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How is Latin America perceived in the explanation of the term “Third World” in Japanese junior-high and high school textbooks?

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What does “Third World” mean if the Second does not exist any longer? Does the Third World include Latin America? Would Latin America be better understood in the classroom when presented as a part of the Third World? To answer these questions, the explanation of the term “Third World” was analyzed of 24 “social studies” textbooks for junior high school and 44 textbooks of “world history”, “geography”, “contemporary society”, and “political science & economics” for high school, which were in use in the academic year 1994-95. The results show us the following: (1) the term “Third World” is used in 6 out of 24 junior high school textbooks and in 27 out of 44 high school textbooks; (2) the term “Third Power” is used in 5 junior high school textbooks and in 4 high school textbooks; (3) geography textbooks tend to omit these terms; (4) Latin America is explicitly included in the Third World in only 11 out of 33 cases in which the term is used; (5) in the other cases, the explanation of the term “Third World” refers only to the Asian and African countries which achieved political independence after the Second World War; (6) in some cases, the explanations of the

term may cause a misunderstanding that Latin American countries had attained political independence after 1945; (7) in many cases, the fact that most Latin American countries, unlike many other "Third World" nations, have almost two centuries of history as politically independent republics, is not clearly stated. From these and other findings in the analysis, we can conclude that Japanese students may have a rather unbalanced and inadequate perception of Latin America, if their knowledge is based only on the description given in the school textbooks now in use.