

# A Bridge Too Far? Comparing Postwar German-Polish and Sino-Japanese Reconciliation

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The 2<sup>nd</sup> CVE Roundtable

## Presenter

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## Participants

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## Overview

Why do some former enemy countries establish durable amity while others remain mired in animosity? From this question, Professor Yinan He started her theoretical study on post-conflict interstate reconciliation and the outcome of her study was published as *The Search for Reconciliation: Sino-Japanese and German-Polish Relations since World War II* (2009).

Today's 2<sup>nd</sup> CVE Roundtable invites Prof. Yinan He to hear and share her distinguished viewpoint on "deep" reconciliation which is very important but unexplored especially in international theory.

Overall today's Roundtable is conducted in two parts. First, Prof. He briefly introduced and summarized her argument about reconciliation and national mythmaking mechanism for about 30 minutes. And then a discussion including comments and questions on her presentation will be followed in a very comfortable and free atmosphere.

## Presentation

Prof. Yinan He's main argument is that harmonization of national memories can significantly facilitate genuine reconciliation, while divergence resulting from national mythmaking tends to harm long-term prospects for reconciliation.

Focusing on the two empirical cases, postwar Sino-Japanese relations and West German-Polish

relation, she appeals the strength of her point of view comparing to a realist theory.

Prior to elaborate her own idea, she defines genuine reconciliation as the concept of Deep Interstate Reconciliation (DIR), where countries share the understanding that war is unthinkable and hold generally warm feelings toward each other. She thinks that DIR needs to be cemented not only by shared short-run material interests but also by sustainable mutual understanding and trust.

Aforementioned historical ideas are not the only force affecting post-conflict interstate relationships and we can also find out a realist theory that some degree of compatibility between two countries' security interests facilitates reconciliation. However, favorable structural environment alone proves insufficient to overcome the shadow of the past without serious efforts to bridge the memory gap. This is evident in the lack of DIR in Sino-Japanese relations during the 1970s-80s when the two countries faced a common Soviet threat. Moreover, the trend of German-Polish historical settlement from the 1970s, though benefiting from détente, was largely a function of the shifting tides in domestic politics and memory discourse. And this trend persisted in the 1980s when Cold War tension resumed, again due to internal drives than structural impact. Finally, since the 1990s German-Polish relationship has been approaching DIR in a multipolar Europe that has no clear structural fault line.

However, according to the mythmaking theory, post-conflict interstate reconciliation is more properly explained. Specifically, after World War II, Sino-Japanese and West German-Polish rela-

tions were both antagonized by the Cold War structure, and pernicious myths prevailed in national collective memory. Even though in the 1970s, China and Japan brushed aside historical legacy for immediate diplomatic normalization, 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 demythified war history and narrowed their memory gap through restitution measures and textbook cooperation, paving the way for deep reconciliation.

Furthermore, the mythmaking theory is useful not only to understand the origins of interstate reconciliation but also to study several outstanding puzzles in contemporary East Asian and Central Eastern European international relations. In other words, it is conducive to ascertain the underlying causes of the so-called history problem in Sino-Japanese relations: Why did China and Japan quarrel over history not immediately after the war but only from the early 1980s, when the majority of their populations had no direct experience of the war? Moreover, we can infer why the Germans are far more forthright regarding their war responsibility than the Japanese even though during WWII, Germany and Japan both committed horrendous atrocities against neighboring countries.

In a nut shell, historical ideas are not epiphenomenal; shared material interests do not automatically produce memory harmonization, nor does a trend towards the latter require the former. The best way to reach reconciliation will be construction of a shared honest history between nations and the promotion of domestic political liberation.

## Discussion

**Prof. Kwak:** I have a question about the public opinion poll depicting Japanese people's feeling

of closeness to the Chinese from 1982 to the present, which is, I think, biased. The data reflects at most the views of socialists, political scientists, historians but not economists, since Japanese economists have quite different view on the relationship with China; they believe that there is institutional integration in economic level in East Asia, and this economic integration is indeed increasing. Besides economic exchange, more and more people freely move [across border] these days. In this context, how can we understand the relationship between Japan and China?

**Prof. He:** I agree with your idea. Sino-Japanese relationship is not very bad since the levels of mutual contact and economic integration are high. However, my primary purpose of this work is to explain why China and Japan are in conflict despite the affluent social contact and economic integration. In other place, I have used three independent variables to measure influential power on interstate relationship: history, power, and economic integration. I found out that economic integration actually has no moderating effect in political relationship. Counterfactually speaking, if there was no economic integration, the relationship would have been worse. But if we interpret historical reconciliation as economic integration and reasonably good official relationship, there is no reason to write this book. What I wanted to do was to interpret reconciliation in a different way and to see the same phenomenon from a different angle.

**Prof. Kwak:** Prof. He's work has a very distinguished approach – narrative analysis in which we choose some texts and then interpret them. Yet it might be very difficult to find and interpret texts before China was politically liberalized. On that time period, how did you find relevant data?

**Prof. He:** Before 1980s, it was indeed hard to acquire data. I asked some help from scholars who studied China but there was no open public discourse. Worse still, we cannot go back to the past to interview. That's why I used logical inference like what you did think at that time and limited texts such as statement by leaders and

officials and internal party meeting chaired by Zhou Enlai in the early 1970s. All the data shows that China was seriously conscious about security problem and possible Japanese remilitarization while recognizing the need for normalization. Another example is documents on Nixon's visit to China. The US persuaded the Chinese government to have a bad relationship with Japan at that time, and on Chinese side there are many documents expressing distrust of Japan as well.

**Prof. Kwak:** What I am curious about is your measurement of public feeling during the 1970s. Given that all documents including papers and newspapers were handled by the Chinese government's censorship, we can hardly trust the source of "public opinion."

**Prof. He:** Yes. There is no evidence, and no public recording data. But I could make judgment that even if all friendship were really there, it was not real. Actually there were very few Chinese who had a chance to meet Japanese people at that time. When Prime Minister Tanaka visited China, the Chinese government made direction to all levels, including provincial, municipal and continental levels, that government officials must do propaganda to tell people importance of normalization with Japan. However I think that among Chinese people there was deeply embedded emotional [resistance] against Japan. If there had not been emotional resistance there, the government did not need to try to persuade their people.

**Prof. Loo:** I think trust and closeness very high standard of estimating reconciliation. It is indeed not easy to feel mutual trust even if we are not in conflict. For instance, it might be obvious that the British and the French do not trust and like each other but war is unthinkable between the two countries. It means that we can reach reconciliation without a high level of friendship.

**Prof. He:** That's why I used combination of indicators such as stable peace and official part of reconciliation measured by strategy, plan and political thinking about mutual relationship. From strategic analysis and official document, we can find out how China and Japan looked to each

other and whether war was thinkable or not. You may have a question because it seems that higher bar exists here and lower bar there. But the focus here is the 1970s during which the [Sino-Japanese] relationship was supposed to be the best condition by realists because the Soviet Union was a common threat. Contrary to the realist view, we can find out popular aspect of alienation and even in official documents security threat was a main concern.

And I want to say more about my measurement of popular sentiment. In a longer-term analysis, I made a point that, setting aside feeling of closeness and trust, history should not be a long-term factor in the relationship. To put it differently, two parties still keep on talking about history but when something happened between the two, they do not have to draw history again. We view some items just as a current issue and history should be out of the picture even though it has been discussed.

And I found it too much extending in Poland as well. When you see the opinion poll in 2003, there is a drop due to dispute over "Center against Expulsions" proposed by some right-wing Germans. Originally the western part of Poland used to be Germany, but after the Yalta Conference, the territory came to belong to Poland and Germans resided in the region were kicked out from the land. In 2003 the right-wing of Germany demanded to establish commemoration of German victims who were kicked out from the western part of Poland in order to manage perpetrator Germany and to encourage German property claim.

That means history came back. But because of a safety-net which is conceptualized as common ground on history, there was no need to consider history again. More specifically, the German leaders claimed that they were not going to build the center for expulsion when dispute arose. Moreover German and Polish historians initiated a joint campaign. Based on these observations, it can be argued that even though a historical dispute comes back it would not give rise to conflict if two countries have build up a good safety-net.

In contrast, if there is no cushion as in Sino-Japanese relationship, a level of relationship will drop in low point when a dispute is occurred.

**Prof. Wu:** What exactly does the safety-net mean?

**Prof. He:** The safety-net is a kind of efforts both Germany and Poland made from the 1970s up to now, such as mutual textbook cooperation.

**Prof. Wu:** Even if reconciliation is settled down, how can this reconciliation bind the future generation? Is there any institutional guarantee?

**Prof. He:** If you believe in a realist position that idea and structure is changed all the time, it is hard to be bounded. But if you believe that ideas have their own cause and they have the same power, then it is more confident. My position is a kind of combination of the former and the latter.”

**Prof. Loo:** I have two questions. First, even if it can be expected that people can reconcile and love each other in official level, how can we guarantee a change of memory at popular and everyday level? Second, can mythmaking dimension also make people silence to memory? Is it true that encouragement to remember history is also a kind of mythmaking?

**Prof. He:** Firstly, I agree with you on the discussion about individual emotion. I cannot guarantee that every individual memory can be changed. Yet what I talk about is reconciliation in interstate relationship. So what we need is scale of overall climate of opinion. Of course the German right-wing shapes the main stream climate of opinion and they can marginalize your entitled opinions in a democratic and pluralist society. But the thing is that they cannot shape overall opinion.

Secondly, encouraging people to remember history is a whole theme about inherited responsibility. It is really man-made and unnatural trend. However we need this because perpetrators would rather forget generally while victims never do that. And the way what I define mythmaking

is not a general way and every effort to interpret history. It is more specific about interpretation of a way that harm to international relation and inimical effect to self-other relationship.

**Prof. Wu:** What if history is not shared among people given that a No.1 solution should be a guarantee of sharing history?

**Prof. He:** There is a Germany-Poland specific case. Since 1972, in every year two conferences have been held, one in Germany and the other in Poland, with equal number of participants. They have been jointly writing textbooks and supplementary reading materials for schools. They still keep on doing this conference. In this sense, we can catch three points. First, even though complete overlapping interpretation does not exist, a common ground has been increasing these days. Second, the purpose of the conference is to help understand each other’s perspectives. If you listen to the other side we might find out that my interpretation maybe something wrong. Finally, you will see that the debate remains the same all the time about what happened, even the interpretation of documents. But the nature has been changed. It became more like an academic debate, not emotionally charged one like “you are a perpetrator and I am a victim.”

**Prof. Wu:** Does the public have also consciousness about the conference?

**Prof. He:** I think so. A lot of opinion polls in Polish data show that it is unthinkable to hate Germans in Poland. Right after the end of WWII, Polish people hated Germans as much as Jews hated Germans, but now they have a reasonably good relation.

**Prof. Loo:** Cross-dialogue had a month ago to draw a Japanese-Chinese joint textbook. But China questions about modern period that it is sensitive.

**Prof. He:** It is not surprising at all. When German-Polish historians published their first joint history report in 1978, that document had a lot of events regarding communist Polish government because communist countries were not that tole-

rate. But Germans had no problem with that because they have already established positive relationship.

Meanwhile, Polish historians came to the table without full honesty and they could not speak frankly of what they were thinking. However, they reached a basic agreement in some other issues. It was good enough to sooth emotion and thus the Polish believed that it was possible somehow to manage the relationship with Germany despite what they did in the past. Of course there were lots of limitations in 1978. But it was when Poland were democratized that the timing came; the result became much more productive and constructive. We can say that if there was no effort as in 1978, latter development wouldn't be so smooth.

When comparing German-Polish relationship with German-Czech relationship, it seems that there exist some similarities. Two diets reached normalization at the similar time and had a similar war experience. Yet Czech Republic and Germany never had any joint history dialogue and there wasn't any compensation or apology. It is irony since even though less degree of trauma in the Czech Republic, Poland recognized reconciliation with Germany much easier than the Czech Republic. Maybes Czechs felt unnecessary and therefore was not much attentive to textbook cooperation or any compensation. Nothing happened in the 1970s.

**Prof. Kwak:** I would like to comment three things about your resolution. In political theory, there are normally three different negative attitudes in the debate on interstate dialogue. The first is gag rule. It means that more conversation, more conflict arises. In this regard, the best way to reach mutual respect is to be silence on some crucial matters. Second, deliberation is not peaceful at every moment because it might bring about strong antagonism. The last attitude is very closer to what I suggest. That is a regulative principle – mine is called reciprocal non-domination. It suggests that even in different position, we need at least an agreeable principle to be accepted by both parties. What Prof. He said is very close to

what I want to say but we still need a regulative principle at least to make the solution durable and sustainable.

**Prof. Wu:** Where does a regulative principle come from in the first place? Taiwan is all the time excluded from all kinds of conversations about history even if she was at the center of conflict. We will especially need this kind of regulative principle but where is the authority of this principle come from? For example, why should Chinese scholars be interested in this issue? Actually at the bottom of China, they don't regard Taiwanese issue at all. It is very cynical situation.

**Prof. Kwak:** It is not easy to make super power like China to be interested in reciprocal non-domination. But if we just follow realist purview about power, there is no choice but to follow the super power. In fact Taiwan as well as Korea are not a super power and never expect that we could be a super power. Moreover, there are many small powers who cannot be a super power. That's why we need room for saying something and a regulative principle to appeal and quest super power. We don't have to be cynical.

**Prof. Wu:** In that case what is to be done to make a regulative principle? Is this like keeping saying to super power that the regulative principle is good?

**Prof. He:** I want to share my experience. There was a conference among Japanese, Chinese and Korean scholars. But besides these participants, the Chinese governments invited the United States and Australia as well. This indicates that history problem should be international issues.

**Prof. Loo:** Especially regarding the comfort women issue we had several legal means and international methods such as ICC, ICJ. But even if we can use those legal means and have a regulative principle or power, we also need to have power to enforce. So we need a political will outside of ICJ.

**Prof. Kwak:** It seems that the problem is how to actualize a discursive stance. Everybody agrees that deliberation would be one of the best solu-

tions we might have. In this situation, I would like to give one comment about how to actualize: persuasion with good intention. We can start from one person and finally get popular agreement. It means that we could change our imagination. But the thing is that politicians usually don't have a picture like this: no choice but to follow realistic advice. Of course this suggestion might be idealistic in some sense but it works. What about civil rights movement in the US? Everybody said this was not we could do. Yet in some reason, starting with an idealist reason worked. Politicians and people might have political intentions. And there might be a gesture making of provocative like visiting the Yasukuni Shrine. In this sense political elites and citizens are important. So if some has a cynical view, we have to try to educate them and keep teaching.

**Prof. Wu:** We can find many bilateral conversations on history issues such as between Japan-China, China-Korea, Japan-Korea and so on. Yet even if we can reach a consensus from them, isn't it possible that this consensus might exclude other countries? In that case, is this ultimately not a consensus at all? So across bilateral meeting might be needed like four-party-talks and we have to remind that Nazi nation even had a conversation on history. Can you imagine the same example in East Asia?

**Prof. He:** In 2005 China, Japan and Korea published history textbook jointly.

**Prof. Wu:** But is it a compromise not reconciliation?

**Prof. He:** It is not a compromise because compromise is usually one direction. Starting from organization of East Asian history studies symposium, they do it every year and publish a report on every symposium. The participants include Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and sometimes Taiwanese, Vietnamese [scholars] etc.. It is not about joint history writing any more but it has a theme. It's not just a sharing common issue but drawing another thing.

When considering Germany and Poland relationship we can find that they also started from joint history textbook. And after the end of the WWII the circle was expanded. Actually they dealt with multilateral issues such as ethical issues in Europe or Jewish issues. Plus NGO has been started to organize cooperation with Israel, Palestine and Turkey also even if originally only German-Polish dialogue was created. Plus Catholic Church was an initiative in Germany and Poland case. Thus NGO, Catholic Church, civil society and political will are all coming together to deal with reconciliation.