

Sharing the Burden of the Past

Legacies of War in Europe, America, and Asia

Edited by
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Proceedings of the symposium Textbooks, History, and War Memory in Europe, America, and Asia, held in Tokyo on 13 and 14 November 2001, and the forum Paying Wages 60 Years Overdue: Compensating Victims of World War II Forced Labor, Does Germany's Example Apply to Japan? convened in Tokyo on 5 February 2002.

The symposium and forum were conducted in Japanese, English, and also partly in German. These trilingual proceedings reproduce the original English and Japanese presentations with translations respectively into Japanese and English. The German papers are reproduced along with their English and Japanese translations. In the case of discrepancies between original and translation, the original-language text is the sole norm. The original-language texts do not carry translators' credits.

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Preface I

Face the Past to Win the Future

Gebhard Hielscher

World War II had two main perpetrators, Germany in Europe and Japan in Asia. It seems natural that both countries are often compared, also in regard to how they handled the aftermath of that war. Some of these comparisons are quite convincing, others not so. Starting from the premise that only comparable things should be compared, I would like to sort out some elements where Japan and Germany differ significantly (A), then proceed to point out some of the differences in their postwar behavior (B), and finally touch upon two international conferences jointly sponsored by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung of Germany (FES, henceforth identified in English as Friedrich Ebert Foundation) and The Asia Foundation (TAF), headquartered in the United States (C). Both conferences were held in Tokyo, in November 2001 and February 2002, and dealt with important aspects of the postwar settlement of wartime issues. This publication is based on their proceedings.

(A) The Incomparables

1. Geography: To begin with the obvious and uncontroversial: Japan is an island nation, Germany is situated in the middle of a continent. If Germany wanted to be accepted again by its European neighbors, it had to come to terms with its past behavior in a way acceptable to these neighbors. In contrast, Japan felt it could disregard its neighbors and run away from its past for a long time because America protected it anyway.

2. The Holocaust: Japan has plenty to account for, but it certainly did not commit anything comparable to the systematic, state-organized, and immensely cruel mass murder of millions of Jews in Germany and German-occupied parts of Europe. Therefore, it is unfair and inappropriate to compare German efforts, to at least symbolically and financially express remorse for what Germans did to the Jews, with anything Japan did or did not do with regard to victims of Japanese misdeeds.

3. Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The A-bomb was originally developed to be used against Germany, but when it was ready for use in July 1945, Adolf Hitler's so-called Third Reich had already collapsed. The shocking damage caused by the two bombs dropped on Japan was so terrifying that many Japanese began to think of themselves as victims of a crime against humanity, conveniently forgetting the crimes committed by their countrymen against fellow Asians and others. To put the first use of nuclear weapons against human beings into perspective, let me quote former U.S. ambassador to Japan and Harvard professor Edwin O. Reischauer: "An argument could be made for having used the first atom bomb on Hiroshima in order to shock the Japanese leaders into surrender, because the decision even then hung precariously in the balance, but there was certainly no justification for using the second bomb."¹

4. The Defeat: Germany capitulated in May 1945. On the 23rd of that month, the Allied Powers deposed the last government of the Third Reich. Germany ceased to exist, was divided into four occupation zones, and ruled directly by the four Allies, the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union; exactly four years later, the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) was established on the territories of the three western zones, with Bonn as its provisional capital, to be followed a week later by the founding of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) on the territory of the Soviet occupation zone, with East Berlin as its capital. After four years of *discontinuity*, Germany had reappeared as two rival states, reunited into one Germany 41 years later in October 1990.

In contrast, Japan, which had capitulated in a two-stage process, on 15 August (the day of the radio speech by the emperor) and on 2 September 1945 (the signing of the surrender documents), continued as a state, with Emperor Hirohito still on the throne and government officials still at their desks. Unlike Germany, Japan was not divided into separate occupation zones but was ruled indirectly through the Japanese bureaucracy as one unit by a single U.S.-led occupying authority until regaining sovereignty in 1952. The keyword to describe Japan's early postwar period, in comparison to Germany, would be *continuity*.

(B) The Comparables

After eliminating these major differences, there remain large areas open to comparison: the wars of aggression by the armed forces of Germany and Japan against other countries, policies and actions in occupied or colonized territories, war crimes in the narrow legal sense—meaning crimes that go beyond what are considered “normal” war activities—and finally how Japan and Germany dealt with these war legacies since 1945.

1. The prosecution of war crimes: The Allied Powers conducted war crimes trials against Germans (in Nuremberg) and Japanese (in Tokyo). But in the very same year (1958) that the Japanese government ordered the release from Sugamo prison of the last remaining inmates who had been convicted a decade earlier at the Tokyo War Crimes Trials, Germany set up in the town of Ludwigsburg the Center for Investigating National Socialist Crimes. The Ludwigsburg Center is still operating to this day. It has initiated criminal proceedings against more than 100,000 suspects of whom about 6,500 have been found guilty of war-related crimes. In other words, German courts have continued to pass sentences on German nationals who had committed crimes against humanity.

In contrast, Japanese prosecutors and criminal courts have not pursued any cases against Japanese suspects. Even the commander of the notorious Unit 731, which operated camps where approximately 3,000 victims died cruel deaths, many as part of inhumane “medical experiments” not unlike those conducted in German concentration camps, could live out his life, even reopen a medical practice under his real name, unperturbed by any challenge from Japan’s legal system.

2. The treatment of the prewar period and the wartime in history textbooks: See below under (C)1.

3. Compensation and reparation policies: One aspect of this broad topic, compensation for forced labor, is taken up under (C)2.

(C) The Two FES–TAF Conferences

1. The first symposium, titled “Textbooks, History, and War Memory,” was held at the Japan National Press Club (NKC) in Tokyo on 13 and 14 November 2001, followed by two media events on 15 November, a press conference at the NKC and a press dinner at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan (FCCJ). The symposium drew some 200 participants (academics, journalists, diplomats, officials of political parties and trade unions, etc.) and attracted exceptional media coverage with more than a dozen major press reports, including coverage by three of Japan’s mass-circulation national dailies. The symposium also merited the attention of Japan’s two news agencies, Kyodo and Jiji. NHK, Japan’s public television network, aired a detailed interview with the symposium’s keynote speaker. Participation of leading experts from Germany, France, Poland, the Netherlands, and Italy gave the audience direct exposure to how textbook reconciliation has progressed in Europe. The discussion of war-related textbook controversies in the United States by American experts was both refreshing and useful. The openness of American scholars in airing problems effectively countered the often-heard argument that Japan need not engage in reconciliation in Asia because only nations that *lose* wars are obligated to do

so. This argument often comes with the corollary that Japan, like the Allies in World War II, carried out merely a “normal war” and therefore should not be asked to atone for its past because, unlike Germany, Japan did not commit a Holocaust. Textbook reconciliation experts from Japan and South Korea demonstrated how good will and appropriate self-reflection can produce impressive results, even friendship.

2. Also held at the Japan National Press Club, the forum on compensation for wartime forced labor took place 5 February 2002 and drew about 100 participants of a similar quality as the symposium, but with a larger share of diplomats from Japan, Germany, the United States and several East European countries, as well as Israel. Again, there was remarkable media coverage. Japan’s third-largest national daily, *Mainichi Shimbun*, with a circulation of almost 4 million, devoted nearly half a page to the topic, including an interview with one of the two main speakers and a commentary critical of Japan’s refusal to compensate forced labor. These two main speakers reported, from a German and an American point of view, on the difficult negotiations leading to the conclusion of a multilateral agreement that provided for German payments of compensation to people, mostly from Eastern Europe, who had been forced to work in wartime Germany. The German compensation payments are based not on established legal claims, but on a new law passed by the German parliament in July 2000 to set up a foundation financed jointly by government and industry. In other words, it is not a matter of legalistic arguments but of the political will to come to terms with the past and pay at least something for it. It is the lack of a comparable political will that has prevented Japan from facing up to its own past—not treaties or statutes of limitation.²

Notes

1. Edwin O. Reischauer: *Japan: The Story of a Nation* (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1971), p. 216. By the way, the author was born in Tokyo, spent his youth in Japan, and dedicated this book “To My Brother Bob, the first American casualty in World War II, Shanghai, August 14, 1937.”
2. For a more detailed comparison, see Gebhard Hielscher, “Wie Japan und Deutschland mit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg umgehen,” in Manfred Pohl and Iris Wiczorek, ed., *Japan 2000/2001 Politik und Wirtschaft* (Institut für Asienkunde, Hamburg, 2001), pp. 327–44 (in German); idem, “Senso to kokka—Nihon to Doitsu no sengo shori,” in *Kanagawa Daigaku Hyoron* (Kanagawa University Review) 36/2000, from p. 58 (in Japanese).

Preface II

Historical Reconciliation in East Asia: The Search for an Elusive Consensus

Andrew Horvat

Why discuss World War II nearly 60 years after the last gun was silenced? Why talk about France, Poland, and California in this context in Japan? And why put together such seemingly disparate issues as school textbooks and forced labor?

The immediate answer for these questions was provided by anti-Japanese demonstrations in Korea and diplomatic protests voiced from both South Korea and China in the first half of 2001 in response to the approval by the Japanese government of a nationalist textbook for use in schools.

A broader rationale, however, comes from Fujisawa Hiei of Waseda University, who stated on the first day of the Textbook, History and War Memory Symposium (13–14 November 2001), “History is not just about the past but the present and the future as well.” This comment is particularly apt in the East Asian context where textbooks children use are seen—rightly or wrongly—as officially approved history. Although the significance of textbooks in this era of abundant alternative sources of information is becoming questioned, how Japanese high school history textbooks today describe the relationship between the Yamato (Japanese) court and the ancient Korean kingdom of Mimana can draw protests from Korean critics, who are able to point to a time in the first half of the twentieth century when the nature of the links between these two kingdoms was officially interpreted to justify Japan’s colonial rule of the Korean peninsula.

As Fujisawa states, “. . . disagreements over interpretation of past events between Japan and China, and Japan and Korea can trigger regional instability and as a result can threaten the peace and security of the entire world.” At a time when the world faces new threats in a post–Cold War environment, unresolved issues left from the past in East Asia have the potential to affect negatively the close international cooperation needed to fight forces of instability.

Gebhard Hielscher, Tokyo representative of the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation,

and I have been discussing the concept of international historical reconciliation ever since the early 1980s when as Tokyo-based journalists we both covered South Korean demonstrations against the whitewashing of the past in Japanese high school textbooks. Since leaving journalism to work for our respective foundations, we have been able to put into effect an idea that had been germinating for two decades: introducing to Japanese audiences work done elsewhere to reconcile conflicting interpretations of history.

The pioneering work of the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research is a case in point. As explained in the symposium portion of this book, the geopolitical conditions that existed during the Cold War in Europe and the concomitant moves toward regional economic integration served to encourage those who wished to create a common past. Professor Mark Selden of Binghamton University refers to similar forces of inclusiveness in the United States when describing the frank discussion in American high school textbooks of the internment of Japanese-Americans in concentration-camp-like conditions in California during World War II. The eventual righting of this wrong through an official apology and the payment of compensation is described in a number of U.S. textbooks as a triumph of the democratic system.

The textbook symposium and the subsequent forum on forced labor (*Paying Wages 60 Years Overdue*, 5 February 2002) succeeded in triggering discussion on controversial public policy issues, which was the aim of both The Asia Foundation and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in convening meetings of this kind. At the symposium, questions were asked about whether it is possible or even desirable to reconcile the histories of different peoples, as has been attempted by scholars and educators in Europe. One Japanese commentator wondered whether American textbook writers had not gone a bit overboard in interpreting the long-delayed rectification of the violation of the constitutional rights of thousands of American citizens as a victory of the democratic system.

A valuable outcome of both the symposium and the forum was the highlighting of the dual need to address not only the absence of consensus on historical issues in the East Asian region but also within Japan itself. As Tokyo University's Fujiwara Kiichi, speaking at the forum, put it, ". . . criticism from abroad to the effect that most Japanese want to bury their country's wartime past . . . is not rooted in reality. . . . But the problem is not confined to biased accusations from abroad. Within Japan as well, radically opposed mutually incompatible camps confront each other."

At the symposium, author Ian Buruma stressed, "When talking about reconciliation and healing . . . the basic problem is not consensus between Japanese and non-Japanese, such as Americans, Koreans, or Chinese. The real heart of the problem is a lack of consensus between Japanese and Japanese." Hielscher and I, as organizers of these two events, came to understand the chasm that runs through Japanese intellectual and policy com-

munities when we found it impossible to get certain members of the above “mutually incompatible camps” to share the same podium at the textbook symposium.

The crucial significance of a national consensus as a prerequisite for reconciliation was driven home by Otto Graf Lambsdorff, Germany’s chief representative in negotiations on compensation for World War II forced labor, when he said, “Without the backing of all political parties, of the German parliament, of the government and all the media in Germany, from Left to Right, I could not have done this job.” Lambsdorff recalled being approached by ordinary German citizens in restaurants and on airplanes and told, “Thank you for what you are doing. We wish you well.”

I wish I could say that, as an organizer of this event, I only received encouragement from prominent individuals. But then, if that were the case, there would have been no reason to hold either the symposium or the forum. Reactions of the kind quoted by Professor Sato Takeo of Takushoku University at the forced labor forum are typical of the positions of a number of leading intellectuals: “All claims were taken care of under the San Francisco Peace Treaty. The matter is settled.” While such a statement is legally correct, as Sato stressed, it “fails to address real issues.”

Perhaps the “real issues” can best be summed up as an absence of a sense of closure. American journalist Charles Burrell asks how often must Japan apologize and, together with Fujiwara Kiichi, points to genuine apologies that Japanese leaders have delivered on numerous occasions in the past. Nevertheless, Germany’s successes in reaching settlements with disparate groups through arduous negotiations, agreements on frameworks, and deliveries of official apologies, together with individual compensation, cannot be denied, and even though Graf Lambsdorff bends over backwards to stress that he has not “come to teach,” the European example of successful reconciliation is an immovable fact.

In what were almost the last words in this two-part symposium/forum, Sato states the need for a local solution to this problem. “Rather than adopting a European formula, we should seek to find a solution appropriate to Asia.” I believe I speak for all participants when I say, “We wish you well.”

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