since this project is being carried out in a larger socio-political context in which Japanese society is increasingly concerned about the privacy of personal information and in a political environment experiencing increased sensitivity regarding regional history, we are proceeding very cautiously in the development of the public website.

However, a preliminary analysis of the oral and written narratives reveals some very interesting themes. There are narratives about constructing a new cosmopolitan concept of the global citizen. Across the different nation-states there are parallel experiences of destruction and loss. There is the emerging, previously untold, comprehensive story, of the Korean diaspora. There are the "hidden" histories of Ainu, Okinawans, Evenki, Khanmigans, Buryats, Japanese "returnees" from Siberia, Manchuria and North Korea, and of people left behind in all three areas. And there are the generational stories of people who actually experienced events versus those who have just read about them in books.

What was remarkable was the quality of human relationships that emerged from the work of videotaping each other's narratives in the Dialogue Circles. Real listening was accomplished, and a small step was taken in the creation of a multifocal regional history.