

BOOK REVIEWS

The Search for Reconciliation: Sino-Japanese and German-Polish Relations since World War II

Yinan He

Cambridge University Press, 2009, 380 pp.

ISBN: 978-0521514408 (Hardcover) £53.00

Yinan He adds yet another book on the subject of post-war reconciliation. The aim of her book is to examine the validity of two theories, that of standard realist theory of international relations, and that of ‘national mythmaking theory’, in explaining the process and outcome of reconciliation between countries. For this purpose, she examines two post-World War II cases, Sino-Japanese and (West) German-Polish relations. In the end, Yinan He wishes to establish why reconciliation is achieved in some cases and not in others.

There is actually little new on Germany and Japan in this book. This topic has been extensively discussed both in journalism and in the academic world. Nevertheless, she does add one new aspect to this subject by bringing into the open how much national myth-making had actually happened not only in Japan but also in China. Thus, she traces how official history treated the CCP, the KMP, and the Japanese since the early post-war days and points out how it ‘retained the self-glorifying and

other-maligning myths constructed and institutionalized in the earlier period' (p. 180). She admits that much was politically motivated ideological propaganda.

All in all, her narrative is relatively fair to all parties involved. Quantitatively, the book gives German-Polish relations just one chapter whereas Sino-Japanese relations receive four. These chapters are mainly historical narratives and comparative analysis is provided in the final concluding chapter. That Japan and China have failed to harmonize in the way they remember their past, both domestically and internationally, becomes quite clear. Instead, both societies have clung to the myths of their past made in the earlier post-war days, and have never had sufficient qualified debate to reach some sort of reconciliation with their own pasts as well as the past interstate happenings. This is all very true, but to say that 'national-mythmaking' was at work and one must get away from this seems to this reviewer to be only half way to the necessary conclusions. It does not really explain why this happened. It only gives a proper name to the observed symptom. But when one carefully reads the historical descriptions, the deficiencies in Japanese and in Chinese societies become very clear.

If one looks at the German and Polish domestic scenes, two things stand out. One is the activeness, independence, and strength of the 'non-state actors', especially the Church in the spiritual life of its people. The church continued to be the spiritual center of opposition to Communism, virtually a spiritual sanctuary in the otherwise strictly controlled communist state, and was also the window of opening to the outside world. German and Polish churches were in contact since the late 1960s, and provided spiritual guidance to the process of reconciliation. As reconciliation always involves mourning of the deceased, the significance of having a common place for prayer, whether in the case of Franco-German or Polish-German relationships, should not be underestimated. When one compares this to the peculiar nature of enshrining the dead in Japanese Shintoism, and the godless nature of Chinese communist society, the advantage of possessing a common religious life is apparent. Apart from this, academic and cultural figures in both German and Polish societies, such as philosophers, historians, and literary figures, were also quite active in the political realm.

The other is the resilience and the high intellectual quality of the political opposition. This includes political opposition parties in West

Germany, and opposition movements and civil right activists in Poland. Of course, it was much stronger in West Germany than in Communist Poland, but it was also never totally dead in Poland. Since the early 1960s, pluralism in society was quite high in West Germany and, although much subdued, pluralism was never totally dead in Poland. Because of the activeness and intellectual integrity of their political opposition, both West Germany and Poland had alternative groups of people ready to take over, once the ruling parties began to show their weakness. This actually happened in West Germany when the Social Democrats came to power in 1969. The Poles had to wait a little longer but, in the end, they managed an even bigger regime change from a communist to a democratic state system in 1990. If one traces carefully the history of both societies, the change, of course, about their earlier established 'national myths' is closely tied to the change of government and regime change. It is only after the democratization of Poland that a truly 'deep reconciliation' takes place between Poland and Germany. Under Communism, there was little official progress in reconciliation or compensation although there were substantive efforts from the German side as Yinan He rightly points out. It was only under the liberalization of the Polish regime in the 1980s, and after the change of regime to democracy in the 1990s, that efforts like the West-German Textbook Cooperation really lead to meaningful results.

Reconciliation is never a 'one-way' process. It requires two to tango. *Rapprochement* is a two-sided act where efforts need to be made from both sides. Yinan He dismisses the democratization of Poland as not being of paramount importance and stresses instead the difference in individual political leaders in her conclusion (pp. 297–298). But in a society where political pluralism is weak or lacking, one must rely totally on individual gifts to demolish national myths and try to approach historical truth. This in itself is an institutionalized obstacle for re-evaluation of one's own past. Self-criticism and change is always difficult and is especially so if one is part of a deeply entrenched and institutionalized system, such as the Japanese LDP and the Chinese Communist Party. Both in Chinese and Japanese societies, these 'alternative forces' were and still are weak and have been kept out of power.

The Japanese political opposition forces have very little but themselves to blame for the near complete lack of change of government from the end of the war until very recently. Alternative historical views were never

absent from Japanese society, but they were never implemented in diplomatic policies, because the opposition parties never gained the political maturity that the German Social Democrats did to truly seize power and implement their views into policy. While the reviewer is writing this review, renewed efforts are being made by the DPJ government to establish itself as a political party capable of giving coherent governance, and the outlook does not allow for optimism. How the CCP repeatedly plucked political opposition in their early stages is a common knowledge. Yinan He further describes how history in the form of national myth was indoctrinated through official education system and utilized for political purposes in the 1990s, and how hawkish public opinion turns into a constraint for Chinese policies.

Reading this book does not give us much optimism concerning Sino-Japanese reconciliation in the near future. Perhaps reconciliation between Japan and South Korea has a better future. Very much is at stake as we closely watch the metamorphoses of the DPJ government in Tokyo.

Yoko Iwama

National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies

Tokyo

iwama@grips.ac.jp

doi:10.1093/irap/lcq017

Advance Access published on 26 November 2010

Welfare and Capitalism in Postwar Japan

Margarita Estevez-Abe

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 360 pp.

ISBN: 9780521856935 (Hardcover) £42.00

How the welfare state and capitalism coexist is an enduring and highly contentious research question. According to Margarita Estevez-Abe, Japan's welfare state is not easily classified in standard, comparative