

## Reflections on the History: Different Attitudes between Germany and Japan

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The 70th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War is an important opportunity for victors to draw strength from the history and to clarify the way ahead, and also a critical year for the defeated to learn hard lessons from the history and to turn to move forward. For 70 years, Germany and Japan, the two main hotbeds of the aggressive war, have held widely divergent awareness and attitudes towards this war, which lead to their different peripheral relations, international images and development trends. The former feels deeply shameful for the past actions, and severs ties with the aggression history to gain a fresh start, while the latter only tries to conceal, cover up and worship war criminals from time to time. 70 years past, but the history should not be forgotten, crimes should not be covered up and lessons should not be ignored. Only correct introspection for the history, can human kind open a new development page and embrace a brighter future.

**Only shouldering the historical responsibility, can the future prospect be pioneered.**

Each nation and state has its own history, and the glory and splendor are a historical treasure to be proud of, which should be inherited, while the wrongdoings and

responsibilities for the crimes are an unchangeable fact to face and be undertaken. Historically, Germany and Japan also had created their own immortal civilizations, which made significant contributions to human civilization. However, in WWII, they launched aggression war furiously, plunged countless innocent people into misery, suffering and blood-shedding, and brought the holocaust to the whole world. Their crimes are too numerous to record. After the war, whether or not the rebuilt Germany and Japan should, in the name of the sovereign state, take the necessary political, moral, and economic responsibilities for the historical guilt of the Japanese militarism and the Nazi regime, continue to investigate and convict war criminals and apologize to and compensate the victims, and be firmly committed to maintaining world peace, are the fundamental test whether they are determined to farewell the evil history and rearm their historical conscience. Shouldering this historical responsibility means that the nation and state regain their dignities and start all over again.

The successive post-war German Governments have taken a responsible attitude towards its national history, do not avoid bearing the guilty of the aggression war because of the collapse of the Nazi group, and apologized sincerely to the war victims in various forms. In 1951, Konrad Adenauer, the

first post-war Chancellor of West Germany stated that Nazis have committed heinous crimes in the name of the German people, for which Germany has an obligation to compensate morally and materially. In 1995, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl said that any German standing in front of Israeli Holocaust Memorial or St. Petersburg Cemetery can not say that this has nothing to do with him. In 2013, German Chancellor Angela Merkel still repeated that Germany bears a permanent responsibility for WWII and the crimes Nazi committed, and particularly for the victims of genocide. The justice voices believe that Germany should shoulder the historical responsibility of WWII, which prevail in both its government and public. Germany never stops tracking down the escaped and hiding Nazi war criminals, making state compensation to victims (including countries) of war and Jews as well as their relatives, who were tortured and killed in concentration camps. Pre-paid war compensation will reach 120 billion marks till 2030s. Shouldering responsibility for the history means taking accountability for a nation and pioneering the future.

On the contrary, Japan refuses to bear the responsibility of the aggressive war-caused heavy damages to the world and Asia and East Asian people, and particularly denies the aggressive nature of the war. In 1994, Nagono Shigeto, Japanese Minister of Justice, said to reporters that the Greater East Asian War was not a war of aggression, but a product of careful consideration for the survival of Japan, the liberation of the colonies and the establishment of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. And the purpose at the time was essentially proper and allowed. More furiously, since 1980s, some Japanese Prime Ministers, many cabinet members and congressmen visit the Yasukuni Shrine each year on August 15. For example, Shinzo Abe visited the Yasukuni Shrine as the prime minister in December 2013. The Japanese Government on the one hand looks for excuses refusing to pay any war compensation to victims such as “comfort women”, war labors and Gas warfare victims. On the other hand, it

takes good care of the war-participants and their relatives. Japanese Government's taking such “historical responsibility” is abundantly clear. Japan's understanding of the WWII history is lingering for decades. Those in favor of thorough reflection and bearing war crimes are always in disadvantage and minority. Therefore, Japan can neither step out of the historical shadow and unload the historical burden, nor the wishful thinking of turning into a “political power” from an economic power be attained.

### **It is admitting historical guilt that can get reconciliation.**

The WWII launched by fascists created a number of barbarous holocaust, brought tremendous harm to world people and created serious consequences to the post-war international relations. The above-mentioned had produced great obstacles and difficulties for these few countries to reintegrate into the world and to seek peaceful coexistence and development with war victims. The precondition is to admit historical guilt in WWII in order to request for forgiveness and national reconciliation by other countries and the world at large. Historical guilt is a historical shame to the country. However, only pleading guilty publicly and making apology for returning forgiveness, repentance for trust, honesty for harmony, will there be a peaceful and bright future. As German Chancellor Angela Merkel during her visit to Japan last March stated that the reason why Germany is accepted by the international community once again is that Germany parts completely from the past. If Japan doesn't take the step like Germany, it will be unable to get out the trap set by itself.

For the past 70 years, the German Government never avoids talking about the historical guilt and repeatedly apologizes to people who suffered from Nazi's holocaust and aggression. In 1970, Chancellor Willy Brandt knelt down to apologize in front of the Warsaw Jewish Martyrs Monument, a monument to victims of the 1943, which moved the whole world. Media commented that German Chancellor knelt down, but his nation stood up.

In 1995, Chancellor Helmut Kohl also knelt in front of a monument in Israel and reiterated Germany's repentance, and later, promoted the establishment of "Atonement Committee". In 1996, the German Government set January 27 the day of mourning Nazi victims. Auschwitz became the center of mourning the Jewish victims of Holocaust. Any attempt to distort, conceal or dilute the Germany's guilt in WWII would be immediately met with counterattack from society and be convicted according to the law. Taking into consideration the overall situation of remodeling international relations when dealing with historical issues, Germany respects feelings of victims, pays attention to the supervision from international public opinion and takes an attitude of participating in international communication and cooperation to gain the trust of international community. After years of unremitting efforts, Germany has re-shaped its international image and reintegrated into Europe and the world, its international relations gradually become repaired, its voice and international influence strengthened. Finally, Germany becomes a backbone of the EU. In the mean time, Germany holds commemorations of the victory over fascism in conjunction with other countries to popularize the idea of remembering history and cherishing peace. History indicates that reconciliation is based on admitting guilt.

In sharp contrast, Japan is always evasive about war crimes. It attempts to dilute those crimes and finally eliminate them. Emperor Hirohito, a "Japanese top war criminal", had never apologized to the victims of the Japanese invasion before his death. Nanjing Massacre was a heinous and monstrous guilt the Japanese troops committed to the Chinese people. However, the Japanese right-wingers try hard to quibble that "the truth of Nanjing incident is unclear" and "killing in war is not murder", rephrase the "Nanjing massacre" into "Nanjing incident", with "massacre" replaced by "incident", the number of 300,000 killed by "many". In 1995, the Japanese Congress does not use any "apology" wording in its "50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Post-war Resolution". For quite a long time after the war, the Japanese

Government fools people around, covers up historical truth, and beautifies the war of aggression and war criminals. For instance, Shinzo Abe referred to the "comfort women" victims as engaging in "body business", and tried to conceal and distort history flagrantly. Even worse, a Japanese local authority started declaring world cultural heritage for the infamous "kamikaze team" and fanatically propagated militarism openly. These erroneous rhetoric and action were strongly refuted by China, South Korea and other countries concerned. It is the basic common sense for the Japanese Government to uphold that admitting historical guilt helps defuse historical animosities, improve Sino-Japanese relations, and promote national exchanges. It is the Chinese government's sincere advice that 70 years ago, Japan lost the war, and 70 years later, Japan shouldn't lose this conscience again. On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the defeat, Japan faces a critical choice and has to introspect and remorse, and set out on a new path. Otherwise, if Japan acts willfully, it would be further alienated with Asia and the world.

### **Only preserving historical memory can taking the beaten track be avoided.**

History is the best textbook. Only historical experiences and lessons saved in memory can they truly become textbooks. For Japan and Germany that had brought huge damage to their own countries and unprecedented tragedy to the world, their historical lessons are close at hand. Always keeping in mind the painful historical lessons, and preserving and passing them on can serve as a guide for the future. On January 27 this year, the international community solemnly commemorated the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the "International Holocaust Memorial Day". German Chancellor Angela Merkel reiterated that the young generation needs to keep in mind the historical lessons so that they can avoid the beaten track to ruin.

It is history textbooks for the young generation that is a vital carrier to preserve historical memory of a nation. According to the

German Education Act, history textbooks must contain enough facts of Nazi time, and school teachers must explain Nazi dictatorship history in depth, especially detail about concentration camps and the Holocaust. In today's German history textbooks, there is nothing for reversing verdict of Hitler's aggressive authorities, and middle school students all know that Hitler's guilt to people of the world. In terms of preserving historical memory, Germany established more than 60 venues to commemorate Nazi victims at the sites of the former concentration camps since 1960s, which have become momentous places for national education. Completed in 2005, a permanent striking monument, the "Holocaust Memorial Forest" for murdered Jews was built in the heart of Berlin in order to assure the world to remember Nazi guilt and sincerely apologize to the six million innocent Jews killed in the Holocaust. Germany also preserves historical memory through art forms, such as the global sensational movie "the Downfall" and so on. Such national history in memory is painful, but can lead to sober-mindedness or mending one's way and is a warning to keep people away from the wrong routine. The historical memory can always alert any nation and anyone who wants to return to the past and loses both intelligence and conscience.

On the same issue, Japan constantly revises its history textbooks to distort historical facts and create false historical memory. Japanese Ministry of Education repeatedly revises history textbooks wantonly, leading to strong protests from Asian governments and people. In 2001, Japanese government announced that the review of middle school history textbooks used from the beginning of 2002 was completed, in which the invasion of Northeast China and the establishment of the puppet Manchukuo regime were rephrased as Japan in attempt to build the first modern state with rule of law in China, thereby Manchukuo

achieved rapid development, and people's livelihood improved. Nanjing Massacre has become a part of history textbooks by many countries and a convincing evidence of Fascist guilt. However, the Japanese history textbooks try one way or another to cover up, and repeatedly entangle in minors and refuse to touch on the war guilt. Conversely, beautifying and covering up war crimes flood the education on history in Japan. Japanese history textbooks repeatedly stress that the Japanese aggression brought so-called "positive changes" to neighboring countries, and allies' counterattacks on Japanese Fascist troops are rendered Japanese people's suffering from the war. In addition, Japan launches films and television programs, such as "Warlords", "Dignity", "Admiral Isoroku" and "Aa, Kaigun", etc. to praise war criminals and aggression war. Such cheating history education makes many Japanese young people poorly understand or completely unaware of the disaster Japan brought to the peoples of China and Asia during the war, and even sympathized with war criminals whose hands were stained with the blood of victims. If the Japanese Government wishes to gain the trust of its citizens and the world, it must restore the truth of history 70 years ago. Otherwise, Japan would be unable to extricate itself out of quagmire with endless difficulties.

There is an old Chinese saying that "thousands sails pass by a shipwreck, thousands saplings shoot up beyond a withered tree". For Germany and Japan, it is a strategic choice to set out on a long path towards bright future and farewell the "shipwreck" and "withered tree". The whole world sees clearly that Germany is reborn and repentant for the better, while Japan is stubborn and perverse. A good advice to Japan authority, 70 years have past, please think twice, it is time to make reflections on the history, the world and yourself.