

An Analytical Commentary on the Different Attitudes Between Germany and Japan Towards Their Criminal Responsibilities in the Second World War

· 胡鉴明 ·

I

Seventy five years ago, Germany and Japan jointly launched the Second World War in both eastern hemisphere and western hemisphere. The war ended finally in 1945 with the total collapse of this military alliance. Up till now nearly seventy years have passed, the smoke of gun powder has already scattered and disappeared. But the tragic scars could never be forgotten. The world's retrospection about this war has never stopped. In the early years right after the war, it was hard to distinguish the attitudes between the two guilty countries towards the war responsibility. However, after they had stood up again on the ruins of war, they became separated and went different ways in dealing with the problems of war crimes. This difference was revealed successively through the following two significant postwar Problems——the war reparations and their postwar relations with victimized countries.

As to Germany, she was brave enough to face the reality of history, made deep going introspection about her historical lessons, apologized for her offences and made war reparations accordingly. Hence Germany gained the world people's forgiveness and appreciation. On the contrary, Japan denied her crimes and evaded her war responsibilities. Up till now, the Japanese right wingers in both the government and the public still not only have no self-condemnation of her war crimes but also claim that the Pacific War was an armed struggle for the liberation of the European and American colonies in Asia.

The change of the German people's recognition of the Second World War experienced a complicated process. As a country in which millions of people supported Hitler and almost every family had lost its members in the war, it was

really not an easy thing for the German people to recognize the nature and result of the war. In the first few years after the war, the retrospection of this human tragedy was only made by limited number of intellectuals in German society, many common people thought they were also sufferers of the war. In fact, the German nation experienced a bitter process in recognizing the reality of the history. Not long after the war, the U.S. army organized millions of the German people to visit the notorious Nazi Concentration Camps in which countless Jews were murdered by the Nazi gangs. Such visiting activities were one of the important factors that at long last awakened the German people to the recognition of the unprecedented atrocities of the Nazi Regime.

1. The correct attitude of Germany towards the war has been evidenced by the following facts.

—— Since the beginning of the sixties of last century, the whole German society began to discuss and recognize the historic issues of their country. In 1979, **more than 72% of the German people believed the Nazi political power was a criminal one.** In 2005, during the 60 years anniversary of victory of the anti-fascist war, about 3000 new Nazis created a disturbance in Berlin, soon more than 6000 Berliners came around and suppressed them together with the police.

—— On the main war sites in Germany, there are memorial monuments and tomb stones of the Soviet army and the western Allies. Every year, German political leaders attend memorial activities there to mourn the heroes. On the contrary, we can not see any memorial constructions nor any tomb stones of Hitler and his gangs throughout the country.

—— On December 7, 1970. German Prime Minister. W. Brandt knelt before the memorial monument of Nazi victims in Poland for repentance representing his country. His action moved the whole world. In 1985, on the same memorial day fifteen years later, the President of Germany took a clear-cut stand to say **“May the 8th was our country’s liberation day. On which we were liberated from the Nazi dictatorial rule.”** The change of wording from

“defeat” to “liberation” actually was a milestone of the German people’s recognition about the history of the Second World War. In June 1995, Prime Minister Kohl also knelt down before the memorial monument of the Jewish victims for the forgiveness from the dead.

—— Germany has made a series of laws such as the Fundamental Law , stipulating definitely that all activities such as prettifying the Nazi war criminals, propagating Nazi thoughts, flying the Nazi flags or shouting Nazi slogans are illegal and should be punished or sentenced to imprisonment.

—— The Second World War caused tremendously heavy casualties and material losses. In Europe, more than 40 million people were killed; In Asia, merely China, other Asian victimized countries excluded, suffered casualties of 30 million, economic losses up to 6000 hundred million U.S. dollars. Even though both aggressors had caused equally heavy losses to the world people, However their respective responsibilities in war reparations formed a sharp contrast.

As to war reparations, Germany began to pay its reparations to victimized countries from early fifties. In 1953, West Germany made a law of war reparation, deciding the total amount of 880 hundred million U.S. dollars, which should be paid before 2030, while comparing with that of Japan, **Japan had only paid 18 hundred million U.S. dollars to Indonesia, the Philippines. Myanmar. Vietnam and South Korea. Only $\frac{1}{50}$ of that of Germany in**

Europe! There is a world of difference between the two figures!

—— The difference between Germany and Japan in their attitudes towards the nature of the Second World War also reflected in their directions and ways in history education in schools. In the early years right after the war, the textbooks in German schools mentioned the Nazi war criminals very casually. About ten years later, the Western Germany government began to criticize this evasiveness about the Nazi crimes. Under the governmental intervention and encouragement, the Germany’s textbooks began to give an account of the Nazi times without the

least reservation. As a result, the German young people, generation after generation, have had correct understanding of the Second World War.

At the same time, the West Germany government initiatively connected France, Poland and Israel to set up several bilateral textbook committees to discuss some relative sensitive problems so as to enable their history textbooks to stand the test of assessment of the international society. Such a way of compiling their school history textbooks, not only embodied the German statesmen's political consciousness of respecting historic reality and their broadmindedness, but also helped remove the barriers for Germany to associate with her former enemies.

—— The postwar relations between the defeated aggressors and the victimized countries should be considered an essential aspect in evaluating the formers' attitude towards the latter. As to Germany, there have been generation after generation, a good number of statesmen who have had confronted the history squarely and guided their people as well as the media to get rid of the Nazi evil influence and determined to be friend again with their European neighbouring countries. Hence, Germany was able to be a member of the European Union, doing very well in gaining impetus to the integration of Europe. It is the support of the people that has encouraged the German statesmen not to feel isolated but have an impetus in introspecting and drawing lessons from the war.

Today Germany has become an important and equal member of the large European family and is highly respected by her past enemies.

2. Now let's turn to Japanese attitude towards the Second World War

—— after the Meiji Reformation in 1868, the political and military circle of Japan had turned the whole country into a war machine, from 1911 to 1945 unconditional surrender to the Allies, in those 45 years, among 20 prime ministers, 8 of them were generals from the army or admirals from the navy. Under the leading thought of “maintaining the life line of the empire by territorial expansion”, since then until the Second World War,

Japan had launched 5 wars successively against Russia, Ching Empire, the Republic of China, and the U.S.S.R., until at last against the U.S.A. and the U.K.

After the Second World War, the U.S. for the sake of opposing the U.S.S.R, did not expose and condemn the Japanese militarism in a thorough way. Hence, the militarist thought survived and many Japanese thus deemed that their country was only defeated but not guilty. Some even complained that Japan was not only innocent but also was the victim of the U.S. atom bomb. As a result of the evil political guidance, **a media investigation by Yomiuri Shimbun**

in 1982 showed that more than 90% of the Japanese people believed the war against China was not an invasion.

—— Contrary to the attitude of German political leaders, almost all the Japanese government high officials have taken various ways to conceal the real facts of the war, shirking Japan's criminal responsibilities. Under the shelter of the U.S., the late Japanese Emperor had never expressed his apologies to the victimized countries as well as millions of the war sufferers. **Among more than twenty Japanese post-war Prime ministers, only Murayama Tomiichi**

honestly admitted that the Pacific War was Japan's aggression, and brought tragic disasters to millions and millions of the Asian people. Even Prime Minister Tanaka Kaku who was generally acknowledged as a friend of China and helped to bring about the later formal rehabilitation of diplomatic relationship between China and Japan, had not expressed any apology to China at all. When visiting China in 1972, he only said "Japan has given China much trouble!"

In 1978, the memorial tablets of 14 Class A war criminals including Hibeki Tojo , and 2000 Class B and Class C war criminals were brought into Yasukuni Shrine in the name of "martyrs" for people to pay homage to. Since then, altogether seven prime ministers have been there to worship them with the identity as a national political leader.

In 1980, with the government's formal approval, a stone memorial monument was built in Sugamo Prison , for the seven Class A war

criminals including Hibeki Tojo and Iwane Matsui .

In 1982, another monument was built in memory of the “Holy War”.

In 1995, a museum exhibiting things left over by the dead army men was set up by the side of Yasukuni Shrine .

In January 2014, a Japanese local government even went so far shamelessly to apply to the United Nations of 333 posthumous papers of Japanese young pilots who died in bombing the U.S. warships, for the world’s Non-material Civilization Heritage.

—— Owing to the fact that, the defeated Japan was entirely occupied by the U.S. army, not as Germany by 4 winners. At the beginning the occupier partly got rid of Japan’s militarist social foundations. However, with the coming of the cold war, the U.S. quickly changed her occupational policy, utilizing Japan as the frontline in confrontation against the socialist camp headed by the U.S.S.R. Subsequently, the Japanese left wing force with the Communist Party as its core naturally turned into object of the U.S. suppression instead of the rightists. Such policy enabled the war-time government officials to seize administrative power again. Some of them even climbed up to the posts of a prime minister and a foreign minister. In such a case, how could any anti-fascist law be made and carried out?

—— Concerning the problems of war reparations, Japan differed from Germany not only in the amount of money but also in their attitude towards this matter. Japan had actually made some war reparations to several southeast Asian countries. **However, the total amount of compensation was less than 2% of the reparations made by Germany.**

In 1952, under the U.S. control, the San Francisco Peace Conference was held and a peace treaty exempting Japan from war reparations was signed. In 1972, on the eve of the establishment of Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations

helped improve China's economic growth a great deal. Some Japanese frankly regarded it as partly a compensation of war reparation, but the Japanese government has never admitted that, because they know war reparation is a form of acknowledgement of war responsibility, while financial and technical assistance is quite another thing.

—— The problem of history education is another important aspect of different attitudes towards war responsibilities between Germany and Japan. At the early times after the war, the Japanese history text-books for primary and middle schools were compiled by scholars having sense of justice, in which the history of the Second World war was objectively described. But after the cold war emerged, the surviving militarist forces of Japan immediately made an uproar of recompiling history textbooks. In 1958, the “invasion to China” was changed into “entering China.” Several years later, all the original history textbooks were announced to be disqualified by the State Education Department. In 1969, all contents in history textbooks introspecting Japanese war crimes were completely cancelled. In 1982, all history textbooks were completely recompiled. Concerning the gruesome Nanjing massacre, the students could only see the following sentence “Many Chinese soldiers and common people died in chaos.” In 1986, the Pacific War was described as a liberation war, in which Japan liberated all these Asian colonies from European and American powers. **In reality, Japan captured all these European and U.S. colonies and turned them into her own property.**

—— As to the relationship with victimized countries, there is another obvious difference between Japan and Germany. Japanese right wingers thought she was defeated by U.S and the U.S.S.R, not defeated by China and all other victimized Asian states. Therefore when Japan rose up again with American support, she consistently looked down upon China, Korea and other Asian countries, not willing to get into harmonious relations with them as Germany had done in Europe.

Why did Japan not to follow Germany's example to apologize to the

victimized countries? The present Japanese Prime Minister Abe made such an explanation. When visiting Germany in Spring 2014, he said that Germany made apologies to her neighbouring countries because there was a common effort for European unity in the seventies of last century, but such an occasion did not appear in Asia at the same period of time. In fact, during the early seventies of last century. There was a chance for the improvement of Sino-Japanese relations after President Nixon's ice-breaking visit to China. Japan did not apologize to China then, only because she denied her war crimes. And Abe does not want to make an apology today because he does not think of any need for unity with China.

Both Germany and Japan were the arch-criminals of the Second World War, who had given the world unprecedented catastrophe. But in the seventy postwar years, the two guilty countries. have taken completely different attitudes towards their respective responsibilities. As for the Nazi offences, most of the German postwar statesmen have made thorough introspection and apologies to victimized countries. Furthermore, they also have made contributions to the process of European unity. However, Japan on the contrary, has been taking an attitude of evading, denial and shifting war responsibilities.

II

Why are the two attitudes so vastly different? Such a question really should be considered deeply about. Here we would like to discuss some possible answers as follows.

1. External Factors

—— The distinction in ways of the victorious nations in reforming the vanquished aggressors.

Germany was entirely defeated. dismembered, separately occupied and ruled by the three Allies and France. Even though these four winners differed from one and other seriously in ideology and political motive, however they united as one in smashing the Nazi ruling mechanism and pushing forward

democratization in Germany. In 1949, as the result of the cold war, Germany was separated into Federal Germany in the west and Democratic Germany in the east. But neither of the two new states had any relations with the remnants of Nazi Regime to the slightest degree. A statistic showed that the Allies had prosecuted more than 70,000 Nazi war criminals, 36,000 of them were convicted. And a great deal of so-called reluctant-followers were dismissed from administrative offices. So that almost all the East or West Germany's government workers were bitterly opposed to Nazi regime or were sufferers of Nazi political persecution. Hence, it was possible for Germany to be able to denounce sternly the Nazi aggression in the past. Not only investigating the Nazi war criminals thoroughly, but also reminding the people not to forget the disasters and miseries that Nazi Regime had once brought to the world.

Comparing with Germany, Japan's postwar situation was entirely not the same. When Japan unconditionally surrendered. The Allies armies had not landed her metropolitan territory. After the U.S. army had occupied the whole country alone. Japan's central government still exercised its ruling function under the control of the U.S. occupational army. Though some war criminals were put under strict surveillance, the social foundation of militarism was crippled to some extent. Yet, the Emperor as the No.1 war criminal was free from investigation, the imperial political system untouched. Not long later, the cold war began and the process of political reformation accordingly suspended. And Japan became the U.S. frontline confronting the U.S.S.R. in Northeast Asia. Under this particular situational background, in April 1952, more than 200,000 former government officials were set free and a large part of them even went so far as to return to governments at different levels. To the world's surprise, several of them even became members of the cabinet. On the other hand, the U.S. even gave order to the Japanese government to persecute the Japanese Communist Party, Putting the Japanese left wing forces under political suppression. In such atmosphere, the militarist influence soon revived.

In such situation how could the Japanese government confess her crimes

and make apologies to the victimized countries?

As a matter of fact, this particular historic factor was certainly one of the essential causes which had determined the difference of attitudes between Japan and Germany towards the postwar relations with their neighbouring countries.

—— Victimized countries' different attitudes towards Germany and Japan.

The European victimized countries and nations such as Poland Czechoslovakia and the Jewish nation persistently insisted on exposing and condemning the Nazi war crimes. They neither gave up their rights for war reparations nor for pursuing and capturing those escaped unpunished Nazi criminals. Consequently many Nazi murderers who had fled to South America were caught back to Germany and punished accordingly. At the same time Germany conscientiously made the reparations and tried her best to reconcile with her neighbouring countries, especially those central and eastern European ones. Finally she succeeded in gaining their forgiveness and reestablishing friendly relations as well as cooperations with them. Conversely Asian victimized countries' attitude towards Japan differed greatly from that of the European ones towards Germany. Most of the Asian victimized countries involved in political instability or other domestic difficulties. Hence they, including China, had to adopt a very lenient way in dealing with Japan' war responsibilities, they almost forgot to look into the Japanese war crimes and even tried to give up war reparations from Japan. On the other hand, Japan not only took advantage of the cold war to become a U.S. follower, but also made use of the Korean War to restore and develop her collapsed economy. In such a favorable situation, the right wing forces in Japan fully utilized the lenience of all victimized countries to shirk her war responsibilities and to refuse to apologize as well. Until now, a lot of postwar interstate problems are left over by history and still unsettled, the issue of Diaoyu Island sovereignty is one of them.

—— The different interstate environments of the two countries had been one of the influential factors that led to the difference of their attitudes

towards war responsibilities.

Europe is a highly developed continent. For a long time, most of the European countries have had an understanding of their identity to a very large degree and a hope of blending in with one another, regardless of their differences in history, cultural traditions, political and economic conditions. And an ideal of European unity and the forming of an European community had become more and more clear and definite after the Second World War. Germany is an European country, locating at the central part of western Europe, she was more earnest to blend in the European society and closely connect them politically and economically. By so doing, it would be easier for Germany to get rid of her historic weight on her mind through apology and get along with her neighbours again.

Japan is in Northeast Asia, but separated from the continent. the interstate relations among Japan and the Asian countries are quite different from that Germany faces in Europe, where there is very little in common whether in the sense of unity or in the degree of blending in politics and economy. In such a backward environment, Japan as a modern developed industrial country, would find itself isolated, unwilling to lower herself to give apology to the poor victimized countries.

After the war, the split Germany was facing two kinds of neighbouring countries. One kind included France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Demark etc. They had been conquered by Nazi Regime in 1940. They belonged to the capitalist camp during the cold war together with West Germany. The other kind included the Soviet Union, Poland Yugoslavia Hungary etc. They were also heavily devastated by the Nazi armies. During the cold war time, they were member states of the socialist camp together with East Germany. Owing to the fact that Germany had been divided into two independent countries and joined the two antagonistic camps respectively, therefore they needed to give apologies to countries in both camps.

As to Japan, after she had surrendered unconditionally, she was solely

controlled by the U.S. and had become an American lackey since the cold war. Of course she would not give apology to China — the largest victimized country, because China was then antagonistic to the U.S. As for the Pacific Ocean countries, such as the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia Vietnam etc, Japan had another reason not to give them apology. Because Japan insisted on that the Pacific War was for the liberation of all these colonies from Britain, the U.S. France and The Netherlands. They should not get apologies from Japan, but

the two countries' attitudes towards war responsibility.

German people think a state is the collection of people, while a government is a political organization governing the state. Denying a government does not mean denying the state. However, wiping out Nazi Regime has nothing to do with the existence of the country of Germany: While in the minds of the Japanese, the state can not be separated from the government. As a very particular country in the world, her national government represents the Imperial family, not the people. Denying the Emperor's government directly means denying the heavenly Imperial ruling system. Therefore the country and the government can never be divided. If the Japanese government representing the rule of the Imperial family is denied, it equals to a total denial of the whole country of Japan. That's why during the crucial moment of unconditional surrender, Japan still insisted on conserving her heavenly Imperial system. So, it is understandable German people's denial of the notorious Nazi Regime provided a logical basis for Germany to give apologies to her victimized countries, but in Japan the people could never dare admit that their heavenly Emperor is sinful. Thus, demanding the Imperial government to apologize to the victimized countries is almost out of the question.

== The different attitudes are also related to the two countries' religious and Cultural traditions.

Germany as an European country, most of her people are Christians, who sincerely believe in the Christian doctrine which emphasises undertaking responsibility for what one does and understand that committing a crime is a disgrace, while admitting a crime honestly and turn over a new leaf is respectable. But in Japan, her religious and cultural traditions pay much more attention to one's "face" and assessment from others. Admitting a crime is a disgrace for the individual, much less the nation of the heavenly Emperor. Obviously, the Japanese have very high sense of disgrace, but they have not any sense of being guilty. As a matter of fact, it is impossible for a nation which lacks the sense of being guilty to make a real self-examination of her brutal

crimes of aggression. They think it doesn't matter whether they have done something wrong or not, however it matters much whether others know they have done some evil things or not or whether others believe they are or are not guilty. Here I would like to repeat the vivid example I have just told you in the first part of my lecture, which embodied such typical Japanese psychology. At the early years of the beginning period of China's carrying out her policy of opening to the outside world and the economic reforming, Japan actually had given China a great deal of financial and technical support. Some people considered that this assistance from Japan was somewhat like a substitute of war reparation, which might lighten Japan's sense of war guilty. But Japan never said the assistance was related to Japan's war responsibility: The Japanese government stressed that their help to China embodied the friendly relation of the two countries.

III

Obviously speaking, Japan looked down upon China in the past because she was weak, poor and politically unstable. And further, Japan's ally and supporter, the U.S. was antagonistic to China then. But now she is Jealous of China's prosperity, economic strength and political stability. In addition, the Sino-American relation has changed into a new model of constructive major-country relations. In order to cope with the tremendous change of international situation, on the one hand, Japan has to watch China's further development with vigilance; on the other hand, for her national interests, Japan can not reduce, to say nothing of giving up economic cooperation with China. What she desires is to strengthen it. Therefore Japan is eager to contact China again. And that's why we can see the Four Consensuses today. An important article in Afahi Shimbun on November 8th, reads **“Concerning the sovereignty of The Fenkaku Islands the formulation in the consensuses is ‘It's been acknowledged by both parties that different propositions exist in recent tension of east-sea issues concerning Diaoyu Islands and both parties agree to hold talks to improve the situation, and to**

establish a managing regime in case of emergency and unexpected events.’ This wording embodies China’s all along stand. It means the recognition of existence of difference is the first step in solving the problem. It is also recognized as a concession made by Japan for the first time. Originally, adding the content about Diaoyu Islands is an embodiment of the strong will of China.” As we all know, Japan had never admitted there was any disputed sovereignty issue of Diaoyu Islands before.

Since the Diaoyu Island issue is a left over problem of the Second world war, some people would think, Japan’s concession could be considered as her change in attitude towards her war responsibility. I think such belief is innocent. Just not long ago, when attending a meeting in memory of army men sacrificed in the Second World War, Prime

S

Appendix

The Four Consensuses

I. Adhering to principles and spirits of four political documents of Sino-Japan relation, both parties would continue to develop a strategic relation with mutual benefits.

II. In line with the spirit of “facing history and meeting the future”, both parties would reach more agreements in overcoming political obstacles hindering Sino-Japan relation.

“ ”

III. It's been acknowledged by both parties that different propositions exist in recent tensions of east-sea issues concerning Diaoyu Island and both parties agree to hold talks to improve the situation, and to establish a managing regime in case of emergency and unexpected events.

IV. The two countries also agreed to gradually resume political, diplomatic and security dialogues through various channels and work hard to establish mutual political trusts.