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Comparison of Historical Memory Narratives in Japan and the FRG after the Second World War

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Abstract

The article is devoted to identification of similarities and differences in the historical memory of Japan and the Federal Republic of Germany after World War II. These issues are a relevant topic for research in the face of the enduring influence of historical grievances on Japan's relations with its former victims, in contrast to similar relations of Germany. As a theoretical framework, the paper uses O. Malinova's approach, which interprets historical memory as a product of social construction and a variation of symbolic politics. In addition, the author uses the classification of historical memory proposed by Matteo Dian. In the scope of the study, the author examines the impact of occupation policies on the further development of historical memory in the two countries. The paper compares the original content of the main narratives of historical memory in each country, the main mnemonic actors promoting them, and the evolution of these narratives from the end of the war to the present day. The author also highlights the reasons for the differences in the content and evolution of the narratives in Japan and the FRG.

The author concludes that, despite a certain similarity of the occupation policy in the two countries, as well as the formation of two traditions (conservative and left-progressive) in each country's historical memory, its content and evolution are substantially different. In the FRG, the conservative tradition initially included the narratives of self-victimhood and amnesia, while the progressive tradition included the narrative of contrition; over the years,

however, the traditions have evolved from polarization to a consensus around contrition and elements of self-victimhood. In Japan, the conservative tradition initially included glorification of the past in addition to self-victimhood, i.e., it was more revisionist, while the progressive tradition focused on self-victimhood rather than contrition. Over time, the traditions in Japan shifted from a consensus around self-victimhood to a sharp polarization: progressives moved to a contrition narrative, while revisionists gained ground among conservatives.

Keywords: historical narratives, traumatic past, politics of memory, Japan, Federal Republic of Germany, World War II.

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Introduction

The issues of historical memory are becoming increasingly relevant, as many countries' official discourses have been marked by rhetoric concerning historical grievances and the rewriting of history. These questions acquire particular significance in the context of international

relations. In East Asia, tensions related to historical memory are especially acute: memories of Japan's aggressive policies remain a crucial factor in its relations with China, North Korea, and South Korea.

At the same time, there is an example of a country whose comparable legacy of past crimes does not exert such a negative influence on its international position, which is Germany. It may be assumed that an important factor underlying the divergence in the international stance of Japan and Germany is the difference in the historical memory of the two countries.

The purpose of this article is to identify both the similarities and the differences in Japanese and German historical memory: the influence of occupation policies on it, and the content and evolution of the main memory narratives within each society. It should be noted that this study does not examine the historical memory of the German Democratic Republic, insofar as it adopted, to a certain extent, the memory narrative of the Federal Republic of Germany after 1990, and due to the limitations of the article's scope.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Olga Malinova's approach, which conceptualizes memory politics as a form of symbolic politics. The latter is defined as "public activity related to the production of various modes of interpreting social reality and the struggle for their dominance," which implies a plurality of actors producing narratives and the influence of pre-existing systems of representations [Malinova 2018, pp. 30–31]. A memory narrative is understood as a "plot-structured account offering a coherent picture of a sequence of historical events" [Malinova 2018, p. 37]. For the typology of memory narratives, the article employs the classification developed by Matteo Dian, who identified five ideal-typical models of war memory:

– *Glorification*: violence is represented as heroic deeds justified by national interests and values; figures of the military past are glorified, while the suffering of other nations is silenced.

– *Self-victimhood*: the "ordinary people" are depicted as victims unable to influence high politics, with responsibility for their suffering attributed either to the political elite or to other states.

– *Amnesia*: traumatic past events are ignored or excluded from collective memory.

– *Acknowledgement*: responsibility for violence is recognized (though the scale and motivations of the actors remain contested), yet active repentance for the crimes committed is not implied.

– *Contrition*: beyond acknowledging guilt for crimes that cannot be justified, deep remorse is expressed toward the victims [Dian 2017, pp. 24–25].

Occupation Policy in Japan and Germany

Among the most decisive factors shaping postwar memory in the Federal Republic of Germany and Japan were the occupation policies of the victorious powers. Their primary task was to prevent a repetition of aggression, for which purpose they pursued a course of demilitarization, democratization, decentralization, and, in the case of Germany, denazification in the defeated countries. One of the main instruments of this policy was the prosecution of those guilty of war crimes, crimes against peace, and crimes against humanity. As part of the Nuremberg Trials, more than 5,000 German war criminals were convicted, including 18 Class A war criminals, and more than 800 death sentences were handed down [Herf 1997, p. 206]. Under the Japanese tribunals, more than 5,000 people and 28 Class A war criminals were convicted, and nearly 1,000 people were sentenced to death [Dower 1999, p. 447]. Designed to lay the symbolic foundations for the "re-education" of Germans and Japanese, the tribunals indeed became a starting point for their postwar identity.

At the same time, the positive nature of the Trials had certain limitations, which continue to provoke debate in the societies of both countries. Controversial issues included the failure to consider alleged crimes committed by the Allies (carpet bombing, the use of nuclear weapons, looting and violence against civilians), as well as a number of crimes committed by Japan and Germany. For instance, the Holocaust

was not sufficiently addressed since the Tribunal's jurisdiction covered only international crimes. Such issues as the use of forced labor and "comfort women" were also not given adequate consideration. Another problem was the retroactive application of legal norms, as "crimes against peace" and "crimes against humanity" were, from this position, defined only after they had been committed. This point was raised, among others, by Radhabinod Pal, a judge at the Tokyo Tribunal, who argued for the acquittal of the defendants [Olick 2005, p. 106].

An important consequence of prosecuting specific individuals was the de facto exoneration of those who were not brought to trial, which divided the nation into a guilty minority and an innocent majority. The tribunals became an alternative to the idea of collective responsibility, elements of which were applied in Germany in the first months of the occupation but were soon abandoned due to their low effectiveness and the need to establish cooperation with the people [Olick 2005, pp. 98–99]. In Japan, however, the occupation administration immediately set out to separate the "militarist clique" from the people, refusing to penalize ordinary Japanese and attempting to use the militarists as scapegoats [Orr 2001, p. 16].

However, as the Cold War intensified, the focus of the U.S. shifted from efforts to demilitarize and "re-educate" aggressors to turning them into allies. Consolidating pro-American forces in power and rearmament became urgent tasks, requiring the rehabilitation of some of those previously convicted or deprived of their rights. With Washington's approval, a number of German officers were rehabilitated and trials were halted. In 1949 and 1954, the Bundestag passed amnesty laws that exempted more than 1 million former officials and functionaries of the NSDAP, SS, and SA from punishment. In 1951, a law was passed that restored the right of persons who had undergone denazification to hold public office. As a result, by 1953, about 30 percent of all posts in ministries were held by former members of Nazi organizations [Frei 2002, p. 23, 54], and Konrad Adenauer's military advisers included Heinz Guderian and Albert Kesselring. At the same time, pressure on the far-left opposition increased: in 1956, the German Constitutional

Court ruled to ban the Communist Party of Germany, and thousands of communists were subsequently persecuted.

A similar "reverse course" was pursued in Japan. In the 1950s, at Washington's insistence, processes of rehabilitation were initiated. Soon thereafter, approximately 200,000 figures of the former regime were rehabilitated, the majority of whom returned to politics and public administration [Harries, Harries 1987 p. 196–197]. Following the 1952 elections, approximately 42 percent of Diet members were rehabilitated persons [Finn 1992, p. 296]. Among them were Kishi Nobusuke, who held a ministerial post in 1941–1944 and became Prime Minister in 1957, and Shigemitsu Mamoru, foreign minister in a number of both wartime and postwar Cabinets. The United States also contributed to the "red purges" of 1949–1951, the forced dismissal of communists and those suspected of supporting them from government service and private corporations. About 27,000 trade unionists, journalists, and intellectuals were persecuted [Hirata, Dower 2006, p. 3].

There were, however, significant differences in the occupation policies towards Germany and Japan: in the latter case, it was more lenient. In addition to dividing the country into several occupation zones, Germany was subject to a policy of denazification aimed at eradicating Nazi ideology. The entire adult population had to complete a survey on their level of involvement in the regime, on the basis of which special courts (*Spruchkammern*) divided Germans into five categories of guilt. In total, more than 3 million people were examined, of whom about 23,600 were found to be "responsible" or "most responsible" [Berger 2012, p. 48]. This process, however, encountered serious problems. Due to a lack of time and personnel, decisions were made on the basis of guarantees from trustworthy individuals. As a result, those found guilty were often not the real criminals, many of whom had enough connections and resources to find a guarantor, but people less connected to the regime. Denazification soon became extremely unpopular. By the late 1940s, it was criticized even by some of the Nazi victims and gradually ceased.

Although restrictions were also imposed in Japan on ideas and organizations considered to be drivers of chauvinism and expansionism, they included less severe measures and had a limited scope. Thus, the United States decided to preserve the institution of the Emperor and exempt Hirohito from responsibility in order to stabilize the country and prevent public resistance. The occupation administration persuaded the people that the military command had betrayed their Emperor and deceitfully drawn the Japanese into the war.

Nonetheless, the U.S. made serious efforts to demilitarize the country and separate Shinto from the state, considering it to be the main driving force of expansionism and chauvinism. The Emperor had to issue the Humanity Declaration (*Ningen sengen*), in which he debunked "false conception that the Emperor is divine, and that the Japanese people are superior to other races and fated to rule the world".[1] Under the new Constitution of 1947, the Emperor was given an exclusively symbolic status, stripped of real power; religion was separated from the state, and the Emperor's functions as head of Shinto were limited to ceremonial duties. Article 9 postulated the renunciation of "war as a sovereign right of the nation" and the prohibition of maintaining armed forces, while Article 66 barred military personnel from holding the positions of Prime Minister and Cabinet members.[2] Concepts of Japanese exceptionalism, duty to the Emperor, and glorification of militarism were removed from school curricula. More than 120,000 teachers were forced to resign from educational institutions due to their nationalist views [Finn 1992, p. 60].

At the same time, the extent of demilitarization became a factor of difference: in Japan, it proved to be more profound and enduring. Although the aforementioned "reverse course" led to a retreat from

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[1] 官報號外 昭和21年1月1日 詔書 [人間宣言]. 国立国会図書館: https://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/shiryo/03/056/056tx.html

[2] The Constitution of Japan. *Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet*. https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html

strict compliance with the prohibition of armed forces, some results of demilitarization persisted. Unlike in West Germany, former Japanese imperial officers were largely excluded both from the restoration of military institutions and participation in postwar politics.

Historical Memory in Japan and the FRG During the Cold War

World War II became a central element of postwar collective memories in German and Japanese societies, forming a prism through which they viewed their history and shaped their identities. In both Germany and Japan, two main traditions of historical memory emerged: a conservative tradition associated with big business, certain religious organizations, and the prewar elite who had escaped lustration, and a progressive (left-wing) tradition associated with left-wing forces, trade unions, part of the intelligentsia, and leftist youth. In both countries, efforts of the occupation administrations to consolidate power in the hands of the pro-Western elite resulted in conservatives dominating politics in the first postwar decades. However, the nature and evolution of the two traditions, the specifics of their rivalry, and its outcome turned out to be distinct in the two countries.

In Germany, the key mnemonic actor seeking to promote a conservative narrative about the past was the Christian Democratic coalition (CDU/CSU). Between 1949 and 1969, it managed to control the majority of seats in each cabinet and appoint the chancellors. This force, equally hostile to Nazism and Communism, sought to rebuild the country as a free, market-oriented democratic state and to secure its place within the Western alliance. Electorally, the block relied on large business, the Catholic community, and, due to its active promotion of rehabilitation, former members of the NSDAP and the military. Other important conservative mnemonic actors were various organizations of “expellees,” that is, German repatriates who were forced to leave the territories that no longer belonged to Germany. Their interests were

represented, among others, by the GB/BHE political party, which was a long-standing parliamentary partner of the CDU/CSU. The "expellees," whose number reached 9 million in the first postwar decades (about 17 percent of the total population of the FRG), formed a significant electorate [Ahonen 1998].

In the early decades, the conservative tradition in Germany centered on a handful of key beliefs. First, it postulated the need to restore national dignity and self-confidence based on positive self-esteem, which was de facto synonymous with minimizing attention to Germany's past crimes. Second, it divided Germans into a guilty minority and an innocent majority. Responsibility for the crimes was placed solely on the group of regime leaders. Although conservatives unequivocally condemned this group, they rejected any concept of collective responsibility and saw the majority of Germans as innocent people whose good name had been tarnished [Herf 1997, p. 212]. Thus, the conservatives sought to shield Wehrmacht soldiers from responsibility to preserve the honor and legitimacy of the military, as well as leading industrialists in view of the country's reconstruction needs [He 2008, p. 59]. Conservatives defended continuity with pre-Nazi Germany, viewing the Third Reich as a historical anomaly.

Third, conservatives championed the self-victimization of the German people, i.e., portraying them as victims of both Nazi repression and the actions of the Allied forces, including carpet bombing, violence against civilians, expulsion from eastern territories, occupation and division of the country. Thus, in 1952, the Adenauer government supported reinstating a National Day of Mourning (*Volkstrauertag*) to honor the memory of German victims of the war, while no commemorative practices were associated neither with the Holocaust or other crimes, nor with the Surrender.

Among the major mnemonic actors within the progressive (left-wing) narrative was the Social Democratic Party (SPD). In terms of electoral support, the SPD relied on influential German trade unions. The Social Democrats saw the Nazis' rise to power as a result of Germany's socio-economic development: accelerated modernization was not

accompanied by a bourgeois revolution, which made the bourgeoisie dependent on the state and hostile to democracy. They believed that, in order to consolidate democracy and prevent the resurgence of ultra-nationalism, it was necessary to nationalize large enterprises and take broad measures to re-educate the people: removing those who sympathized with Nazism from politics, recognizing the responsibility of all Germans for crimes, and repenting actively before the victims [Berger 2012, p. 50].

Other important actors within the progressive tradition were various writers and scholars. For instance, the renowned writer Thomas Mann, who supported the idea of collective German responsibility for Nazism, stated that "it is quite impossible for one born there simply to renounce the wicked, guilty Germany" and declare innocence [Mann 1945, p. 18]. In his famous 1947 work "The Question of German Guilt," philosopher Karl Jaspers emphasized political responsibility, the responsibility of a state's citizens for the consequences of its actions, and noted that, although Nuremberg was a "national disgrace" for the Germans, it was "due to the fact that we did not free ourselves from the criminal regime but were liberated by the Allies" [Jaspers 2000, p. 49].

Thus, it can be seen that, in the initial period, the conservative narrative in Germany corresponded to Matteo Dian's model of self-victimhood and amnesia, while the progressive narrative corresponded to the model of contrition. Apart from their rejection of Nazism, the two traditions had little to agree on. Consequently, in the first postwar decades, there was no public consensus on historical memory. As a result of the 1949 elections, a coalition of the CDU/CSU and FDP came to power and embarked on a conservative line in the field of memory politics, including the enactment of the above-mentioned rehabilitation laws and the alignment of school history textbooks with the conservative narrative.

At the same time, the government did not shy away from attempts to reconcile with the victims of Nazism. The FRG normalized relations with France, the Netherlands, Greece, and Israel. In 1953, 1956, and 1965, compensation laws were passed providing for payments to German citizens and those who emigrated from the country before 1937 for the

loss of relatives, damage to health, deprivation of liberty, loss of property, and forced dismissals.[3] However, the influence of conservative positions was manifested in the fact that payments were directed not least toward Germans, and normalization was limited to the Western allies. Overall, in the first decades after the war, the absence of societal consensus and the intensity of collective trauma led to attempts to bracket out the most painful questions. This period would later be called "an era of active suppression of the past" [Berger 2012, p. 58].

However, gradually, due to various factors, the situation began to change. On the one hand, the ongoing prosecutions of those responsible for the Holocaust helped to keep questions of German guilt at the forefront of public discussions. The trials of a high-ranking police officer in Ulm in 1958 and Albert Eichmann in 1961 caused a significant public resonance. The latter intensified the debate on the role of German conformism in the Holocaust. The 1960s also saw trials of personnel from the Auschwitz, Belzec, Treblinka, and Sobibor concentration camps. On the other hand, the growth of the left-wing student movement and the SPD's transition from opposition to participation in government contributed to the breakdown of the policy of silence. The involvement in politics of the younger generation, which condemned their elders for complicity in Nazis' crimes, stimulated the re-actualization of war memory. At the same time, the SPD's adoption of more moderate positions and growth in support allowed it to enter government in 1964 alongside the CDU/CSU. In 1965, the Social Democrats succeeded in extending the statute of limitations for Nazi crimes. It was extended again in 1969 and completely abolished in 1979 [Herf 1997, pp. 337–342].

The SPD's victory in the 1969 elections provided an opportunity to foster a progressive narrative. The key element of Chancellor Willy

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[3] Bundesgesetz zur Entschädigung für Opfer der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung. *Bundesanzeiger Verlag:* https://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBl&jumpTo=bgbl153s1387.pdf#__bgbl__%2F%2F*%5B%40attr_id%3D%27bgbl153s1387.pdf%27%5D__1715565081852

Brandt's course was his Eastern Policy (*Ostpolitik*), aimed at reconciling with Germany's Eastern European neighbors. In the early 1970s, he reached agreements with the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR. His famous kneeling during the visit to Warsaw in 1970 had a positive impact on West Germany's image in Eastern European countries, as well as symbolized the incorporation of a narrative of contrition into the official discourse. However, German society was far from reaching consensus: the conservatives vigorously resisted the reforms. The ratification of Brandt's treaties led to fierce opposition; in 1974, the Chancellor resigned. The year before, a German court had once again rejected claims for compensation from former forced laborers. Yet the foundation had been laid. In the 1970s, educational reforms were carried out: coverage of Nazis' crimes increased and anti-fascist commemorative ceremonies were organized. Besides, a four-part TV series Holocaust sparked widespread public discussions of the issue of German guilt [He 2008, pp. 73–75].

The 1980s marked the gradual emergence of a consensus in society around the narrative of contrition. With the collapse of the Union-SPD coalition and the arrival of Helmut Kohl as Chancellor, the conservatives attempted to take revenge in the realm of memory politics, returning to the idea of "drawing a line" under the Nazi past and restoring the "spirit of healthy patriotism." This conservative impulse was met with resistance, which manifested itself in two scandals. In 1985, the public reacted with fierce criticism to the initiative of Kohl and U.S. President Ronald Reagan to jointly visit the American-German military cemetery in Bitburg, where, among others, members of the Waffen-SS were buried. Although Kohl persuaded Reagan not to cancel the event, the leaders were forced to supplement it with a visit to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp [He 2008, p. 88]. In 1986, the "historians' dispute" erupted. A number of conservative scholars, including Michael Stürmer and Ernst Nolte, argued that the topic of Nazism should not dominate the historical memory of Germans and that it was the justified fears of the middle classes about the threat of communism that led them to support the NSDAP. In response, Jürgen Habermas

and other left-wing thinkers accused them of relativizing Nazis' crimes and seeking to renationalize German historical consciousness. The leftists are generally considered to have prevailed in the dispute [Berger 2012, p. 67].

Ultimately, the narrative of contrition became established within society. The 1985 address by German President Richard von Weizsäcker became symbolic. Weizsäcker, a CDU member, stated that repentance did not contradict healthy patriotism but was a source of national pride and the duty of every German.[4] The speech, highly praised by both conservatives and leftists, marked the acceptance of the narrative of contrition by the conservative tradition and the establishment of a national consensus around it.

In postwar Japan, both conservative and progressive (left-wing) memory traditions also took shape. Among conservatives, the major actors were the Liberal Democratic Party and the state bureaucracy. A notable part of the elite retained prewar continuity, as many escaped lustration or were rehabilitated. The conservative narrative was also promoted by a number of influential non-governmental organizations. One of them was the Association of Shinto Shrines (*Jinja honchō*), which was established after the separation of religion from the state and brought together most Shinto shrines. Dissatisfied with the diminished status of Shintoism, it sought to revise the postwar order and restore traditions, including the cultivation of the "unique spiritual values" of the Japanese people associated with Shinto, the centrality of the Emperor, and the cult of war heroes (*eirei*), who sacrificed their lives for him [Seraphim 2006, p. 53].

Another influential organization, The Japan Association of War-bereaved Families (*Nippon izokukai*), campaigned for the restoration of pensions and public recognition for veterans and war bereaved families, and for the preservation of the cult of war heroes. Thus, it promoted the

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4 Richard von Weizsäcker, "der 8 Mai 1945: 40 Jahre danach, Weizsacker, Von Deustchland aus: Reden des Bundesprasidenten. – Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987.

enshrinement of the spirits of fallen soldiers, including those who were recognized as war criminals [Dian 2017, p. 42].

At the heart of the Japanese conservatives' ideology was their rejection of the "Tokyo Trials view of history." Often referring to the dissenting opinion of Judge Radhabinod Pal, they criticized the tribunals as victors' justice, which regards all of Japan's actions since 1931 as aggressive, while considering any decisions of the Allies to be justified. Conservatives, in turn, did not consider the war to be exclusively aggressive. They argued that Japan was dragged into it, emphasizing the factors of economic crisis, the U.S. oil embargo, and Western colonialism setting the standards for great power politics [Gluck 1990, p. 12]. The most ardent revisionists insisted on the messianic goal of the war – the liberation of the peoples of Asia from "white colonialism." The annexation of Korea, the establishment of Manchukuo and Wang Jingwei's government in Nanjing were claimed to reflect the will of the people, while war crimes were presented as exaggerations or propaganda lies. An essential part of the conservative narrative was the idea of continuity between prewar and postwar Japan, symbolized by the institution of the Emperor and Shintoism [Dian 2017, pp. 43–45].

Conservatives sought to bolster the high status of Japanese war dead. They idealized the "Japanese spirit" of the wartime generation, which sacrificed itself for the nation and its future prosperity, and believed that recognizing the war as aggressive implies dishonor for the heroes [Orr 2001, p. 21]. The Yasukuni Shrine became the central location for commemorating fallen soldiers. Finally, conservatives saw Japan's restoration of the "first-tier power" status as the core objective, but disagreed on how to achieve it. Kishi Nobusuke, Shigemitsu Mamoru, and Hatoyama Ichirō sought full rearmament and viewed the alliance with the United States as a temporary evil. Yoshida Shigeru, Ikeda Hayato, Satō Eisaku – a more moderate group – put a premium on active economic development, less involvement in international affairs, and relying on U.S. security guarantees [Samuels 2007].

Within the progressive (left-wing) tradition of memory, the major actors were the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) and the Japan Communist

Party (JCP). Although they did not participate in any government until 1993, these parties wielded considerable influence, serving as a powerful check on hardline conservatives. Various non-governmental organizations also played an important role. One of them was the Japan Teachers' Union (*Nykkyōso*). Since most of the teachers who remained in education after the purges held left-wing views, *Nykkyōso* enjoyed considerable support. The core of its ideology was remorse for participation in the militaristic education system. The organization blamed the war on the "feudal-fascist characteristics" of the prewar system and declared the need for decentralization of education [Duke 1973]. Another vocal organization, the Memorial Society for Students Killed in the War (*Nihon senbotsu gakusei kinen-kai*), sought to honor the memory of students who were called to war in the final years of the conflict, including kamikaze pilots, and to ensure that such senseless deaths would not be repeated. Various groups of atomic bomb victims (*hibakusha*) aimed to achieve public recognition and compensation for victims and to promote nuclear disarmament.

At the core of the progressive tradition was the idea of the "double victimization" of the ordinary people, i.e., the Japanese were seen as victims of both the militarist regime and the war, that caused considerable suffering, including carpet bombing and atomic attacks [Dian 2017, pp. 51–52]. The *hibakusha* became an important symbol of the Japanese people's suffering and the struggle for nuclear disarmament. Another key idea was a radical break with the past. Progressives linked militarism and war with incomplete modernization and traditionalism, advocating complete democratization, the achievement of civil subjectivity and political freedom [Kersten 1996, p. 181]. Finally, progressives shared an extreme rejection of militarism in both domestic and foreign policy. Their doctrine was unarmed neutrality: a complete renunciation of armed forces and non-alignment with military blocks.

Thus, it can be seen that, unlike in Germany, the conservative narrative in Japan included not only a model of self-victimhood but also glorification of the past, i.e., it was more revisionist. The progressive narrative, on the other hand, focused on the model of self-victimhood

and barely included any contrition. In addition to the differences in occupation policy described above, this divergence between Germany and Japan can be explained by historical circumstances. Firstly, in Japan, it was impossible to clearly identify a specific group responsible for wartime crimes. Japan's imperial expansion, which culminated in World War II, spanned the entire half of the century and involved several Cabinets and Emperors. In addition, the peculiarities of the decision-making system, including the dispersion of responsibility, competition between centers of influence, and the absence of an autocratic leader and a single party, further complicated the identification of the group of perpetrators [Berger 2012, pp. 130–131]. Furthermore, the use of the term "militarists" to designate those responsible was complicated by the vagueness of its definition and by the reluctance to regard the military as criminals (as in the case of the Wehrmacht in Germany).

Secondly, Japanese conservatives were able to take a more revisionist stance due to the differences in the crimes committed by the two countries, namely the factor of Holocaust. Although ideas of racial supremacy served as the basis for many of Japan's crimes, it did not pursue a systematic policy of complete extermination of a group on racial grounds. The Holocaust became both a factor in the complete delegitimization of the Nazi regime and a powerful symbol of its crimes, as it was the discussion of the genocide that prevented German society from drawing a line under the Nazi past [Berger 2012, pp. 128–129].

Unlike Germany in the first postwar decades, Japan saw a certain convergence between conservative and progressive narratives. Taking advantage of this, the moderate conservatives were able to build a consensus between the two traditions in the areas of commemoration and foreign policy. The first element of this consensus was the portrayal of the Japanese as the main victims. Conservatives thus avoided the issue of guilt and elicited sympathy for the victims of the war generation, while progressives justified their rejection of militarism, which they blamed for the war. The consensus led to the commonality of commemorative symbols (Hiroshima and *hibakusha*) and, most importantly, the ignoring of the victims of Japan's aggression. Thus, in his address at the San

Francisco Conference, Prime Minister Yoshida justified Japan's "desire to live in peace" solely by "the suffering of his people".[5] The National Memorial Service for the War Dead, organized since the 1950s, also ignored the victims among the non-Japanese [Buruma 1995, p. 117].

The second element of the consensus was minimizing Japan's military role, as moderate conservatives viewed the pacifism championed by the leftist movement as a practical excuse for rejecting U.S. requests to increase military commitments. Attempts by revisionists led by Prime Minister Kishi in the late 1950s to revise defense policy toward a greater military role met with widespread public resistance, resulting in the largest protests in the country's history (*Anpo tōsō*). Although the updated security treaty with Washington – Kishi's main brainchild – was ultimately concluded, the protests led to his resignation, the coming to power of moderate conservatives, and the consolidation of a pacifist consensus [Dian 2017, p. 63].

The consensus endured several crises. Against the backdrop of U.S. demands to engage in the Vietnam War, the Cabinet of Satō Eisaku, partly under the pressure from the protest movement, reinforced the doctrine of military non-involvement, establishing the three non-nuclear principles and prohibiting arms exports. Meanwhile, the victimhood of those who had suffered from Japan's aggression was acknowledged only in exceptional cases. Although, in 1972, Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei, under the pressure from Beijing, stated that Japan accepted the responsibility for the damage caused and "deeply reproached itself,"[6] by 1973, he told the Diet that historians had yet to determine whether the deployment of troops in China constituted an act of aggression [Dian 2017, p. 68].

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5 Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida's Speech at the San Francisco Peace Conference. *Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo*. https://worldjpn.net/documents/texts/JPUS/19510907.S1E.html

6 Joint Communique of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People's Republic of China. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*. September 29, 1972. https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/joint72.html

At the same time, there was a slight shift in the progressive narrative. The Vietnam War and normalizing relations with China led to a growing focus on the narrative of contrition. Thus, a vast body of literature devoted to Japan's war crimes has been published, including works by Honda Katsuichi, Morimura Seiichi, and Senda Kakō. Public debate was sparked by lawsuits filed by historian Ienaga Saburō against the Ministry of Education, as his 1965 textbook, which extensively covered Japan's war crimes, was not approved. The litigation lasting until 1982 reinforced the belief that Tokyo deliberately conceals the unsavory aspects of history.

In response, the conservative camp consolidated its position. In 1980, the LDP launched a campaign to correct "biased textbooks" promoting a "masochistic view of history." In 1982, the party proclaimed the "cultivation of Japanese spirit and national pride" as the basis of its political program [Conrad 2010]. At the same time, revisionist historians became more active, disputing the use of the term "Nanking Massacre," the number of victims, and the evidence of other war crimes. In 1982, the premiership was taken by Nakasone Yasuhiro, a hardline conservative. His visit to the Yasukuni Shrine on August 15, 1985, sparked heated debate. Being the first visit to this shrine by a Prime Minister in an official capacity following the enshrinement of Class A war criminals in 1978, it provoked a diplomatic scandal and further destabilized the historical memory consensus.

In sum, by the end of the 1980s, Japan found itself on the verge of a collapse of the postwar historical memory consensus based on a narrative of self-victimhood. In contrast, in the FRG at this point, for the first time in the entire postwar period, a consensus based on a narrative of contrition had formed.

Historical Memory in Contemporary Japan and the FRG

In Germany, from the 1990s to the present day, the consensus around the narrative of contrition has largely remained intact. German reunification, however, posed a challenge due to the need to integrate the historical memory of West and East Germans and fears that the patriotic fervor of reunification would revive ultranationalism. In the 1990s, there was indeed an upsurge of the New Right movement, which sought to overcome the "guilt mythology," establish Germany as a "normal" and "self-confident" country, and oppose immigration [He 2008, p. 99–100]. At the same time, the early 1990s saw a spike in crimes against immigrants. However, the efforts of moderate forces pushed the New Right out of mainstream politics.

Despite concerns, the need to integrate the historical memory of the GDR did not lead to a breakdown in the consensus around contrition as well. On the one hand, the FRG has made efforts to bring East German historical memory into line with its own. The education system was restructured: thousands of school and university teachers found to have collaborated with the Stasi were dismissed, history departments were reorganized, and curricula were revised [Lyozina 2015, pp. 61–62]. Youth educational activities were also organized, including trips to concentration camps, to inform about the multifaceted nature of the Resistance movements and the dangers of xenophobia and racism. On the other hand, the new East German elites themselves sought to adopt the historical narrative of the FRG. In 1990, after the first free elections, a parliamentary declaration recognized the "responsibility of the Germans in the GDR" for "genocide, particularly affecting Jews ..., the people of the Soviet Union, the Polish people, as well as the Sinti and Roma" [Jander 1990]. As a result, the historical memory of East Germany was, to a certain extent, assimilated into the narrative of the FRG.

The narrative of contrition was reflected in the official events marking the 50th anniversary of the end of the war. The Bundestag declared January 27, the date of the liberation of Auschwitz, a Day of Remembrance for

the Victims of National Socialism. On the anniversary, German President Roman Herzog noted that responsibility for the Holocaust lay with Germans as a whole [Herf 1997, p. 369]. A tradition of issuing official apologies became established, with statements to this effect made by Roman Herzog, Gerhard Schröder, and other leaders. A similar trend was observed in the museum sphere. In 1995, an exhibition dedicated to the Wehrmacht's atrocities against the civilian population sparked debate, undermining the myth of the innocence of regular soldiers. In 2001, construction of the Memorial to the Victims of the Holocaust began in Berlin, and Europe's largest Jewish Museum opened.

At the same time, by the early 2000s, following the consensus on contrition, a gradual convergence on the issue of expelled Germans emerged due to the adoption of elements of self-victimhood by the Left. Researcher Thomas Berger traces this trend back to 1999, when the left-wing government of Gerhard Schröder, seeking to justify Germany's participation in the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia, stated that, given their experience of Nazism, the Germans had a moral obligation to respond to human rights violations [Berger 2012, p. 76]. This rhetoric created a framework for the Left to condemn violations of Germans' rights. As a result, in May 1999, the Bundestag passed a resolution calling for the settlement of "still open questions of history," referring to the expulsion of Germans [Berger 2012, p. 77]. In 2008, as part of the CDU/CSU and SPD coalition agreement, the Bundestag established the Center Against Expulsion and the Foundation Flight, Expulsion, Reconciliation. The trend continues to this day. In 2018, on World Refugee Day, Angela Merkel noted that there was no justification for the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans.[7]

Unlike Germany, which observed a growing consensus between traditions based on contrition and elements of self-victimhood, Japan's politics of memory was characterized by increasing polarization. At the

[7] Merkel calls Sudeten German expulsion "immoral", drawing Czech ire. *Czech Radio*. https://english.radio.cz/merkel-calls-sudeten-german-expulsion-immoral-drawing-czech-ire-8157867

turn of the 1990s, the postwar consensus finally collapsed. The death of Hirohito in 1989, which ended the unspoken taboo on discussing his guilt, once again divided conservative and progressive traditions. A statement by Nagasaki Mayor Motoshima Hitoshi stating the Emperor's responsibility for the war sparked debate, and the progressive-oriented newspaper Asahi Shimbun published a series of articles on the subject. Conservatives, meanwhile, enthusiastically embraced the extensive enthronement rituals conducted under Meiji-era regulations, which were intended to reaffirm the relevance of centuries-old traditions.

Concurrently, amid the globalization of memory and increased cultural exchange with East Asia, the progressive tradition began to move away from the self-victimhood narrative toward embracing the "German model" of repentance and reconciliation with former victims. As early as 1986, the *Nihon senbotsu gakusei kinen-kai* spearheaded establishing the Japan-Germany Peace Forum, which brought together activists from the two countries. New mnemonic actors emerged from among human rights organizations. One of the most important was the Violence Against Women in War Network (VAWW NET), founded by renowned journalist Matsui Yayori. In cooperation with South Korean groups, the Network brought to the forefront the issue of "comfort women."

Thus, in 2001, they organized the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal, examining Japan's military sexual slavery during the war. The tribunal found 10 wartime leaders guilty, including Emperor Hirohito as Commander-in-Chief.[8] VAWW NET also supported protests against U.S. bases in Okinawa, linking them to violence against women. In addition, Children and Textbooks Japan Network 21 was established in 1998. Following in the footsteps of activists who supported lawsuits of Ienaga Saburō, it opposed attempts by historians and politicians to alter history textbooks toward justifying the actions of militaristic Japan.

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[8] Women's International War Crimes Tribunal Archives. https://archives.wam-peace.org/wt/en/judgement

The advocacy of human rights and left-wing groups, the historic defeat of the LDP in the 1993 elections, pressure from international civil society and Western countries, as well as interest in cooperation with China and South Korea led to attempts first by moderate LDP conservatives and then by coalition cabinets to reform official rhetoric. Over several years, repeated apologies for past crimes were made on behalf of Emperor Akihito, prime ministers, and other officials. The most apologetic statements are considered to be those made by Kōno Yōhei in 1993 and Murayama Tomiichi on August 15, 1995. The former acknowledged the responsibility for establishing and managing comfort stations, and the recruitment of comfort women against their will, extending "sincere apologies and remorse" to them.[9] In the latter statement, Murayama, the Prime Minister from the JSP, expressed "deep remorse" and "heartfelt apology" for colonial rule and aggression.[10] Progressives also made advances in the field of education, as the provisions of Murayama's statement were included in school curricula, and leading textbook publishers *Tōkyō Shoseki* and *Kyōiku Shuppan* increased the coverage of war crimes.

However, a number of political trade-offs with conservatives limited the ability of left-wing parties to influence memory politics, and, by the end of the 1990s, the JSP (reorganized as Social Democratic Party) had lost its former popular appeal. Eventually, not only was there no consensus on contrition, but a sharp backlash from conservatives followed. Although subsequent Cabinets did not revoke the statements by Murayama and Kōno for concerns of damaging foreign relations, many conservatives did not accept them. Thus, Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryūtarō believed that recognizing the war as an act of aggression was disrespectful to the fallen soldiers. This position was manifested, in particular, in his visit to

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9 Statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary. August 4, 1993. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*. https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/rp/page25e_000343.html

10 「戦後*50*周年の終戦記念日にあたって」いわゆる村山談話. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*. https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/danwa/07/dmu_0815.html

the Yasukuni Shrine. Koizumi Jun'ichirō, Abe Shinzō, and some other leaders acted similarly.

In 1997, the Japan Conference (*Nippon kaigi*) was founded, associated with many LDP leaders and promoting ideas of constitutional revision, the non-legitimacy of the Tokyo Trial, the denial of the 1937 Nanjing Massacre and military sexual slavery, and the reinterpretation of Japan's wartime objectives as the liberation of Asia [Japan-U.S... 2023: 44]. In 1996, conservative historians established the Society for History Textbook Reform (*Atarashii rekishi kyōkasho o tsukuru-kai*) and proposed a textbook that repeated the provisions of the revisionist narrative. Although this textbook eventually accounted for only about 1 percent of the history textbooks adopted nationwide, its formal approval in 2001 sparked protests in Japan and abroad. Revisionism also influenced more neutral publishers: since the 2000s, textbooks have begun to place less emphasis on topics that remain contested.

At the same time, by the 2000s, there was a growing sense of "apology fatigue" in Japan, as full reconciliation with its neighbors had never been achieved [Streltsov 2020, p. 54]. One reason for this failure was the lack of consensus in Japanese society on the issue of guilt, causing the apologies to seem insincere. Behind the vagueness of the wording and the failure of the Diet's attempts to adopt a resolution offering unequivocal apology was fierce resistance from conservatives. This very same resistance explained the combination of apologies with revisionist actions, particularly visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. Another reason was, however, the politics of memory in the victim countries themselves, including the use of the image of Japan as an enemy for political purposes.

The 2009 electoral victory of the opposition, led by Hatoyama Yukio, marked the last attempt to reverse the conservative trend: the Cabinet attempted to deepen official apologies and create a non-religious memorial to the war dead as an alternative to the Yasukuni Shrine. However, Washington's dissatisfaction with the new leadership, the acute crisis in relations with China in 2012, and the rise to power of Abe Shinzō ensured the prevalence of the conservative narrative [Dian 2017, pp. 121, 125]. Abe laid the groundwork for the current trajectory aimed

at moving beyond the issue of wartime apologies, overcoming the pacifist constraints of the Constitution, and fostering patriotism. He undertook efforts to exclude the contested history issues from school curricula and to reform state museums in a similar vein. An example of the latter trend is the complete removal of discussions on Japan's aggression from the Osaka Peace Museum, previously known for its focus on war crimes [Seaton 2015, p. 1].

It should be noted that memory politics in Japan remain polarized: attempts to reinforce the conservative narrative are met with public opposition. An example of this is the large-scale protests of 2015 against changing the interpretation of the Constitution, which brought more than 120,000 people onto the streets.[11] They were supported by the Constitutional Democratic Party, which largely took on the role of the major progressive party. In addition, the Komeito party, which is associated with the Buddhist movement Soka Gakkai and has been a coalition partner of the LDP since 1999, also promotes a moderate historical narrative, constraining the aspirations of conservatives [Nelidov 2022, p. 47].

Conclusion

After 1945, Japan and Germany found themselves in similar circumstances. Both countries were occupied, and their politics, economies, and societies underwent forced restructuring. The war crimes tribunals resulted in similar numbers of people being convicted. The trials themselves shared the common problems of failing to take into account a number of crimes and applying legal norms retroactively. Similarities also included the de facto division of society into a guilty minority and an innocent majority, and the "reverse course," that is, the return of a number of previously convicted individuals to government positions

[11] Huge protest in Tokyo rails against PM Abe's security bills. *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN0QZ0C2/

and the suppression of the left-wing opposition. At the same time, there were some differences between the occupation regimes, which partly influenced the formation and evolution of historical memory. Among them were the division of Germany; the preservation of the institution of the Emperor in Japan, which affirmed a certain ideological and state continuity, but was accompanied by a more far-reaching demilitarization and secularization; and the broader political purge in Germany.

Eventually, despite certain similarities in the historical memory of the two countries, including the centrality of the memory of World War II, and the distinction between conservative and progressive traditions, content and evolution of narratives proved to be largely different. Among the reasons were, in the case of Japan, the greater continuity of the elites; difficulties in clearly identifying a group that could be held responsible for crimes and the differences in the crimes themselves, including the absence of an analogue to the Holocaust (which, in Germany's case, kept the issue of the Nazis' crimes timely); as well as the more dominant position of conservatives in Japan's political system.

As a result, in the FRG, the conservative narrative initially coincided with the models of self-victimhood and amnesia according to Dian's classification, and the progressive narrative coincided with the model of contrition. In Japan, however, the conservative tradition included the glorification of the past (i.e., it was more revisionist) in addition to self-victimhood, while the progressive tradition focused on self-victimhood, with virtually no contrition. Moreover, in the FRG, the evolution of narratives involved a shift from polarization in the early decades to a consensus of traditions by the 1990s, due to the adoption of a narrative of contrition by conservatives, and a consolidation of this consensus in the 2000s due to the adoption by progressives of elements of self-victimhood. In Japan, by contrast, it was the early postwar decades that were marked by a consensus of traditions established around self-victimhood. This consensus gave way to polarization by the 1990s, which was initially sparked by progressives' embrace of contrition, and later deepened by the 2010s due to apology fatigue and the strengthening of revisionism among conservatives.

These differences contributed to the enduring relevance of historical grievances in Japan's relations with its neighbors, as the lack of domestic consensus created the perception that Tokyo's apology efforts were insincere.

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