

HISTORICAL REVISIONISM SUPERCHARGED: LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS (LLMs) IN EDUCATION IN JAPAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the current structure of large language models (LLMs) implemented in Japanese schools, especially primary and secondary classrooms, constitutes a supercharged mode of historical revisionism. LLMs are structurally disallowed to maintain internal world models and thus rely on existing corpora for outputs, which, in Japan's context, risks perpetuating existing historical revisionist texts saturated in Japanese-exclusive training data. The state's caution against "hallucinations," coupled with the contemporary rise of revisionist groups such as Tsukurukai, creates a structural symmetry between narratives where majoritarian revisionist historiography is more likely to thrive. Moreover, Japan's cultural and political (robot) anthropomorphic animism, also perpetuated by the state and especially susceptible in children, means that LLMs may exist on the same plane as humans in the making and recording of history, which extrapolates the flawed human essence to Japanese imperial atrocities, relativizing them as inculpable narratives. Ultimately, LLMs' structural oblivion creates a form of historical revisionism two orders above simple redaction: to manufacture an epistemology of symmetrical narratives over historical "truth" and to imbue the transcendental human spirit, kami, in the nation-state and its atrocities in the form of "narrative humanism," depoliticization being revisionism's final goal.

KEYWORDS

Large language models, historical revisionism, education in Japan, collective memory

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2020s have witnessed an accelerated awareness and focus of large language models (LLMs), under the umbrella category "generative AI" (or simply "AI"), by the Japanese government within the education system, as part of "the Big Bang of AI in Japan" celebrated in a Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) policy paper [1]. In May 2023, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) Policy Bureau issued guidance titled "Regarding future response to use of ChatGPT and other generative AI in school settings" to boards of education, in the wake of OpenAI's ChatGPT's already widespread usage in Japanese schools [2,3]. Subsequently, MEXT released tentative guidelines for the use of LLMs in elementary and secondary schools, approving integration, in the following months [2,4]. Specifically, MEXT designated 52 schools across 37 municipalities as "generative AI pilot schools" for "knowledge [to be] accumulated" on LLMs' use in education [2]. As a result, 48 new textbooks across eight subjects now include generative AI as a major topic, a dramatic increase from only one book four years prior [5,6]. This is in part a response to the fact that, already, "junior high school students mainly use generative AI for research" and that "LLMs create information that does not exist as if it actually exists, and the false information that has been generated appears so correct that humans, even experts, cannot determine whether it is real" [5]—a phenomenon also noted repeatedly in the LDP (ruling party) policy paper and MEXT's K-12 GenAI Guidelines as

“hallucinations” (ハルシネーション) [1,7]. Accordingly, the 2023 guideline stresses “information utilization competency” (情報活用能力) [3]. However, it is also well known that Japan’s education system is saturated by historical revisionism, a whitewashing of the nation’s colonial history [8,9,10,11]. In Japan’s elementary and secondary schools’ context, this paper argues that the official endorsement, canonization, and rollouts of LLMs in education do not forestall historical revisionism but amplify it due to LLMs’ and Japanese political environment’s systematic knowledge production. This paper first reviews criticisms of LLMs in terms of “hallucination,” Japan’s long-standing institutional practice of historical revisionism, and their structural similarities in terms of historical forgetting—the first order of revisionism. Next, it introduces Japan’s unique animist/anthropomorphist cultural and political context, arguing that LLMs, inevitably anthropomorphized as state-sponsored solutions to gender and ethnic anxieties, participate in the humanization and depoliticization of historical narratives themselves—the second order of revisionism. Finally, it concludes with implications for the future.

2. LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS AND STRUCTURAL OBLIVION

On the one hand, research on LLMs’ so-called “hallucination” phenomenon as an agent of historical memory has been ample. LLMs have been widely reported to “generate false or misleading information due to reliance on patterns in training data rather than verified facts” [12]. Numerous mutually synonymous terms have been coined and popularized to denote the phenomenon of LLM-produced text “transform[ing] truth into a question of frequency and majority opinion”: *careless speech* [13], *stochastic parrot* [14] and, indeed, *hallucination* [15]. Pelevina et al. [16] note apparently innocuous phrases such as *open dialogue*, *friendship*, or *mutual understanding* that “distorted . . . collective political memory” in the context of Finland’s political position. These concerns echo Makhortykh’s [17] about “algorithmic systems,” themselves “mnemotechnologies that organize our memories . . . including the ones of mass atrocities.” In a more technical sense, Patil and Jadon [18] observed that LLMs “learn probabilistic patterns in language data” rather than symbolic AI’s adherence to “explicit logical rules,” effectively foreclosing LLMs’ adapting “rule-based symbolic systems” in their reasoning. This means that LLMs, unable to maintain internal world models, are structurally prevented from escaping a “representational heuristic” of existing text—a rough analogy to Marx’s value theory: LLMs as a technology of knowledge production cannot produce “new” knowledge but only transfer knowledge from a place of hegemony. Importantly, as “epistemically opaque” processes, LLMs may exercise remembrance/forgetting “independently of human agents,” a mode of memory construction and propagation neglected by the dominant humanist view on remembrance—an overemphasis on human agents [19,20].

On the other hand, Japan remains notorious for historical revisionism in textbooks and wider ethnolinguistic texts, which produced an inescapable and ideologically charged revisionism in the existing Japanese corpora. As an example, in 2001, MEXT approved the *New History Textbook*, a Japanese junior high school history textbook created by the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (also known as Tsukurukai), a conservative organization founded in 1996 [21]. According to Tsukurukai’s 1997 declaration, the creation of the new textbook was in response to a “shameful loss of national pride” because “the Japanese are treated like criminals who must continue apologizing [for the past] for generations to come” [22]. Accordingly, the textbook contains no mentions of the comfort women system of militarized rape, no mentions of Unit 731 and the Imperial Japanese Army’s human experimentation programs, the Nanjing Massacre as “accusations . . . made at the IMTFE [International Military Tribunal for the Far East]” and “ongoing debate [that] does not allow a final judgment,” framing of colonization of Korea as “contributing to the development and modernization of the country” with no mentions of forced assimilation or resistance suppression, and framing of Asia-Pacific War as “war of self-defense”

or “war of Asian [anti-West] liberation” [21]. Despite the textbook’s negligible adoption, multiple major private companies that author and issue elementary and secondary school textbooks in Japan “engaged in self-censorship to avoid the controversy and retain their market shares” [11]. Subsequently, mentions of comfort women dropped significantly in 2002–2006 Japanese textbooks to a meager 20% [11]. Indeed, a parallel emerges between Japan’s institutional efforts to create its relatively independent LLMs trained on Japanese data, such as Tokyo Institute of Technology’s Swallow (continual pre-training with Japanese data based on English-pretrained model Llama 2), and its institutional efforts to create alternate history—revisionism—within the Japanese textbooks [23]. Swallow operating on “1.6B tokens from Japanese Wikipedia” as part of its 90% Japanese data [23], consistent with the active “LLM-jp” program launched by the National Institute of Informatics (NII) in May 2023 that names Japanese Wikipedia as part of its Japanese corpus [24]. The problem is that Japanese Wikipedia exclusively cites Japanese sources for World War II content, unique among other languages’ articles on the same topics, and is highly compromised by far-right revisionism [25,26]. LLMs trained on Japanese Internet may also be predetermined by the sheer volume of heavily crawled and indexed text from “Japan’s most popular online community,” 2channel, which is simultaneously a hotbed for far-right ideology [27]. LLMs in education are thus uniquely susceptible to Japanese historical revisionism.

More importantly, the *New History Textbook* reveals the new quandary of historicism entering the 21st century, especially in relation to criticisms it received from Historical Science Society of Japan (*Rekishigaku Kenkyūkai*). Namely, in addition to the whitewashing of Japan’s imperial atrocities, these criticisms also target the textbook’s presenting mythological figures (such as Emperor Jimmu and Yamatotakeru) as factual historical figures and overall “many errors of detail and one-sided, arbitrary or distorted views of history” that prioritize a political agenda over historical rigor [21]. However, Tsukurukai’s proclamation exhibits a parallel: according to the far-right organization, it is instead the inclusion of Japan’s imperial atrocities that is “propaganda of former war enemies . . . treated as if it were the truth” [22]. This structural symmetry between revisionist forces and historicist academia over the claim of truth creates a situation of “your words against mine” where claims of factual error may be countered by claims of factual error while historical “truth,” where it may exist, is rendered irrelevant—noted by Daqing Yang [28] to resemble the story of *Rashōmon*. An analogy can be made here with US and Latin American textbooks’ treatment of the Haitian Revolution: instead of *revolution*, *revolt* and *rebellion* were used, among the few textbooks that mentioned it [29]. As Trouillot observes, “[e]ffective silencing does not require a conspiracy, not even a political consensus” [29]—systematic postwar revisionism began immediately after the occupation ended in April 1952 [10], and such revisionism is not solely top-down but also “grassroots” [11]. The emphasis on “hallucinations” in official narratives, then, cannot amount to historical sensibility or a safeguard against revisionism, as the output of LLMs, even if historically accurate, may be questioned not according to factuality but existing structures of denial and forgetting. This form of historical revisionism is an order higher than simple redaction.

3. JAPAN AND NARRATIVE HUMANISM

Just as the silencing of the Haitian Revolution was born out of the revolution’s active defiance of European humanist ontology—“that enslaved Africans and their descendants,” due to being subhuman, “could not envision freedom” [29], Japan’s historical revisionism in textbooks is intimately related to a Japanese animist ontology, the same force underlying the promotion of LLMs in children’s education, which is discussed next.

There exists tension within official narratives—as well as Japan’s national culture—between the tendency towards AI anthropomorphism and LLMs’ nonhuman status. The official guidelines

caution against AI anthropomorphism. MEXT's Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau [7] notes "[r]isk of mistakenly perceiving AI as having a personality" (AI に人格があるかのように誤認するリスク) attributed to "children and students" (児童生徒); instead, LLMs must be seen as a "useful tool" (有用な道具) while "humans ultimately make the decisions and assume responsibility for the final outcomes" (最後は人間が判断し、生成 AI の出力結果を踏まえた成果物に自ら責任を持つ). However, Japan's state policies surrounding robots, AI, and technological innovation in general are functionally rooted in anthropomorphism. Concurrent with Japan's declining population, inasmuch as the "robotization" of Japanese society remains a "renewal of old values—especially those represented by the patriarchal extended family and wartime ideologies," as Jennifer Robertson recognized within Abe administration's Innovation 25, robots—or embodied advanced laboring technologies—shall be "feminized and masculinized" as quasi-humans [30]. This leads to state-endorsed imaginaries of robots co-existing (共存) with humans, rather than instruments or "tools" [31]. It is arguable that the implementation of LLMs in schools, part of the national innovation scheme, relies more on robotic anthropomorphic culture than the policy papers insist. The state's unrelenting advocacy for technological advancement and subsequent ideologically charged robot anthropomorphism manifests in two ways: sexism and xenophobia. On the one hand, promoted technology reproduces "sexual and gendered division of human labor," with "elder-care, child-care, and household 'maid' robots" at the forefront of trade literature and robots treated as "colleagues" in care settings [31], in response to the proletarianization of women ("womenomics") and their "reluctance . . . to marry and have children" [30]. On the other hand, the implementation of robotic labor in these already gendered—specifically, feminized—spaces in the unpaid or underpaid workforce ("*teachers*, nurses, translators, and newscasters") is a means to "mitigate[e] the sociocultural anxieties provoked by foreigners" as migrant workers towards a "technologically closed country" [30]. A microcosm of Japan's population crisis, the Japanese teacher workforce, especially in elementary schools, faces sharp decline in competition, "unattractive" labor conditions, mass retirement, and, most tellingly, primary unfilled positions rising due to female teachers' maternity and childcare leaves [32,33,34]. It is reasonable to assume that the push for generative AI in primary and secondary education follows the same national, anthropomorphic, and sexist-xenophobia scheme in response to the population crisis.

Japan's religious and popular cultures likewise reinforce AI anthropomorphism—or, at least, animism—in educational settings. As Robertson argues, the "dominant perception among Japanese of robots" is robots as "benign, benevolent *living* entities" [35]. Due to Shintoism and manga/anime influences, it is widely and tacitly recognized by Japanese roboticists and schoolchildren alike that nonhuman entities, especially robots, can be understood as part of a "continuous network of beings" as humans', possessing *kami* (spirits or souls) [30,36]. This anthropomorphic animism for robots takes place specifically in back-and-forth communication (question-answer exchanges) [30], which is "experienced as a social relationship where the goal is not control or mastery but attachment" [36], which, evidently, LLMs embody the best. Capturing this force, government-funded campaigns adapt the very same friendly, endearing, and engaging anthropomorphization tactic as propaganda [37]. Much accordingly to the animist continuum between popular culture and state's ideology, roboticist like Hiroshi Ishiguro champion robotics as "a science of human–*human* interaction" (emphasis original), and child participants in a 2025 study "imagined future technologies incorporated elements of anthropomorphised AI," designing AI systems with "human-like attributes such as age, gender and honorifics (Mr./Ms., -chan/-kun)" [38]. LLMs in education will inevitably take on quasi- or sub-human traits as friendly, helpful role of a robot teacher.

Coupled with the aforementioned epistemic violence inherent in LLMs' training data, infrastructure, and cultural use, the anthropomorphism of AI in classrooms augments historical

revisionism. As Makhortykh observes, prominent is the bias that “human agents play a central role in the context of communication about the past” while nonhuman agents often override human agency in this regard [20]. Due to an ontological-epistemological shortcoming that prevents nonhuman agents from being categorized as history-makers, such as in the case of many schoolchildren [38], they must retrospectively be recast as human-like, in accordance with Paul Ricœur’s phenomenology of the “‘capable human being’: being able to speak, being able to intervene in the course of affairs, being able to recount, being able to ascribe an action to oneself by making oneself its actual author” [39]. This phonocentric endowment of human agency upon LLMs and robots generally enables the equivocation of “both ‘what happened’ and ‘that which is said to have happened’” in the dual human participation “both as actors and as narrators” in history [29]. In effect, this both humanist and “flat” ontological historiography in which history-tellers and history-makers are united on a single plane of *kami* risks subsequently “humanizing”—relativizing; every human makes mistakes—the very historical events themselves. This manner of historical revisionism is the second order above the first in Sec. 1, embodied by the liberal humanist school of historiography represented by Golo Mann, who proclaimed “the catastrophe of Germany and the European Jews” was “spontaneous, wilful, unreasonable and senseless”—what may be called “narrative humanism” [40,41]. In this manner, the aforementioned crisis of the indeterminability of truth within narratives is exacerbated by one order higher: the relativizing power of narrative humanism is capable of not only disputing truth on the ground of narrative but depoliticizing narrative to promote alternative “truth.” In Japan, LLMs in schools are a potent candidate of this ultimately revisionist project: as AI cannot be faulted for “hallucinations,” seen as a pure and isolated mechanical flaw within “AI nature” rather than the aggregation of training data, Japan cannot be faulted for historical “wrongs,” themselves replaced by the advanced, pacified, and amicable “new Japan,” also anthropomorphized with *kami* [30]. Japan’s official caution against LLMs’ “hallucination” amidst massive AI rollouts in education settings turns out a powerful technique of depoliticization—the ultimate goal of historical revisionism—rather than a custodian of truth.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Takashi Hoshiyama [42] categorizes Japan’s post-war opinions on the Nanjing Massacre as two groups: “the massacre affirmation school” and “the massacre denial school.” Rather than two oppositional camps of historical sensibilities, they embody the two orders of aggravation of historical revisionism discussed above: the first order, Yang’s *Rashōmon* analogy where contradictory and relativistically epistemologically weighted accounts ultimately point to “no ‘Truth’ at all” [28], and the second order, Mann’s narrative humanism where history, historical accounts, agents in history, and agents recording history are all implicated with human imperfection, a transcendental, apolitical essence such as *kami*. Notably, both orders are more advanced than simple and purposeful redaction, denial, or even omission (though such efforts persist); these higher orders of historical revisionism allow for the free flow of information in the digital age and even take advantage of its presumed uncensorability—and *uncensurability*. Both functions perfectly align with LLMs’ infrastructure and cultural function. First, LLMs lack internal world models that may allow them to escape majoritarian (right-wing) ensnarement. Second, LLMs are framed by official narratives as apolitical agents of “hallucination” whose outputs may be accepted or rejected at will. Finally, Japan’s present cultural tendency to anthropomorphize advanced technology, especially those termed “AI” like LLMs are, relativizes these “mistakes” as part of the unimpeachable human/robot nature, which extrapolates to Japan’s body politic as “the world’s most AI-friendly country” facing forward [1]. LLMs are thus a powerful tool of historical revisionism, scoring erasure, oblivion, euphemization, trivialization, relativization, and, ultimately, depoliticization in one state-sponsored policy. LLMs in schools where children entrust their educators, LLMs among them, result in historical revisionism and,

thereafter, worsening international relations with previously aggrieved states of Japanese imperialism.

Although much of LLMs' role in historical revisionism in Japanese schools is inevitable due to structural limitation discussed above, efforts must be made in terms of structures in order to combat the rising tide of right-wing extremism in Japan. In a 2023 UNESCO interview [43], Dr. Libing Wang warns of some of the same risks mentioned above: "hallucinatory data," "homogeneity of opinions," and "culturally insensitive or biased content." However, Wang associates these challenges with "localization," arguing that "Western data," which most LLMs are trained on, may "lead to a lack of contextual and cultural relevance in the Asia-Pacific or even racial and gender biases that could condition the minds of the generations to come" [43]. This ignores the pressing racial and sexual biases present in East Asian cultures, especially in the 2020s. Ironically, the public ChatGPT 5.2 model [44] answers questions about comfort women with much emphasis on the imperial policy's coercive nature and industrial scale than Japanese Wikipedia, which formalizes the victims as "prostitutes, hostesses, and the like" (娼妓や酌婦) [45]. As this paper has hopefully shown, a simple acknowledgement of "hallucination" or biases without substantive change counterproductively strengthens historical revisionism. It can thus be proposed that, if LLMs must be implemented in schools, East Asian nations shall exchange corpora, Japanese developers train their models much more cross-linguistically, to avoid the "inbreeding" of existing narratives. Additionally, as LLMs' structural limitations cannot be circumvented with user sensibility, efforts must be made to demystify LLMs as a (re)writer of history in a strictly and inevitably oblivious and revisionist manner.

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