

## Admit Guilt, Repentance and Reconciliation: The German Paradigm of Historical Justice

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### International pressure on Japan and others

On the occasion of 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the World Anti-Fascist War victory, a few countries meet with strong international pressure on the history issue, and the disputes on history and the tense international security relations are also interacted to each other

The rhetoric and deed of Japan's Shinzo Abe administration beautifying invasion and avoiding the historical guilt are not only met with strong criticism and dissatisfaction by Japan's militarism victims such as China, South Korea, etc. and are also often subject to questioning and criticism of Western countries. On 10<sup>th</sup> March 2015, during her visit to Japan, German Chancellor Angela Merkel repeatedly stressed facing up to the history, and acknowledging the past is prerequisite for reconciliation with its neighbors, prodding and urging the Japanese correct understanding of the history. U.S. officials have repeatedly exerted open pressure on Japan regarding the history issue. In April before and after Abe's visit to the United States, various U.S. walks of life put pressure on Japan on understanding of the history. On April 21<sup>st</sup>, the U.S. State Department spokesperson Mary Bhave urged Japan to take an approach of bridging and reconciliation to cope with the history issue of World War II. On the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 25 congressmen jointly sent a letter to the Japanese ambassador to the United States, hoping that Mr. Abe can reiterate and reconfirm the historical conclusion made by Murayama Statement and Kono Statement during their visits to the United

States and face up to the history. After Abe finished the visit, a large number of well-known U.S. historian including Vogel, a heavy-weight scholar, issued a statement on Japan's wartime sex-slaves, saying that Japan's interpretation on this issue affected their cognitive image of Japan, pointing out that the denial and desalinizing anything related to the sex- slave is unacceptable and urging Japan to create a free atmosphere to explore the historical justice and admit the past wrong-doing. Pressure from the West, in turn, upgrades the Japanese domestic voice for facing up to the history and making apology for the past guilt.

Russia very much hopes that the international community can recognize the sacrifice and contribution of the Soviet Union in the World Anti-Fascist War, with which to seek legality of its major power status and the position in the Ukrainian crisis, but its commemorative activities are met with a collective boycott by the West. Russia's Eastern European neighbors equate the Stalin period of the Soviet Union with the Nazi Germany and totalitarianism, and interpret the actions of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe before the Second World War as aggression, so as to negate the current Russian geopolitical interests in Eastern Europe.

Turkey's position on the Armenian Massacre is also criticized by the West again. This year happens to be the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the tragedy. The European Parliament as well as some Western governments in the first half of the year passed resolutions to demand

Turkey to recognize its killing of Armenians during the First World War as "genocide". For a longtime, some EU Member States demand Turkey to recognize its killing of Armenians as "genocide", which is taken as a condition for Turkey's admission into EU. The US Congress has also passed a number of bills on this issue, demanding its facing up to the history and admitting the guilt.

### **The shaping of a new paradigm of "historical justice"**

Until the age of imperialism, to conquer is an important way for a country or a nation to become strong, so clearing up the "mass atrocities" and "guilt" is the right exercised on the loser group by the winner group. As far as the victims of atrocities go, taking revenge is the essential way to correct the "historical injustice" and reconstruct the "historical justice", otherwise, leaving behind only a hard rancor, or becoming forgotten gradually.

However, in modern times, How to face up to the historical guilt between groups, including states, the international community has initially formed a new path and new paradigm to peacefully rectify the "historical injustice". On the one hand, the international community has formed the legal framework for punishing individuals responsible for the mass atrocities. In case of Rwanda and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the International Criminal Tribunal is established and the relevant responsible persons are put to trial, and International Criminal Court is set up through the "Rome Statute" (1998). These new developments in the field of international criminal code further confirm and develop the individual-accountable principle shaped by the trial in Nuremberg and Tokyo. Leaders of a state or an organization responsible for serious atrocities can no longer easily escape from punishment because of the asylum provided by the national sovereignty. On the other hand, the

historical guilt-admitted group is required to recognize the guilt – make an apology - repair in order to attain forgiveness by the victim's group, thus the two sides eliminate enmity, move to reconciliation and realize "historical justice" so as to construct a commonly owned or shared historical memory.

It is the emergence of the "German paradigm" that reflects an initial formation of this new type of "historical justice" standard. Exerting pressure on the above-mentioned three states, the international community or the relevant states borrowed the Germany positive example on the historical issues from different aspects. The analogy and connection emerge between the words and deeds by Japan, Turkey and Russia and the Germany's confession, repair and liquidation of totalitarian in the process of current debating a perception of the history, and on which basis the perception in the international politics of right and obligation, legal and illegal, justice and evil is being built. From perspective of the doers, like today Germany's confession, repentance and repair, the opposition to the Nazi Germany's evil and atrocities has become generally accepted and respected code of conduct in the international community. From perspective of the victims, like Jews exploring, constructing and publicizing the historical facts of atrocities, based on which to regain the "historical justice", and under the conditions of pleading guilty-repentance-repair by the doer-state, so forgiveness and reconciliation are accorded, which is a widely anticipated "appropriate" behavior. Germany has become a new criteria for the international community to measure the "historical justice". The approach to Nazi Germany's historical guilt taken by Germans and Jews has become the most widely respected and quoted example.

After the war, Germany has been dedicated to repairing relationship with the victims back then, and deepening the historical

reconciliation process with its neighbors. Germany accepts the legitimacy of the Nuremberg trial, and has carried out liquidation of the past the Nazis, reflected on and apologized for the aggression and atrocities committed by the Nazis, still makes a large payment of compensation to the victims of the Holocaust. Germany still insists on facing up to the history, and its history textbooks keep the history of Nazism and the Holocaust in a key position. Germany is a key supporter for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, and the International Criminal Court. German leaders are also eager to promote the "German experience" of confession, repentance and reconciliation in the international arena..

The will of the German Government to make historical repairs with the Jews, victims of Nazism has a wide-ranging social foundation. Any idea and action denying the Holocaust, exclusionism, Anti-Jewish, and even "patriotic", etc are easily leading to worries about Nazism resurgence, thus categorized as the "politics being incorrect" in Germany, and even become a social taboo and target of criminal punishment. This Germany approach is not a special case of the Western world. Many countries in the West made an apology and repair for their actions of onlookers, in association or involvement during the Holocaust by the Nazis and even established "The International Holocaust Remembrance Day" through the efforts of the United Nations in 2000. Governments of Western countries make an apology and repair for their "injustice" behavior, thus, forming an apology "culture": for example, the United States Government makes an apology for the historical discrimination against the Afro-Americans and carries out the preferential "affirmative action" toward them; makes an apology for the improper custody of Japanese-Americans

during World War II and pays compensation to them, and makes an apology for historical "Exclusion Act" against the Chinese origin. Australian Government makes an apology for the historical persecution and massacre of the indigenous people; Canadian government makes an apology for the historical exclusion of the Chinese; British Government makes apologies and repairs for its colonialist guilt, etc..

### **The liberal tendency of the new standard paradigm**

The new "historical justice" standard embodied in the "German paradigm" reexamines and reinterprets the past (especially during World War II) historical events with the modern Western liberalism, which supports and strengthens the current values of liberalism, in a word, is the organic component of Western liberal values. On the one hand, this standard requires facing up to and abandoning the past history of nationalism, racism, totalitarianism and expansionism, and opposing the aggression, persecution and slaughter in the era of imperialism. A fashionable phrase "Never Again" means preventing the invaded history from repeating for those countries and nations suffered aggression to achieve national prosperity. But for Germany, it means completely turning over a new leaf, and completely negating the Nazis ideology and atrocities. For other countries, it means a self-warning to prevent the history of Nazi style tyranny and atrocity from reoccurring. On the other hand, this paradigm supports establishment of a social governance and international order based on the Western concepts of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The infamous "nightmare" of Nazi Germany in the Western history is used today as the contrast to the "American dream" and "German dream". In Western countries, the history of the

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