

A Bridge Too Far?

Comparing Postwar German-Polish and Sino-Japanese Reconciliation

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Why have some former enemy countries established durable amity while others remain mired in animosity? When and how does historical memory matter in post-conflict interstate relations? Focusing on two case studies, I argue that the harmonization of national memories can significantly facilitate genuine reconciliation, while memory divergence resulting from national mythmaking tends to harm long-term prospects for reconciliation. After WWII, Sino-Japanese and West German-Polish relations were both antagonized by the Cold War structure, and pernicious myths prevailed in national collective memory. In the 1970s, China and Japan brushed aside historical legacy for immediate diplomatic normalization. But the progress of reconciliation was impeded from the 1980s by elite mythmaking practices that stressed historical animosities. In contrast, from the 1970s West Germany and Poland de-mythified war history and narrowed their memory gap through restitution measures and textbook cooperation, paving the way for deep reconciliation after the Cold War.

About the Presenter

Yinan He is an Assistant Professor at the John C. Whitehead School of Diplomacy and International Relations at Seton Hall University. She received her PhD in Political science from MIT. Her work focuses on the politics of memory and reconciliation, East Asian international security, Chinese and Japanese foreign policy, and national identity mobilization and nationalism in East Asia. Her book with Cambridge University Press, *The Search for Reconciliation: Sino-Japanese and German-Polish Relations since World War II*, is the first systematic, scholarly study on post-conflict interstate reconciliation, an important but often neglected topic in the field of international relations. She was appointed as a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University in 2007-2008 and An-Wang Postdoctoral Fellow in Chinese Studies at Harvard University in 2004-2005. In 2009 she received the Provost's Faculty Scholarship Award at Seton Hall University for book publication with a top-tier academic press.

