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Author(s): Sebastian Conrad

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Sebastian Conrad

Entangled Memories: Versions of the Past in Germany and Japan, 1945–2001

In the history of memory, the national paradigm continues to reign supreme. This may come as a surprise at a time when the historical profession is beginning to discard the category of the nation and starting to produce transnational work. International comparisons and relational histories, and also the larger frameworks of European, post-colonial, or world history gradually seem to be replacing the narrow confines of the nineteenth-century paradigm of national history.

Studies of memory, however, continue to cling to the nation with a peculiar stubbornness. Remembering and forgetting are the means through which nations confront their respective pasts. At the same time, nations appear as the products of memory — forged into imagined communities through a series of memorial days, public speeches and visits to memorial sites. Within this scheme, an idealized or traumatic moment is remembered internally in metaphors of a ‘past that does not go away’. Memory thus appears as largely a temporal relation between significant moments in the national past that linger on as memories for generations to come. In the cases of postwar Germany and Japan, the past and the present are severed through historical ruptures and ‘zero hours’ which, it is held, need to be bridged in order to come to terms with a traumatic experience that haunts both societies. From this perspective, memory appears as the almost direct expression of a national mentality, indicative of a nation’s ability to mourn, to learn and to mature (by overcoming narrow nationalist perspectives).¹

The language of temporality thus produces the familiar image of the interpretation of the past as a matter of national culture. The conventional picture of Japan as inherently unable to deal critically with her aggressive and expansionist history falls in this category. This ‘inability’ and ‘deficiency’ is frequently couched in cultural terms and explained as the product of national character.² The German preoccupation with the Nazi past, on the other hand, is attributed to a process of collective learning. Daniel Goldhagen’s thesis

1 The ‘ability to mourn’, of course, refers to Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern* (München 1968).

2 Even Ian Buruma’s masterful *Wages of Guilt. Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (London 1994) is not free from such a tendency.

that innate German antisemitism has only been successfully overcome since 1945 is just the latest version of this culturalist paradigm.³

Apart from the unifying tendencies of such accounts — that homogenize the nation synchronically as memory-community, and diachronically across generations — this perspective conveys an almost xenophobic negligence of factors associated with the outside of the national territory. The history of memory is portrayed through a ‘tunnel vision’ of the past, where the influence of and entanglements with other national memories are marginalized. Memory is thus depicted as the last realm of national autonomy. But can we interpret, to give only one example, the famous visit by Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone to the Yasukuni shrine in 1982 — to honour the war dead at a memorial site symbolically appropriated by nationalist groups — only in terms of internal Japanese developments? Could we not read this particular event as an articulation with a global context that can for illustrative purposes be associated with the names of Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Kohl and Ronald Reagan? The Nakasone visit would then appear not only as the expression of an ‘evasive’ Japanese mentality, but also a part of a global situation that three years later produced the reconciliation ceremony at Bitburg with Kohl and Reagan standing hand in hand at a military cemetery.

Interpretations of the past, this would imply, do not originate and develop within one country but rather must be understood as the product of the connection and exchange between different discourses and practices. ‘Mastering the Past’ (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) was by no means only a German affair, ‘war responsibility’ (*sensô sekinin*) was never exclusively a Japanese concern. The seemingly national discourse on what were considered problematic legacies of war and violence was always inscribed into larger transnational contexts. Against the grain of much recent debate that treats memory as the last vestige of a national ‘culture’,⁴ it seems promising to wrestle the complex processes of remembering and forgetting from the phantasma of autonomy and to read them as ‘entangled memories’.

The term ‘entangled memories’ does not refer so much to the fact that the past which is remembered — the object of memory — must itself be placed in a transnational context and be seen as a product of processes of exchange and influence. Instead, it focuses on the moment of memory production which is seen not only as an attempt to connect to the individual or collective past, but also as the effect of a multitude of complex impulses in the present. The history of memory production, moreover, is a process of entanglement rather than a ‘shared history’ suggesting the hope for consensual interpretations of the past. There have been endeavours to arrive at an uncontested and shared version of the past, most notably in the German-Polish (and, more recently,

3 Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London 1996).

4 Pierre Nora's project *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, 7 vols (Paris 1984–92) comes readily to mind.

Japanese-Korean) project of writing a common history textbook.⁵ Against this nostalgia for a ‘pure’ and ‘objective’ (and therefore uncontroversial) account of past reality, the term ‘entanglement’ stresses the asymmetrical relations and interactions that produce different and conflicting accounts of the past.

A focus on the entangled histories of memory in West Germany and Japan can help to contextualize and situate the postwar experience in both countries and thus to render more complex a story frequently caught in the stereotypes of divergent national characteristics. In particular, the outburst of controversies over issues of memory in Japan since the 1990s demands clarification. Has Japan finally caught up with the West German model of coming to terms with its past, as many commentators would have it? Must the increase of critical voices be read as attesting to a learning process and a willingness to take responsibility for the atrocities and crimes in the nation’s past? Can the current debates be understood as yet another example of Japan as the ‘late-comer’, this time to the critical turn West German memory had witnessed since the 1960s? A comparative perspective that reads the history of memory in both countries as ‘entangled memories’ may help to eschew the forms of cultural essentialization so frequently employed and instead situate Japanese memory in a larger context. Rather than interpreting the virtual ‘explosion’ of discussions about the past as an expression of political maturation, I will argue, they must be understood as what could be called the ‘Return of Asia’.

In the early years after 1945, memories of the war in both Germany and Japan were already situated in a context that transcended the nation state. The point of reference in both countries was first and foremost the USA, not least because remembering happened in the context of the American occupation.⁶ Both Japanese debates on the ‘dark valley’ (*kurai tanima*) of fascism and the attempts to come to terms with the ‘evil past’ of the Third Reich in Germany cannot be understood without taking American interventions into account.

The American presence, permeating interpretations of the past, made itself felt in different forms. Not all influence was direct, and not every taboo was made explicit. Perhaps it is no exaggeration, however, to say that what was remembered and forgotten in postwar Germany and Japan was already pre-structured. As Etô Jun has remarked, Japanese understanding of past events

5 See Wolfgang Jacobmeyer (ed.), *Zum pädagogischen Ertrag der deutsch-polnischen Schulbuchkonferenzen der Historiker 1972–1987* (Braunschweig 1989); Fujisawa Hôei, ‘Nihon no rekishi kyôkasho mondai to Nikkan kyôkasho kenkyû no igi’ in Yamazaki Yasushi and Ronald Ruprecht (eds), *Rekishi to aidentitî. Nihon to doitsu ni totte no 1945nen* (Kyoto 1993), 407–16.

6 While in Japan the occupation was essentially an American affair, West Germany was occupied by French, English and American troops. In the educational and academic spheres, however, American policies soon emerged as the most important factor. See Johannes Weyer, *Westdeutsche Soziologie 1945–1960. Deutsche Kontinuitäten und nordamerikanischer Einfluß* (Berlin 1984), 308–10.

happened within a closed discursive space.⁷ The unprecedented and highly publicized war crimes trials held in Nuremberg and Tokyo were among the more direct interventions with the side-effect of producing an authoritative master narrative of the war. In both cases, the political and military leaders were severed from the larger population and held responsible for expansion and atrocities — to different degrees, however. In Germany, the population had to undergo individual denazification, and a number of subsequent trials extended the circle of perpetrators. In Japan, however, no follow-up trials complemented the Tokyo trial, and even the emperor was exempted from indictment.⁸

The war crimes trials had long-lasting effects, particularly in Japan, where even today the ‘war crimes trial view of history’ (*Tokyo saiban shikan*) is a frequent object of denunciation from the nationalist fringe.⁹ Some of the more direct interventions, however, had more ephemeral effects. They included purges in universities when representatives of an older interpretation of history that had by now become obsolete were expelled from academe.¹⁰ The enunciativ space for interpretations of the past was further delimited by the institution of censorship. In both countries, the central objects of national commemoration were subject to restrictive measures by the occupation authorities. In Japan, coverage of the atomic bomb explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was largely prohibited, and photographic documentary was banned. Only after the end of the occupation in 1952 were pictures of the catastrophic event published in major newspapers.¹¹ In Germany, it was the resistance movement of the Twentieth of July that attracted the attention of the censors. From the perspective of the occupation forces, the largely aristocratic composition of

7 Etô Jun, *Tozasareta genjo kûkan. Senryôgun no ken'etsu to sengo Nihon* (Tokyo 1994); idem, *Wasureta koto to wasuresaserareta koto* (Tokyo 1979). For the continuity to wartime censorship see Satô Takumi, ‘The System of Total War and the Discursive Space of the War on Thought’ in Yasushi Yamanouchi, J. Victor Koschmann and Ryûichi Narita (eds), *Total War and ‘Modernization’* (Ithaca, NY 1998), 289–314.

8 On the effects of the American occupation in Germany see Walter L. Dorn, ‘Die Debatte über die amerikanische Besatzungspolitik für Deutschland (1944–45)’, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 6 (1958), 60–77. For Japan, see Richard H. Minear, *Victors’ Justice. The Tokyo War Crimes Trial* (Tokyo 1972); Awaya Kentarô, *Tokyo saibanron* (Tokyo 1989); Hosoya Chihiro et al. (eds), *The Tokyo War Crimes Trial. An International Symposium* (Tokyo 1986).

9 Prominent examples of this tendency are the interpretations put forward by the ‘Association for a liberalist view on history’ (*Jiyûshugi shikan kenkyûkai*) led by Fujioka Nobukatsu. See Rikki Kersten, ‘Neo-nationalism and the “Liberal School of History”’, *Japan Forum*, 11 (1999), 191–203; Aaron Gerow, ‘Consuming Asia, Consuming Japan: The New Neonationalistic Revisionism in Japan’ in Laura Hein and Mark Selden (eds), *Censoring History. Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States* (London 2000), 74–95.

10 For Germany, see Winfried Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945* (München 1993), 121–30; for Japan, see Yamamoto Reiko, *Senryôka ni okeru kyôshoku tsuihô. GHQ, SCAP monjo ni yoru kenkyû* (Tokyo 1994).

11 John Dower, *Embracing Defeat. Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York 1999), 405–40; Monica Braw, *The Atomic Bomb Suppressed. American Censorship in Occupied Japan* (New York/London 1991); Horiba Kiyoko, *Genbaku. Hyôgen to kenetsu* (Tokyo 1995).

the resistance group seemed to make it unsuitable as a starting-point for the democratization of German society. The first studies on the planned assassination of Hitler in the bomb plot of 1944, therefore, had to be published in Switzerland or the USA.¹²

While the bulk of American measures was prohibitive in character, there were instances of prescription as well. In Japan, an American version of the Pacific War was serialized in all national newspapers in autumn 1945. It used ‘unimpeachable sources’ to present the ‘truth’ about the recent past ‘until the story of Japanese war guilt has been fully bared in all its details’.¹³ In addition, a radio documentary with the title ‘This is the truth!’ (*shinsô wa kô da*) was broadcast between December 1945 and February 1946, to inculcate the American version of the Japanese past into the minds of the Japanese people.¹⁴ In Germany, documentary films showing the liberation of concentration camps were shown to a population that in addition was confronted with its genocidal past through a series of large-scale posters displayed in various German cities.¹⁵

The intervention of the occupation forces contributed to and reinforced a number of striking similarities in West German and Japanese interpretations of the recent past. At the same time, however, the transnational context can help to explain one of the most striking differences — namely the persistence of a largely conservative orientation among German historians (who remained pledged to the methodological tenets of a ‘politically and morally tamed historicism’)¹⁶ that contrasted sharply with the strong influence which Marxism had on postwar Japanese scholarship. Marxist historiography, it is true, was by no means a postwar invention. Particularly in the field of economic history, it can be traced back to the late 1920s. The intensive ‘debate on Japanese capitalism’ (*Nihon shihonshugi ronsô*) that raged in the early 1930s was the most notable example of the new perspective. In the course of the following years, however, these discussions were subdued and their protagonists gradually removed from Japanese academe. After defeat in 1945, Marxist scholars

12 Ulrich v. Hassel, *Vom anderen Deutschland* (Zürich 1946); Fabian v. Schlabrendorff, *Offiziere gegen Hitler* (Zürich 1946); Hans Rothfels, *The German Opposition to Hitler* (Chicago 1948). This taboo was only overcome when the renowned historian Hans Rothfels translated his account into German in 1949. See Peter Steinbach, ‘Widerstand im Dritten Reich — die Keimzelle der Nachkriegsdemokratie? Die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Widerstand in der historischen politischen Bildungsarbeit, in den Medien und in der öffentlichen Meinung nach 1945’ in Gerd R. Ueberschär (ed.), *Der 20 Juli 1944. Bewertung und Rezeption des deutschen Widerstandes gegen das NS-Regime* (Köln 1994), 79–100.

13 GHQ (General Headquarters United States Army Forces, Pacific), Historical Articles on the War in the Pacific, GHQ/SCAP-Records in the National Diet Library Tokyo, Sheet No. CIE (D) 05235, 05236, Box No. 5869, Classification No. 840, 800, 000 and No. 000, 840, 1.

14 Takeyama Akiko, ‘Senryôka no hôsô — “shinsô wa kô da”’ in Minami Hiroshi (ed.), *Zoku: Shôwa bunka 1945–1989* (Tokyo 1990).

15 Cornelia Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung. Öffentlicher Gebrauch von Fotografien aus nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern nach 1945* (Berlin 1998).

16 Ernst Schulin, *Traditionskritik und Rekonstruktionsversuch. Studien zur Entwicklung von Geschichtswissenschaft und historischem Denken* (Göttingen 1979), 140.

were called back to the universities, and historical materialism soon emerged as the most influential school of interpretation that for almost a decade effectively silenced the more traditional (and conservative) historians.¹⁷

This emergence of a Marxist intellectual hegemony was thus the continuation of a longer trend, at the same time colluding with occupation politics. For as unlikely as it may seem, US pressure to reinstate oppositional academics in their former positions primarily referred to Marxist scholars, due to their anti-war stance regularly termed ‘friend of America’ in the occupation documents. But apart from purges, reinstatements and the politics of personnel, in the early postwar years there was an astonishing degree of consensus between the occupation forces and Japanese Marxists. In particular, the sweeping reform programme that the American headquarters had designed for postwar Japan — a new constitution, the limitation of the power of the *zaibatsu*, and, most important, a thorough land reform — met with approval from Marxist academics. The American reforms were based on the conviction that feudal remnants characterized Japanese society and polity, and they seemed to represent the kind of modernization — a ‘bourgeois revolution’ — that in Marxist eyes had long been overdue.¹⁸

In West Germany, the notion of structural deficits that made fascism seem like a logical result rather than a temporary aberration — a notion the Japanese Marxists so readily embraced — was received far less favourably among historians. In fact, most reacted polemically against views propagated by the adviser to the British Foreign Office, Lord Vansittart, who conceived of continuities ‘from Bismarck to Hitler’.¹⁹ The negligible role that early variations of a ‘*Sonderweg* thesis’ played in West Germany — in its Japanese incarnation common currency in the early postwar decades — had a great deal to do with the fact that the personal composition of the historical profession remained largely unchanged. In addition, however, the aversion to interpretations of historical continuity must be situated within the context of what can provisionally be described as a division of labour between East and West German historians. To the degree that the interpretation of the ‘German catastrophe’ as a necessary outcome of German history gained hegemonic status in East Germany, it lost credibility among West German historians.²⁰

West German historiography was thus inscribed into a matrix, with the USA and East Germany as the two principal points of reference. This double per-

17 Germaine A. Hoston, *Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan* (Princeton, NJ 1986).

18 Sebastian Conrad, *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Nation. Geschichtsschreibung in Westdeutschland und Japan 1945–1960* (Göttingen 1999), 88–114.

19 Joachim Radkau, ‘Die Exil-Ideologie vom “anderen Deutschland” und die Vansittartisten. Eine Untersuchung über die Einstellung der deutschen Emigranten nach 1933 zu Deutschland’, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B 2 (1970), 31–48; Jean Solchany, *Comprendre le nazisme dans L’Allemagne des années zéro (1945–1949)* (Paris 1997), 5–24.

20 For East German historiography, see Martin Sabrow, *Das Diktat des Konsenses. Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR 1949–1969* (München 2001).

spective was particularly evident in the historiography of the Nazi period now undertaken under the label of ‘contemporary history’ (*Zeitgeschichte*). The interpretations of the recent past, it was held, had to be wrestled from distortions by American historians who did not have direct experience of dictatorship and consequently lacked the ability to ‘understand’ life in a totalitarian state. Only those who had lived through the Third Reich and ‘themselves stood the test of the times’ seemed eligible to interpret German history.²¹ From its inception, one of the purposes of the newly-founded Institute for Contemporary History in Munich was to keep interpretations of the recent past firmly in German hands. The director of the institute, Hermann Mau, proclaimed in 1950: ‘Research into the history of National Socialism is a German task.’²² At the same time, West German *Zeitgeschichte* was set against the emerging East German orthodoxy and stressed the possibility of unfettered scholarship, free from propagandistic purposes. The focus on the German opposition to Hitler, for example, was thus not only meant to complement Anglo-American views but at the same time to correct the distortions and ‘pseudo-truths from the East’.²³

While in West Germany interpretations of the recent past were frequently indexed with this double reference, in Japan the principal orientation remained towards the USA. The voices of the neighbouring Asian countries hardly contributed to the views taken on the wartime past. To some extent, these two aspects were interrelated. The hegemonic role of the USA, undiminished after the end of the occupation as a result of the Cold War, also reinforced an ignorance of Chinese or Korean perspectives. A particularly telling example concerned the naming of the war which until 1945 had been glorified as the ‘Greater East Asian War’ (*daitôa sensô*), a term prohibited during the occupation. Instead, ‘Pacific war’ was introduced as the official name of the second world war in Japan. This term, however, highlights certain aspects of the conflict, namely the Japanese war against the USA beginning with the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The long period of fighting on the Asian mainland with its estimated toll of over 20 million Chinese lives is marginalized.²⁴ These terminological interventions during occupation days were not simply forced upon the Japanese, however, but were appropriated and internalized. When historian Ienaga Saburô wrote a new history of the war in 1968, he produced a Marxist narrative that focused on the events in China. He nevertheless chose to call his book ‘The Pacific War’ because otherwise (as he

21 Hans Rothfels, *Die deutsche Opposition gegen Hitler. Eine Würdigung* (Krefeld 1949), 11.

22 Quoted from Institut für Zeitgeschichte (ed.), *25 Jahre Institut für Zeitgeschichte. Statt einer Festschrift* (München 1975), 27.

23 Paul Kluge, ‘Aufgaben und Methoden zeitgeschichtlicher Forschung’, *Europa-Archiv*, 10 (1955), 7429–38, here 7433.

24 Richard Minear, ‘Nihon no rekishika to sensô. 1945–1965nen’ in Nakamura Masanori et al. (eds), *Sengo Nihon. Senryô to sengo kaikaku*, vol. 5: *Kako no seisan* (Tokyo 1995), 133–56.

admitted in the preface) he would have anticipated the readership's ignorance of what the book was about.²⁵ Some of the discursive effects of American interventions lived on after the occupation forces had left.

At the same time, the example shows that the privileged position of the USA colluded in the marginalization of Japan's military involvement in China and Korea during the war. In the 1960s and 1970s, this was not an exceptional phenomenon but rather part of a general pattern. It illustrates what Karatani Kôjin has called the 'De-Asianization' of Japanese postwar discourse.²⁶ In a sense, this can be interpreted as a continuation of earlier attempts to 'escape from Asia' (*datsu-a*) and write Japan into the history of the modern West. In the field of memory, this led to partial amnesia about Japan's expansionist past. Japanese victimization of other Asian nations and the history of Japanese violence on the Asian mainland remained largely undiscussed. The war appeared, in the first place, as a conflict between Japan and the USA. The atrocities committed on the Asian mainland — the Nanjing massacre, the biochemical experiments of Unit 731, the forced prostitution throughout Asia — were excluded from debate. In Japanese discourse, 'Asia' disappeared in a historiographical vacuum.²⁷

This is not to say that there were no attempts by other Asian nations to intervene in Japanese memory politics. One example is the extended negotiations between Japan and South Korea between 1951 and 1965 leading to a treaty of reparation and compensation. In the process of the negotiations, however, Korea had to give up the idea of an official apology on the part of the Japanese government. Demands for material compensation and for payment of wages for conscript labour during the war met with stubborn resistance from the Japanese delegation. Finally, reparations were not paid to make up for colonial oppression, but rather, as the official rhetoric went, as part of 'economic assistance'. In the context of asymmetrical power relations and the dichotomous logic of Cold War thinking, the South Korean perspective on the common past had no repercussions in the Japanese debates.²⁸

In the virtual absence of Asia, the principal referent of Japanese politics and world view was the USA. In the realm of historiography, this constellation translated into the massive import of US modernization theory, beginning with the famous Hakone conference in 1960. Funded by the Ford- and Asia-Foundation, the conference formed part of a decidedly anti-communist politics

25 Ienaga Saburô, *Taiheiyô sensô* (Tokyo 1968), 4. On the different terminological approaches to coming to terms with the war, see David Reynolds' article 'The Origins of the Two "World Wars": Historical Discourse and International Politics' in this issue.

26 Karatani Kôjin, 'The Discursive Space of Modern Japan' in Masao Miyoshi and Harry D. Harootunian (eds), *Japan in the World* (Durham, NC 1993), 288–315. The philosopher Takeuchi Yoshimi in his *Kindai no chôkoku* (Tokyo 1983) has made a similar point.

27 James Orr, *The Victim as Hero. Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu 2001).

28 Volker Fuhr, *Erzwungene Reue. Vergangenheitsbewältigung und Kriegsschulddiskussion in Japan 1952–1998* (Hamburg 2002).

in East Asia by presenting the concept of modernization without revolution as historical norm.²⁹ While in the early years of the occupation period we encountered surprising affinities between American and Japanese Marxist versions of the Japanese past, the perspective of modernization theory was explicitly anti-Marxist. In the framework of modernization theory, Japanese fascism appeared as but a temporary aberration from an otherwise successful path towards modernity.³⁰ Its principal proponent, the Harvard historian, Edwin O. Reischauer, stressed the political nature of this remodelling of the Japanese past: ‘This classical Marxism is our true foe in Japan. I have never shirked from an opportunity to inflict a blow against it. Of course, one does not use such words. The words I do use are: “Taking on a new view of history”.’³¹ When in 1960 Reischauer was appointed US ambassador to Japan, this marriage of scholar and politician only underlined the fact that interpretations of the past are not formed in an academic vacuum. The Cold War setting, as Harry Harootunian has argued, ‘prompted Japanese to incorporate American expectations to fulfill a narrative about themselves, produced by others, elsewhere’. The memory of the recent past was inscribed in a decidedly transnational context; Harootunian concludes that ‘America’s Japan became Japan’s Japan’.³²

While Japan remained ‘de-Asianized’, in West Germany the 1960s through the 1980s can be characterized by what historian Heinrich August Winkler has recently called Germany’s ‘Long path towards the West’.³³ In historiographical terms this implied the dominance of the *Sonderweg* interpretation of modern German history which must be understood as an attempt to write Germany into the history of Europe. This is not to say that American influence disappeared; particularly through the appropriation of the work of Max Weber by Parsonian systems theory and its subsequent re-import into Germany, American approaches remained an important factor. At the same time, ‘Europe’ emerged as a complementary point of reference and, in its particular and mostly metaphorical incarnation, as a Weberian ideal type. The alleged *Sonderweg* was pitted against a supposed north-west European normality, and modern German history was interpreted by measuring distance, difference and deviance. The preoccupation with comparative history among social historians since the 1980s is one of the consequences of this approach. Not only in terms of historical trajectory, but also in theoretical and methodological perspective, the ascendancy of social history (*Sozialgeschichte*) was

29 Judith Coburn, ‘Asian Scholars and Government — The Chrysanthemum on the Sword’ in Edward Friedman and Mark Selden (eds), *America’s Asia — Dissenting Essays on Asian-American Relations* (New York 1969), 67–107.

30 See Kinbara Samon, *‘Nihon kindai’ron no rekishizō. Sono hihanteki kentō e no shiten* (Tokyo 1968).

31 Quoted from Harry D. Harootunian, ‘America’s Japan/Japan’s Japan’ in Miyoshi and Harootunian (eds), *Japan in the World*, op. cit., 196–221, here 207.

32 Ibid., 200, 215.

33 Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen*, 2 vols (München 2000).

part of an attempt to integrate German historiography into the European landscape.³⁴

The *Sonderweg* emerged as the new metahistory of the German past, not unlike its Japanese equivalent in the immediate postwar decades. In both countries, this interpretation for a long time remained the most influential meta-narrative.³⁵ The main difference was that it allowed West Germany to become European, while Japan hardly perceived herself as Asian. In the German case this development was spawned by the political process of European unification, and also by various treaties of compensation making up for German atrocities during the war.³⁶ The dynamics of this larger political situation had repercussions in the interpretations of history that needed to take their potential European reception into account. In Japan, on the other hand, in the absence of a movement towards political allegiance, Asia largely remained in a political and historiographical vacuum. The marginalization of 'Asia' in postwar Japanese memory was not so much the product of conscious decisions but rather itself the effect of the larger international context. The silencing of 'Asia' corresponded with the great divide of the Cold War, the incorporation of Japan into a western/capitalist world order dominated by the USA. Under the umbrella of the security treaty with the USA, there was no space in Japanese discourse for the concerns of other Asian nations. Japan regarded itself as 'western',³⁷ and was likewise treated as the 'Prussia of the East'. In Noam Chomsky's words: 'Of course Europe now includes Japan, which we may regard as honorary European.'³⁸

Beginning in the 1980s, but particularly in the course of the 1990s, the landscape of Japanese memory changed dramatically. This shift can be described as a combination of two phenomena: a massive increase in discussions about the wartime past, and the emergence of new actors in these debates. Most importantly, the voices of other Asian nations made themselves heard in the heated discussions about Japan's wartime legacy. Their interventions were no longer marginalized but met with an often critical, and at times sympathetic, response.

34 Thomas Welskopp, 'Westbindung auf dem "Sonderweg"'. Die deutsche Sozialgeschichte vom Appendix der Wirtschaftsgeschichte zur Historischen Sozialwissenschaft in Wolfgang Küttler, Jörn Rüsen and Ernst Schulin (eds), *Geschichtsdiskurs*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt 1999), 191–237.

35 In West Germany, this meta-narrative became hegemonic to the degree that what was perceived as a Japanese *Sonderweg* was interpreted as an outright copy of the German model. See Bernd Martin, 'Verhängnisvolle Wahlverwandtschaft. Deutsche Einflüsse auf die Entstehung des modernen Japan' in Jost Dülffer et al. (eds), *Deutschland in Europa. Kontinuität und Bruch* (Frankfurt 1990), 97–116.

36 The attempt to adapt interpretations of the past to a European context began much earlier. For an illustrative example, see Institut für Zeitgeschichte (ed.), *Das Dritte Reich und Europa* (München 1957).

37 See, for example, Umesao Tadao, 'Bunmei no seitai shikan josetsu', *Chûô kôron* (1947), 32–49.

38 Noam Chomsky, 'The New World Order', *Agenda*, 62 (1991), 13–15, here 13.

Not unlike many other countries, Japan in the 1990s witnessed an intensified debate over issues of memory and remembrance. The reasons for this notable increase in public interest and awareness are manifold. Some are worldwide in character and have contributed to a global vogue of memory debates, while others are more specific to the Japanese archipelago. To begin with, the current omnipresence of discussions about the past clearly has a generational dimension. Those who experienced the war themselves and can still remember it will not be alive much longer. This biological factor has contributed to the heated nature of some recent conflicts over issues like compensation for forced labour and the ‘comfort women’ in the service of the Japanese military. In addition, documentation and testimony of personal experience have developed into an urgent need at a time when there are only a few witnesses around. The extraordinary boom of personal histories (*jibunshi*), of innumerable ‘ordinary Japanese’, has to be placed in this context as well.³⁹

Most importantly, the end of the Cold War has helped to open up a new space for debate and dissenting voices. The fall of the Berlin wall and the breakdown of the Soviet Union not only had effects in these countries themselves, but were indicative of the end of the postwar world order in a broader sense. With the disappearance of the East–West dichotomy, the clearcut framework within which all events were endowed with political meaning has also disappeared. In many respects, the symbolic conflicts over the meaning of the past have moved into its place and been substituted for the ideological antagonisms.⁴⁰ As a result, we can speak of a virtual ‘explosion’ of memory in Japan in the 1990s. After the ‘end of history’ (at least the end of a history dominated by universalist projects), the permanent discourse on the past corresponds with a post-ideological economy of signs.⁴¹

The end of the primacy of the US–Soviet antagonism affected the political landscape in Japan considerably. One of the consequences was the end of the political monopoly of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in 1993. The dissolution of the ‘1955 system’, based on the dominance of the conservative LDP and a foreign and security politics exclusively oriented towards the USA, corresponded with a renewed and contested debate about the national past that had been muted in the decades before. The end of the power monopoly of the LDP coincided with the crash of the ‘bubble’ economy in the early 1990s, and the ensuing economic recession also provided the motivation to look inwards and to subject Japan’s past history to critical scrutiny. One last factor

39 See Petra Buchholz, *Schreiben und Erinnern. Über den Umgang mit der Vergangenheit in Japan* (München 2002).

40 Carol Gluck, ‘Das Ende der “Nachkriegszeit”. Japan vor der Jahrtausendwende’ in Irmela Hijiya-Kirschner (ed.), *Überwindung der Moderne? Japan am Ende des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt 1996), 57–85; Carol Gluck, ‘The Past in the Present’ in Andrew Gordon (ed.), *Postwar Japan as History* (Berkeley, CA 1993), 64–95.

41 Iida Yumiko, ‘Between the Technique of Living an Endless Routine and the Madness of Absolute Degree Zero. Japanese Identity and the Crisis of Modernity in the 1990s’, *positions*, 8 (2000), 423–64.

must not be overlooked: the death of Emperor Hirohito, head of state since 1926, who through his sheer presence made an open discussion over war responsibility (*sensô sekinin*) and the failures of coming to terms with this past after 1945 (*sengo sekinin*) virtually impossible.⁴²

The most notable effect of the end of the Cold War was the change it spawned in Japan's relationship with her Asian neighbours. After a long period of relative ignorance, Japan was again 'homing in on Asia'.⁴³ This development had already begun in the 1980s and was influenced in particular through the economic upswing in South Korea, for example. Political and economic contacts as well as the exchange of popular culture have increased since, and in this context the interpretation of the national past has undergone palpable changes as well.⁴⁴ In particular, the voices of Asian victims of Japan's wartime expansion were given an importance that they had not had in the decades before. These complex and reinforcing shifts have opened up the possibility of new forms of contestation of the hegemonic versions of national memory.

The re-emergence of 'Asia' does not imply that other transnational connections were no longer relevant. On the contrary: as the controversy over the Enola Gay exhibition in Washington in 1995 demonstrated, the concern with American interpretations of the Japanese past had not diminished.⁴⁵ Another interesting case, particularly in our context, is the German example that from the 1980s was instrumentalized by oppositional groups in Japan pressing for a more critical perspective on the nation's wartime history. Japan, it was held, had not sufficiently 'mastered the past' and should look to West Germany for a model. The famous 1985 speech by German President Richard von Weizsäcker 40 years after the end of the war, for example, was translated into Japanese and went into 29 editions within a dozen years. Even the term for 'mastering the past' (*kako no kokufuku*) was invented in 1992 to translate the German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. The comparison with West Germany was implicated in the political conflicts of the time and served oppositional interest groups as a model; at the same time, it was open to instrumentalization by their political opponents.⁴⁶

These examples of transnational entanglements notwithstanding, the most

42 Buruma, *Wages of Guilt*, op. cit., 249–51.

43 Laura Hein, Ellen H. Hammond, 'Homing in on Asia. Identity in Contemporary Japan', *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 27, 3 (1995), 3–17.

44 Gerow, 'Consuming Asia, Consuming Japan', op. cit.

45 See the articles in *positions*, 5, 3 (1997).

46 See Ôishi Kiichirô, 'Die Vergangenheit in der Gegenwart. Die Frage der "Kriegsschuld" in Japan', *Chôiki. Bunka kagaku kiyô*, 3 (1983), 40–55, here 50; Volker Fuhr, 'Von der Bundesrepublik lernen? Der Vergleich mit Deutschland in der japanischen Diskussion über Kriegsschuld und Vergangenheitsbewältigung', *Japanstudien*, 8 (1996), 337–53; Awaya Kentarô (ed.), *Sensô sekinin — sengo sekinin. Nihon to Doitsu wa dô chigau ka* (Tokyo 1994); Fujisawa Hôei, *Doitsujin no rekishi ishiki. Kyôkasho ni miru sensô sekininron* (Tokyo 1986); Satô Takeo, 'Doitsu no sengo hoshô — Nihon no mohan ka', *Sekai*, 561 (1991), 296–309. Nishio Kanji, *Kotonaru bigeki. Nihon to Doitsu* (Tokyo 1994) explicitly warns against seeing Germany as a model.

important development in the 1990s was what could be named the return of 'Asia'.⁴⁷ On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war in 1995, in particular, the demand for an official apology from the Japanese government was made by many Asian governments and civil society groups. The debates in Japan cannot be understood outside this broader context.⁴⁸ The representation of the war in school books has also remained contested terrain, as the Chinese protests against the admission of a revisionist textbook in the spring of 2001 amply demonstrate. The conflicting interpretations of the Nanjing massacre are another subject of public concern and academic dialogue. In the course of scholarly exchange, 'Chinese' and 'Japanese' positions are negotiated but at the same time hint at the possibility of transcending nationality as a crucial factor determining the interpretation of the past.⁴⁹ The arena in which the Asian dimension of Japanese memory is played out most prominently, finally, is the issue of compensation for former 'comfort women' (*jūgun ianfu*), more precisely forced prostitutes in the service of the Japanese army.⁵⁰

What is striking in all these debates is not just the extent to which formerly marginalized voices have made themselves heard and turned a Japanese pre-occupation with the national past into a transnational endeavour. At the same time, these voices have diversified. In the early postwar decades, state governments spoke on behalf of the professed interests of their nations; they intervened to protest in schoolbook matters or to correct what they perceived as faulty interpretations of Japan's role on the continent in the 1930s and 1940s. Moreover, issues of reparations and compensation were negotiated exclusively between governments, while individual claims were not admitted. This form of representation in some cases led to surprising coalitions, as the example of forced prostitution demonstrates, where Japanese and Korean governments colluded in suppressing the claims of former 'comfort women'. In the 1990s, however, the voices increased and undermined the governmental monopoly on national memory. Individuals and civil society groups from other Asian nations began to play a leading role in the shifting terrain of Japanese memory production. Through these various and discordant interventions, they contributed to the emergence of what Lisa Yoneyama has recently called 'post-

47 To be sure, a concern for things Asian has never been entirely absent from Japanese debates. See, for example, Ubukata Naokichi, Tōyama Shigeki and Tanaka Masatoshi (eds), *Rekishizō saikōsei no kadai. Rekishigaku no bōhō to Ajia* (Tōkyō 1966); see also Wolfgang Seifert, *Nationalismus im Nachkriegs-Japan. Ein Beitrag zur Ideologie der völkischen Nationalisten* (Hamburg 1977). Before the 1980s, however, these perspectives remained marginal.

48 See Franziska Seraphim, 'Der Zweite Weltkrieg im öffentlichen Gedächtnis Japans: Die Debatte zum fünfzigsten Jahrestag der Kapitulation' in Hijiya-Kirschneireit (ed.), *Überwindung der Moderne?*, op. cit., 25–56.

49 See Daqing Yang, 'Convergence or Divergence? Recent Historical Writings on the Rape of Nanking', *American Historical Review*, 104 (1999), 842–65; Daqing Yang, 'Contested History. Re-presenting the Nanjing Massacre in Postwar Japan and China' in Takashi Fujitani et al. (eds), *Perilous Memories. The Asia Pacific Wars* (Durham, NC 2001), 50–86.

50 See the articles in *positions*, 5, 1 (1997).

nationalist public spheres in the production of historical knowledge'.⁵¹ The multiplication of actors and the discursive coalitions across national boundaries attest to both the centrality of memory politics in contemporary Japan and to the crucial role of 'Asia' in the context of Japanese identity formation.⁵²

The history of memory is part of an entangled and transnational history. Debates about the past bear the traces of a globalizing world which are deeply engraved in what is often still perceived as the realm of the uniquely national, of a peculiar mentality and mindset. The various exchanges and interventions across national boundaries introduce multiple temporalities into an arena where these conflicting narratives of the past are negotiated. At times, interventions from without have delimited the discursive space within which the past can be remembered (e.g. the occupation); in many instances, however, they have helped to decentre dominant narratives of a nationalized history and have thus contributed to a pluralization of the past, to what Kan San Jun has termed the 'civil war of memory' in contemporary Japan.⁵³ The complex dialectic of remembering and forgetting — as indeed history itself — is not confined to the territory of a nation state.

A perspective that foregrounds the transnational embeddedness of memory production may contribute to a more complex interpretation of the different trajectories of West German and Japanese interpretations of their 'evil' pasts which have frequently been clouded in the myth of national character. This perspective suggests that an allegedly more self-critical way of coping with its wartime experience in West Germany has to be situated within a process of European integration and multiple forms of discursive exchange. At the same time, it helps to explain the 'explosion' of Japanese debates about the war in the 1990s beyond a convenient narrative of repression, amnesia, and eventually, critical mastery. A transnational perspective, moreover, suggests that the changed terrain of Japanese memory production may be associated with what I choose to call the return of 'Asia' into Japanese discourse.

This is not to deny the importance of internal conflicts and heterogeneity within a given society, which, in turn, can always be contextualized within a larger transnational arena. But as long as Ruth Benedict's dichotomy of 'cultures of guilt' and 'cultures of shame' continues to serve as a shorthand explanation for an alleged German learning process in contrast to Japanese denial, the focus on 'entangled memories' may serve as a necessary complement. Given the central role of memory in definitions of a national Self at the turn of the twenty-first century, this perspective suggests that national identity

51 Lisa Yoneyama, 'Transformative Knowledge and Postnationalist Public Sphere. The Smithsonian Enola Gay Controversy' in Fujitani et al. (eds), *Perilous Memories*, op. cit., 323–46.

52 See Norma Field, 'War and Apology: Japan, Asia, the Fiftieth, and After', *positions*, 5 (1997), 1–50.

53 *Sekai* (1997), 188.

itself is the product — and not the precondition — of processes of transnational interaction, exchange and entanglement.

Sebastian Conrad

is Assistant Professor of History at the Free University of Berlin. He is the author of, amongst other things, *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Nation. Geschichtsschreibung in Westdeutschland und Japan 1945–1960* (Göttingen 1999), and co-editor (with Shalini Randeria) of *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften* (Frankfurt 2002). He is currently working on a project entitled ‘“German Work”. Circulation, Globalization, Identity 1880–1918’.