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JAKUB POLIT  
Instytut Historii  
Uniwersytet Jagielloński

## GERMAN-POLISH RECONCILIATION AND SINO-JAPANESE RECONCILIATION: COMPARATIVE REFLECTIONS

### Abstract

Certain parallels exist between the perception of Germany in Poland and Japan in China. This similarity was observed by Chinese historian Yinan He. Poland and China associate their neighbouring nations with a negative, bellicose stereotype that harks back to the Second World War. However, this war is perceived as merely the latest incident in a long history of transgressions. Post-war, both countries came under communist rule, further demonising the former enemy.

In the 1970s, both China/Japan and Poland/(West) Germany set aside historical grievances in favour of immediate diplomatic normalisation. In the 1980s and 1990s in Poland, this superficial reconciliation evolved into genuine reconciliation, thanks largely to the efforts of the Catholic Church and the joint membership of Poland and a united Germany in NATO and the EU. Concurrently in Japan, but particularly in communist China, practices of elite mythmaking only served to accentuate historical animosities. In East Asia, there appears to be a mutual lack of willingness for true reconciliation and forgiveness.

**Keywords:** reconciliation, historical memory, Poland, Germany, China, Japan

The undertaking of comparing the post-war reconciliation – or perhaps, attempts at reconciliation – between post-war Poland and Germany with a similar process in China-Japan relations might appear as a forced and hasty endeavour. Nonetheless, this is not a construct of the author's imagination. In 2009, a monograph on the subject was released by Chinese researcher Yinan He. It was published by the esteemed Cambridge University Press<sup>1</sup>. Educated in the People's Republic of China (PRC) at both Beijing and Shanghai's Fudan Universities and later continuing her studies in Tokyo and Harvard, Yinan He natu-

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<sup>1</sup> Y. He, *The Search for Reconciliation. Sino-Japanese and German-Polish Relations since World War II*, Cambridge 2009.



rally formulated a thesis. Her conclusions were remarkably clear. She posited that “the Germans and Poles finally approach deep reconciliation, whereas the Chinese and Japanese failed in this cause” and that “the Japanese government should realize that it is time to come to terms with the past”<sup>2</sup>.

Feeling patriotic, albeit in the universally accepted Western sense rather than the nationalist interpretation, the Chinese researcher dedicated three-quarters of her work to exploring the impact of historical events on Beijing-Tokyo relations. Indeed, she sought to make the issue more accessible to the West, using the German-Polish experience as an illustrative example, an experience that is undeniably more familiar to Europeans and Americans. (After all, most British people are aware that Poland was their ally during the Second World War, a fact that is not necessarily evident with regard to China). In contrast, the situation is reversed for Poland. It is reasonable to assume that those reading these words are not only knowledgeable about German-Polish relations, but are potentially even more informed than Yinan He herself. The latter gathered her information on the subject from English-language sources, notably citing works by Norman Davies, Jerzy Jedlicki, and Jan Tomasz Gross (specifically “Polish Society under the German Occupation”). Meanwhile, the concept of Sino-Japanese “historical wounds” might seem somewhat foreign to us.

### **Iron Curtain, Isolation of the Victors, Renaissance of the Vanquished**

Indeed, there exist some contentious parallels within the issue of interest. In both Poland and China, the primary source of trauma in relations with their aggressive neighbours lies within the Second World War, with both nations viewing themselves as the initial victims (for China, the calamity is considered to have begun in 1937). In both China and Poland, the negative experiences and stereotypes associated with the invaders substantially predate the invasion itself: the latter event simply represents the pinnacle of a long sequence of injustices. The crux of the problem in both instances is not so much the invasion or even the occupation itself, but their brutal, destructive nature and the fact that the invaders ruled with an openly demonstrated contempt for the vanquished. In both China and Poland, the number of civilian casualties far outstripped that of fallen soldiers. Furthermore, despite Warsaw and Beijing<sup>3</sup> emerging from the war as formal victors, both nations experienced a disruption in their “historical continuity” in relation to their former adversaries (but also to most of the former Allies), and they found themselves on the other side of the Iron (or “Bamboo”) Curtain. Operating on the other side of this curtain, the states vanquished in the war, despite being profoundly transformed due to the occupation, were depicted by the communist regimes in Warsaw and Beijing as the *de facto* continuations of their pre-war and wartime, bloody incarnations. However, somewhat embarrassingly, these defeated states grew into global economic powerhouses. In the

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 291 and 310.

<sup>3</sup> For obvious reasons, I use “Beijing” as a synonym for the post-war, mainland Chinese state, but it is worth noting that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was only established in 1949, with Nanjing serving as China’s capital prior to that.

early 1970s, both countries established diplomatic relations with their former arch-enemies, increasing trade and achieving what could be described (following Yinan He) as a superficial or façade reconciliation. However, beyond this point, drawing parallels becomes increasingly complex.

Perhaps it is necessary to elucidate the most emotive issue first. The number of victims from the Japanese invasion of China between 1937 and 1945, while difficult to precisely calculate for various reasons, is estimated to be at least 15 to 20 million. Of this number, fallen soldiers account for at most 3 million, or less than 20%<sup>4</sup>. Considering that Soviet casualties of the war, also variably assessed<sup>5</sup>, are to be divided more or less equally among Belarus, Ukraine and Russia, in absolute terms, the Chinese losses exceed those suffered by any other nation during the Second World War. Thus, the comparison of Polish and Chinese losses is justifiable. Of course, in percentage terms, the losses of Second Polish Republic were incomparably greater, largely due to the lack of any Asian equivalent to the extermination of the Jews. However, the losses within the intelligentsia of both nations (equivalent to the actual “decapitation” and brainwashing of the nation), are somewhat analogous, especially when one takes into account both the wartime and post-war emigration (although in China’s case, not exactly “foreign”, as it was primarily to Taiwan). It is also worth noting that both nations’ capitals suffered comparable losses, subsequently becoming symbols of their respective martyrdoms. Warsaw lost approximately 200,000 inhabitants in the uprising, the majority of whom were civilians. Nanjing, the capital of the Republic of China and similarly populated, perhaps experienced an even greater loss in absolute numbers, although its true extent remains a contentious subject, including non-historical disputes<sup>6</sup>. The primary distinction is that intense fighting in the Polish capital lasted 63 days. In contrast, resistance in Nanjing was suppressed after a single day, and the following two months were marked by a civilian massacre.

One difference, albeit minor from a historical perspective, is that the legal government of the Second Polish Republic did not return to Warsaw post-war, whereas the government of the Republic of China reinstalled itself in Nanjing for just under four years – before having to retreat to Taiwan. However, both in the Polish People’s Republic (which I have referred to as Communist Poland since 1944, even though the proper name was not adopted until 1952) and in the People’s Republic of China, nationalist stereotypes, significantly reinforced by the war, were exploited in their dealings with Germany and Japan respectively. In a way,

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. Polit, *Gorzki triumf. Wojna chińsko-japońska 1937–1945*, Kraków 2013, pp. 937–940.

<sup>5</sup> From the 1990s onwards, a sort of competition between post-Soviet Russia and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) concerning the number of Second World War casualties is apparent; as Moscow incrementally upscales its figures, Beijing tends to respond with an elevation of its own reported losses. See P.M. Coble, *China’s “New Remembering” of the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance 1937–1945*, “The China Quarterly”, No. 190, June 2007, pp. 404–405 (on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war, President Jiang Zemin spoke of 35 million Chinese casualties); J. Polit, *Gorzki triumf*, p. 938.

<sup>6</sup> The pioneering work on the Nanjing Massacre, by Iris Chang (*The Rape of Nanking. The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*, New York 1997; Polish edition: *Rzeź Nankinu*, transl. K. Godlewski, Warszawa 2013), is a monograph written in a remarkably emotional style and littered with inaccuracies. Nevertheless, it sparked a vigorous discussion on the subject. The recently published *Historia masakry nankińskiej [History of the Nanjing Massacre]* (Warszawa 2021), released by the Dialog publishing house, presents the official stance of PRC historiography. In terms of content, it represents – using the reality of the Polish People’s Republic as a benchmark – a level comparable to the Gierek era.

this was facilitated by the fact that Berlin and Tokyo were led by individuals of advanced age, individuals so elderly that the pre-war totalitarian regimes in their countries had managed to send them into political retirement in the 1930s. We are naturally referring to Konrad Adenauer and Yoshida Shigeru<sup>7</sup>. Both were opponents of totalitarianism and both found themselves imprisoned by their Axis-aligned governments during the war. Their backgrounds and roles in the pre-war authorities, however, made it easy to argue that there were no “new people” in power in Germany and Japan, but rather, at the core of the regimes, little had changed.

However, although the stereotype of the “enemy” was clearly reinforced by immediate post-war propaganda, countries under communist control sank into profound isolation. The significant minorities, Germans in Poland and Japanese in China, which had posed substantial economic and political challenges for the governments of these countries pre-war, were entirely eradicated<sup>8</sup>. In 1937, 14.5% of Polish imports came from Germany and 24% from Japan in China; by 1954, these countries ceased to count as trade partners of the communist-controlled states, their place being occupied (in every case) by the USSR. In 1961, that is, after the most intense phase of the Cold War had passed, Japan’s share of PRC trade just exceeded 1 per cent (1.2 per cent to be precise), while the role of the People’s Republic of China in Japanese trade was equal to zero<sup>9</sup>.

If “historical policy in its broadest sense is synonymous with deliberate and conscious actions by the authorities aimed at consolidating a certain vision of the past in society”<sup>10</sup>, the actions of the authorities of the People’s Republic of China and the Polish People’s Republic (in the latter case at least until 1956) resembled pure propaganda more than such a policy, aiming not to interpret the past in a certain way, but to distort it. Nonetheless, the Communists’ spiteful propaganda also had another, less anticipated effect. Namely, it framed “German and Japanese imperialism” as merely one of many “capitalist imperialisms” to be led by US imperialism post-1945. This undercut, if not outright negated, the thesis of the exceptional, destructive nature of the expansion of these states, and reduced the Communist struggle against them to one of the many fronts of the struggle “for freedom and democracy”. For in this interpretation, Hitler and his Japanese Prime Ministerial counterpart, Tōjō Hideki, were “fascists”, but then again, so were Piłsudski and Chiang Kai-shek<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> The names of Japanese and Chinese politicians will be presented in their original order, that is, surname first, followed by the first name. Therefore, in the case of Yoshida Shigeru, Yoshida is the surname.

<sup>8</sup> I am overlooking here the fact that a significant number of people who identified themselves as German remained in the Polish People’s Republic (for example in Upper Silesia) but declared Polish nationality. However, this does not alter the fact that in post-war Poland it was impossible to ‘stay as a German’ (even as an anti-fascist German).

<sup>9</sup> W. Keller, C.H. Shiu, *China’s Foreign Trade and Investment, 1800–1946*, Cambridge 2020, p. 21 (table) [https://www.nber.org/system/files/working\\_papers/w27558/w27558.pdf](https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w27558/w27558.pdf) [7 XII 2021]; Ch. Howe, *China, Japan and Economic Interdependence in the Asia Pacific Region*, in: idem (ed.), *China and Japan. History, Trends and Prospects*, Oxford 1996, p. 113 (table); more extensively: Y. Soeya, *Japan’s Economic Diplomacy with China, 1945–1978*, Oxford 1998, pp. 45–79 (tables on pp. 40 and 43).

<sup>10</sup> R. Stobiecki, *Historycy wobec polityki historycznej*, in: S.M. Nowinowski, J. Pomorski, R. Stobiecki (ed.), *Pamięć i polityka historyczna. Doświadczenia Polski i jej sąsiadów*, Łódź 2008, p. 175.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Chen Boda, *Czan Kaj-szy – wrag kitajskiego naroda*, Moskwa 1950, passim (p. 60, 149). The proclamations of Bierut’s propaganda regarding the “fascist Sanation” and the “fascist Piłsudski clique” are too numerous and well-known to require citation here.

## The Vanquished: Overcoming the Past or Amnesia

Both the Polish People's Republic and the People's Republic of China were initially under Stalin's influence to varying degrees, mirroring the same communist system. However, the situations in the post-war Federal Republic of Germany and Japan were somewhat different. This distinction is emphasised by Yinan He, who states that the Japanese have not fully come to terms with their past, especially when compared with the Federal Republic of Germany. During the occupation, 21.7% of Germans residing in the US occupation zone underwent a vetting procedure. In comparison, this only applied to 3.2% of the Japanese population. Moreover, the vetting questionnaires used in Germany were far more comprehensive than those used in Japan, with a striking difference of 125 questions versus 23<sup>12</sup>.

Nonetheless, the criticisms directed towards the post-war Japanese regime and the US occupiers that supported it are not completely justified. Disregarding the manipulation of facts: the American occupation zone in Germany only encompassed a minority of the former Reich, with a population of 17 million, whereas occupied Japan (entirely by the Americans) had 72 million. In Germany as a whole, denazification was significantly less thorough than in the American zone, ultimately covering only 1.5 million individuals, when the number of members of organisations declared criminal at the Nuremberg trials was around 5 million<sup>13</sup>. Another critical point to remember is the lack of a totalitarian monopoly in Japan akin to the NSDAP in Germany. With the dissolution of all political parties in 1940, the only permitted organisation, Taisei Yokusankai, was largely a façade, much like the Front of National Unity in the Polish People's Republic. Therefore, it was impossible to "vet" citizens for affiliations with such a party. The official programmatic pacifism in the constitution and the formal abolition of the armed forces also had a complex role in Japan, in contrast with the Federal Republic of Germany, where the Bundeswehr was established only ten years after the war, raising the issue of vetting its officer cadre. Whereas in Germany, the war was viewed negatively because it was perceived as being instigated by the increasingly mythical "evil Nazis", in Japan, the war was denounced because it was simply a war. This viewpoint was encouraged by the haunting memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. With these events in mind, both the left and the nationalist right portrayed the Japanese as victims, rather than perpetrators, of the war. Consequently, the 1937–1945 war, in which the communist USSR participated only at the very end, began to be perceived as a "typical" imperialist conflict for power and influence, where all parties were equally guilty, or perhaps, innocent. In Japan, the "militarists" were blamed, who were notably penalised in the Tokyo Trial of 1946–1948 and less publicised trials. Military personnel comprised as much as 79.6% of those affected by the post-war purge in Japan, while professional politicians comprised 16.5%<sup>14</sup>. This action largely resolved the issue, especially as there was no

<sup>12</sup> M. Shibata, *Japan and Germany under the US Occupation: A Comparative Analysis of Post-War Education Reform*, Lanham MD 2005, p. 68; Y. He, *The Search for Reconciliation*, p. 239.

<sup>13</sup> Data sourced from: H. Sołga, *Niemcy. Sądzący i sądzeni, 1939–2000*, Kraków 2000, p. 94. Additionally, to execute denazification, the Americans, unlike the other three occupiers, had a substantial cadre in Germany composed of pre-war refugees from the Reich who held US citizenship, whereas the number of occupiers who spoke Japanese was minimal.

<sup>14</sup> K. Starecka, *Przebieg i skutki czystki powojennej w okupowanej Japonii*, "Zeszyty Naukowe UJ. Prace Historyczne", No. 149 (2022), vol. 2, p. 353.

official Japanese army after that. Meanwhile, the government of the Federal Republic of Germany continued to grapple with an ongoing, though subdued, issue concerning “ex-Nazis” and its own “skeletons in the wardrobe”<sup>15</sup>.

At this juncture, it is crucial to acknowledge the substantial role the global Jewish Diaspora and the State of Israel played in condemning German National Socialism. Without them, attempts might have been made to argue that all warring parties committed comparable crimes (for instance, aerial bombings) and that “capitalism and imperialism” were to blame for all of them. The role of the USSR and its affiliated intellectuals, who denounced Nazism as an absolute evil to legitimise the Soviet victory, was also pivotal. No such equivalent existed for Japan. Japan’s former victims had limited opportunities to share their grievances and injustices globally, as they resided in the People’s Republic of China, North Korea or South Korea, all of which were essentially isolated from the international community. Despite its pro-American, dictatorial status, the latter was incorrectly deemed completely untrustworthy. Instead, the myth of Hiroshima, effectively propagated by the global left, essentially portrayed Japan as a victimised nation. Consequently, “the millions of people killed and injured by the Japanese [...] were forgotten, allowed to sink into some black hole of collective memory, while the secondary victims – the Japanese themselves – were placed on the privileged public altar”<sup>16</sup>. This was not the case with Germany.

For Japan, a distinct disadvantage was the continued reign of Emperor Hirohito, who had been in power since 1926, during the pre-war era. The question of his responsibility for the war and his reasons for retaining the throne is a complex matter<sup>17</sup>. However, the presence of the same monarch at the head of the state as in 1937–1945 certainly made it easier to assert that little had changed fundamentally in the Japanese regime. Unlike the German leaders, who were an easy target for caricaturists (Hitler with a Chaplin moustache, rotund Göring, cripple Goebbels, the bespectacled Himmler), the Japanese leaders convicted in the Nuremberg-like Tokyo Trial were largely anonymous to the world. The only identifiable figure, not by virtue of his personality but his role, was the Emperor, who remained on the throne.

### **The Issue of the Peace Treaty and the Dual Representation of Germany and China**

The absence of a peace treaty became a distinct, albeit partial, analogy. Though Japan signed one in 1951 with the USA, the UK, and 49 other former adversaries, it failed to do so with the countries that had suffered the most at its hands – mainland China and the divided Korea. (Nor did it sign one, as we know, with the USSR). For these countries, just as for Germany, the state of war was lifted through a unilateral declaration by parliamentary bodies, but left an impression of anomaly and temporariness.

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<sup>15</sup> For obvious reasons, considering the Polish reader’s notably better understanding of Berlin-Warsaw relations and the relatively accessible literature on these relations, the footnotes to this article will, with few exceptions, concentrate on Sino-Japanese relations.

<sup>16</sup> A. Ryerson, *Kult Hiroszimy*, in: I. Lasota (ed.), *Mieszanka polityczna. Dyskusja na Zachodzie*, New York 1986, p. 44.

<sup>17</sup> In this case, cf: J. Polit, *Hirohito. Tajemnica cesarza Shōwa*, Kraków 2019, *passim*.

Another parallel, albeit differing in detail, further complicates the relationship. Just as the Poles confronted a second German state – the German Democratic Republic – with a markedly smaller political stature than the Federal Republic of Germany, Japan faced a second, or rather first, residual Chinese state. Known as the Republic of China and restricted to the island of Taiwan, this entity in terms of legal continuity, was the exact state with which Japan had engaged in conflict on the mainland between 1937 and 1945. As was the case with Poland, formal diplomatic relations were maintained with this smaller, residual remnant of the former enemy for the same reason – due to the will of a powerful ally and protector of the respective states. Communist Poland was a friend and ally of the GDR, a “chronically dependent child of Soviet communism”<sup>18</sup> within the Warsaw Pact; it was an anomaly that a state of war lingered for five more years even after the proclamation of friendship in the Treaty of Zgorzelec of 1950<sup>19</sup>. Similarly, Japan signed a peace treaty with the Republic of China in 1952, but Prime Minister Yoshida clarified in parliament that “this treaty is a treaty with the government which presently rules Taiwan and the Pescadores, and in the future, we desire to conclude an overall treaty”<sup>20</sup>. However, the government of the Polish People’s Republic could say the same thing – but unofficially, as it had long recognised the GDR government as the government of the WHOLE of Germany.

A key distinction was that the GDR was a puppet state created to prevent its inhabitants from fleeing, while Chiang Kai-shek’s state, confined to Taiwan, was the refuge to which the Chinese fled. Notably, while the Chiang government battled the Japanese on the mainland between 1937 and 1945, Taiwan itself was a Japanese colony for half a century (1895–1945). Its inhabitants’ experiences, sometimes serving in the Japanese army and administration during the war, and generally familiar with the language and customs of the occupiers, were markedly different from those of an average Chinese<sup>21</sup>. In the case of the Poles, only a small proportion, chiefly the inhabitants of Upper Silesia, had a comparable experience.

During the 1960s, despite the absence of diplomatic relations, contacts, primarily trade, saw some rejuvenation between the Polish People’s Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany and between the PRC and Japan. In both instances, the Communist neighbour received visits from journalists and politicians, though those not in power and doing so “privately”. In Japan, these often included lesser members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party<sup>22</sup>. However, no equivalent existed in Asia for young Germans seeking to atone for their parents’ guilt by cleaning former campsites, nor (understandably) was there a dialogue between the Bishops of the two countries. “Red China” was considerably more sealed off than the Polish People’s Republic, and the camp system was far from a thing of the past. On the contrary, it was entering its most intense phase.

<sup>18</sup> T.G. Ash, *Niemieckość NRD*, Londyn 1989, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> The state of war between Poland and Germany – in which the GDR government was recognised as the governing body of WHOLE Germany – was formally concluded by the Council of State of the Polish People’s Republic on 15 February 1955, following the precedent set by the USSR.

<sup>20</sup> J.W. Dower, *Empire and Aftermath. Yoshida Shigeru and the Japanese Experience 1874–1954*, Cambridge Mass. – London 1988, p. 410.

<sup>21</sup> On this subject in Polish, cf. the partially memoiristic work by the Chinese author: Lung Yintai, *Wielka rzeka, wielkie morze. 1937, 1939, 1945, 1949, 1987, 1999*, Warszawa 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Ch. Johnson, *The Patterns of Japanese Relations with China, 1952–1982*, “Pacific Affairs”, vol. 59, No. 3 (Autumn 1986), p. 405.

## Façade Reconciliation of the 1970s

A turning point in relations with former wartime adversaries occurred in the early 1970s. Interestingly, the catalyst in both instances was identical: the *détente* policy implemented by the Nixon-Kissinger team, which opened doors to reconciliation under the watchful gaze of superpowers. In the instance of the Polish People's Republic, a significant marker was the high-profile visit of Chancellor Willy Brandt in December 1970, which culminated in a border agreement and the establishment of formal relations. Meanwhile, with the People's Republic of China (PRC), an agreement between Prime Minister Zhou Enlai and his Japanese counterpart Tanaka Kakuei on 25 September 1972 represented a similar landmark. A notable difference in these proceedings was that while the border issue was crucial in the case of Poland, it was almost non-existent in the dialogue between the PRC and Japan. In relation to the only disputed territory, the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu Islands), Zhou conveniently sidestepped the discussion. Moreover, the moral dimension of these meetings bore different implications. Brandt, personally unaffiliated with Nazism (having fought in the Norwegian resistance during the war), symbolically knelt in front of the monument honouring the heroes of the ghetto. Even though this gesture was more directly tied to Jews rather than Poles<sup>23</sup>, it sparked considerable discussion in the Federal Republic of Germany. The authorities of the Polish People's Republic did not immediately highlight this act, but over time it significantly and positively influenced Polish-German relations. Prime Minister Tanaka was similarly uninvolved in his nation's criminal past and briefly served as a simple soldier in Manchuria. Contrary to what is generally believed, when he arrived in the PRC, he sought to express remorse for his compatriots' war crimes. However, this was met with characteristic laughter by Mao Zedong who proclaimed, "it is Japan whom we must thank, for without the invasion of China by the Japanese militarists, we [communists] might still be living in caves from Chiang Kai-shek's army"<sup>24</sup>. Unlike Brandt, Tanaka did not publicly pay tribute to the memory of the war victims. This omission was not necessarily by choice, as there were no dedicated monuments to the victims of the 1937–1945 struggle in the PRC at the time – a stark contrast to the Polish People's Republic<sup>25</sup>. Any existing memorials celebrated only the communists who fell in battle against Chiang Kai-shek and other unspecified "imperialists". Furthermore, the infamous "Cultural Revolution" was still ongoing during Tanaka's visit, albeit losing momentum. Preoccupied with power struggles and the recent assassination of Mao's successor-designate, Lin Biao, the leadership kept foreign policy developments under wraps, leaving the public with less awareness than their counterparts in the Polish People's Republic.

Nonetheless, a form of "shallow reconciliation", or *rapprochement* as it is referred to in diplomatic parlance, took place. Adverse propaganda was curbed and high-profile visits became a symbol of relaxation. In June 1976, the leader of the Polish People's Republic,

<sup>23</sup> "Although it took place in Poland, the intended recipients of Brandt's gesture were [...] not solely Poles, but Jews – not just the Warsaw Ghetto insurgents or just Polish Jews, but all those who perished in the Shoah" (K. Wigura, *Wina narodów. Przebaczenie jako strategia prowadzenia polityki*, Gdańsk–Warszawa 2011, p. 87).

<sup>24</sup> Source: A.D. Coox, *Rescource to Arms. The Sino-Japanese Conflict, 1937–1945*, in: A. Coox, H. Conroy (eds), *China and Japan. A Search for Balance since World War II*, Santa Barbara 1978, p. 314.

<sup>25</sup> A. Waldron, *China's New Remembering of World War II*, "Modern Asian Studies", vol. XXX, No. 4, October 1996, p. 949.



Edward Gierek, visited the Federal Republic of Germany. Interestingly, although he was neither head of state nor government, he was welcomed in Bonn with ceremonies befitting a head of state. An identical reception awaited Deng Xiaoping in Tokyo for his two visits (in October 1978 and February 1979). Formally however he was not the head of the party or the state or the government. Deng, who had consolidated his absolute power in the PRC by the end of 1978, was officially recognised only as the leader of the Chinese Bridge Association<sup>26</sup>. Notably, this marked the first ever visit by an actual Chinese leader to the islands. Among other dignitaries, Deng met Emperor Hirohito, to whom he paid only compliments without making any allusions to the war<sup>27</sup>.

## Economic Rapprochement and Political Challenges

Beyond the superficial diplomatic pleasantries, the economy played a critical role. Both Germany, in its relationship with Poland, and Japan, with the People's Republic of China, emerged as principal partners amongst the "capitalist states". This was particularly significant for the PRC, given its limited economic dealings with the Soviet bloc. In 1977, the Federal Republic of Germany's share in the foreign trade of the Polish People's Republic reached 14.5%. Conversely, Japan accounted for a significant 25.7% of the PRC's trade, albeit the former wartime adversaries' role in each other's economies remained relatively small (1.2% for Germany and 3.6% for Japan)<sup>28</sup>. However, personal experiences held considerable significance. Between 1971 and 1979, the number of annual German tourists to Poland grew from 50,000 to 330,000, while despite financial and political constraints, Polish visitors to Germany increased from 60,000 to 200,000<sup>29</sup>. China experienced a similar shift only after Deng's ascent to power in 1978. In 1980, the number of Chinese living in Japan was 52,896, a figure almost identical to that of a decade earlier (51,481), strongly suggesting that these individuals were likely citizens of the Republic of China in Taiwan. By 1985, this number had grown to 74,924, with "the community of the newcomers is mainly composed of Chinese students [author's note: from the PRC] who have arrived since the 1980s"<sup>30</sup>. In 1990, the Chinese population in Japan rose to 150,000; by 1995, it had increased to 220,000. Due to existing market restrictions in Japan, only a small proportion of them moved to the islands in search of employment.

In Sino-Japanese relations, there was no equivalent to the German-Polish Textbook Commission. This commission, established in 1972 under the auspices of UNESCO, brought

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<sup>26</sup> While Deng held the positions of chairman of the Central Military Commission (1981–1989) and the Central Advisory Commission (1982–1987), traditionally, these roles were entirely subordinate to the head of the ruling party in the PRC's governmental practice. The fact of the matter is, Deng indeed held this power, albeit only in a *de facto* manner.

<sup>27</sup> E.F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, Cambridge Mass 2011, p. 300. It is noteworthy that in the conversation, it was only Hirohito who attempted to allude to the "unfortunate incidents" of the past.

<sup>28</sup> Data sourced from: S. Kowal, *Handel polsko-niemiecki w latach 1918–2006 (uwarunkowania i etapy rozwoju)*, "Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych", vol. LXVIII, 2008, p. 171 (table); Ch. Howe, *China, Japan...*, p. 113; Y. Soeya, *Japan's Economic Diplomacy with China*, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> E. Mühle, *Germany and the European East in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford 2003, pp. 169–170.

<sup>30</sup> Data sourced from: H. Le Bail, *The New Chinese Immigration to Japan: Between Mobility and Integration*, <https://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/521#tocfrom2n1> [7 December 2021]

together historians, geographers, and educators from both countries. Its main outcome was not a unified perspective on history, but a discussion about it, involving the exchange of information about the two countries' historical policies. In contrast, the PRC government, which had completely ignored historical issues for the first decade after establishing relations, began to make school textbooks the subject of carefully orchestrated diplomatic protests after a while. The most notorious of these took place in 1982 and 2001, with the latter protest overlooking the fact that the textbook in question – which omitted rather than distorted sensitive events – was used by a mere 0.039% (!) of the colleges in the islands<sup>31</sup>. It is worth noting that in the German-Polish Textbook Commission, comments and demands could be made by both sides<sup>32</sup>. However, Japanese influence over the portrayal of history in textbooks in the PRC was virtually non-existent.

While the previously mentioned trends could have led to genuine reconciliation between governments and societies, developments in both regions took more complex turns. In the Polish People's Republic, the formation of an alternative civil society, with the help and participation of the Catholic Church and later embodied in the Solidarity movement, played a significant role. With the assistance of underground publications, pulpit messages, and external sources like Radio Free Europe, this movement effectively bypassed the government's monopoly on information. The 1970s and 1980s marked the waning of the "West German revisionists" fears, which had previously been stoked by the authorities with some degree of success. The Bonn government's somewhat hesitant response to the declaration of martial law in the Polish People's Republic in 1981 was in stark contrast to the stances of not just the USA, but also France. Nevertheless, the impact of food parcels sent from Germany to Poland, distributed by local parishes, effectively alleviated fears and reduced distrust of Germans. Before long, the fall of communism in Poland heralded a completely new chapter in Poland's relations with a now united Germany.

Naturally, nothing of this sort transpired on the Tokyo-Beijing front. The ten per cent annual economic growth in the People's Republic of China during the 1980s, leading to heightened national pride and gratitude towards Deng, stood in stark contrast to the economic collapse in the Polish People's Republic. The disintegration of first the Soviet bloc, and then the USSR itself, instilled fear in the Beijing Communists, triggering a course correction. Japan, meanwhile, was entering a decade of economic difficulty and was gradually losing its status as a useful political ally against Moscow. Instead, akin to the US, it was starting to be viewed as an economic rival, and not just in the economic realm.

### **End of Analogy: German-Polish Rapprochement, Sino-Japanese Cool-Down**

As the Republic of Poland, no longer the Polish People's Republic, signed the Treaty of Good Neighbourhood with a united Germany on 17 June 1991 and moved towards

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<sup>31</sup> M. Pletnia, *Pamięć zbiorowa o wojnie na Pacyfiku w powojennej Japonii*, Kraków 2019, pp. 253–256.

<sup>32</sup> W. Jarząbek, *Komisja podręcznikowa a stosunki PRL – RFN w latach 1972–1975*, "Rocznik Polsko-Niemiecki", No. 21, 2013, pp. 163–195; K. Ruchniewicz, *Enno Meyer a Polska i Polacy (1939–1990). Z badań nad początkami Wspólnej Komisji Podręcznikowej PRL–RFN*, Wrocław 1994.

a NATO alliance, historical resentments and grievances against Japan began to resurface in Beijing. In Nanjing, a museum initially opened in 1985 as a modest pavilion was expanded ten years later into a significant venture occupying 28,000 square metres. It featured a special hall displaying the exposed skeletons of the victims of the 1937 massacre<sup>33</sup>. The number of victims was arbitrarily set at 400,000. Simultaneously in 1995, the extremely anti-Japanese film *Heitai yaku Nanjing Datusha*, directed by Mou Tunfei, was released. This was followed in 2011 by the much-acclaimed *The Flowers of War*, directed by Zhang Yimou<sup>34</sup>. Several memorials to the invasion and occupation also sprang up. These memorials had a specific narrative: the one in Beijing portrayed Japanese soldiers as grotesque dwarves with thick-rimmed glasses, while the Chinese were depicted as heroic figures, still commanding in death<sup>35</sup>. Meanwhile, the number of war deaths reported by the authorities in Beijing began to surge, eventually surpassing 30 million. Contrary to historical accuracy, the conflict of 1937–1945 began to be described as “the worst disaster of this century that afflicted our people”<sup>36</sup>. Lastly, from 1996 onwards, when the first landing attempts occurred, the Senkaku Islands dispute came to the forefront. Around these islands alone, some 40 maritime “incidents” took place during the first eight months of 2012<sup>37</sup>. Nobel laureate in literature, Liu Xiaobo, characterised these displays of “gangsterism and militant patriotism” as attempts to overcome old complexes by transforming “from lamenting crybabies to an aggressive love of country”<sup>38</sup>.

The aforementioned phenomenon was undoubtedly driven by the regime’s efforts, but also by the general surge in confidence arising from economic success. It was perplexing to observe that the youngest generation appeared particularly aggressive. In 1995, 85% of Beijing residents and 79% of Shanghai residents expressed antipathy towards the Japanese. Interestingly, at almost the same time in 1997, only 38% of Poles declared negative sentiments towards Germans<sup>39</sup>. The situation was markedly different in Japan, where young people exhibited disinterest in both politics and the past, increasingly suffering from “social withdrawal” (*hikikomori*)<sup>40</sup>. Notably, the distribution of such sentiments in Europe was the complete reverse. The events of 1989–1990 significantly boosted self-confidence and national feelings in Germany, rather than in Poland.

<sup>33</sup> Official website: <http://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/NanjingMassacre/NM.html> [accessed 28 December 2021]

<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the film provided evidence of the PRC’s evolving portrayal of the war, highlighting the bravery of Chiang Kai-shek’s soldiers and entirely omitting any mention of the Chinese communists.

<sup>35</sup> J.L. Margolin, *Japonia 1937–1945. Wojna armii cesarza*, Warszawa 2009, p. 470; J.-t. Chang, *The Politics of Commemoration: a Comparative Analysis*, in: D. Lary, S. MacKinnon (eds), *Scars of War. The Impact of Warfare on Modern China*, Vancouver 2001, pp. 152–153.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150 (quoted) and seq. (naturally, the bloodiest episode in China’s twentieth-century history was Mao’s rule, not the Japanese invasion.); P.M. Coble, *China’s “New Remembering” of the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance*, p. 405.

<sup>37</sup> For the pro-China spirit, see: Pan Junwu, *Toward a New Framework for Peaceful Settlement of China’s Territorial and Boundary Disputes*, Leiden 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Liu Xiaobo, *Nie mam wrogów*, transl. P. Dubicki. Warszawa 2017, p. 73.

<sup>39</sup> Data source on China: J.-L. Margolin, *Japonia*, p. 468; data source on Poland: E. Nasalska, *German-Polish Relations in Historical Consciousness of Polish Youth*, “International Education” vol. XI, No. 1, 2000, p. 54.

<sup>40</sup> T. Toivonen, V. Norasakkunkit, Y. Uchida, *Unable to Conform, Unwilling to Rebel? Youth, Culture and Motivation in Globalizing Japan*, “Frontiers in Psychology”, vol. CCVII, No. 2, 2011, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3171786/> [accessed: 28 December 2021]

Numerous authors, including Yinan He, have attributed the escalation of the “memory conflict” in Asia to the Japanese. They noted that, unlike the Germans, the Japanese did not confront their history. Many of these allegations were, indeed, accurate. On the Islands, the past was more forgotten than confronted. The teaching of history in schools often concluded with the 1922 Washington Conference. In universities and the press, it was occasionally suggested that in many East Asian countries, the Imperial Army was welcomed as a liberator in 1941. This was neither more nor less accurate than the sentiments many inhabitants of the USSR held towards the Wehrmacht in that same year of 1941. However, the difference lay in the fact that apart from a few niche groups in Germany, this point was not particularly emphasised. Works by historical revisionists were published with varying degrees of openness. An example is the film *Nankin no shinjitsu* (The Truth About Nanjing), which denies the Nanjing Massacre. Its creator, Mizushima Satoru, was sued by one of the victims and was subsequently convicted by a Japanese court<sup>41</sup>.

### Is Reconciliation Possible under Dictatorship?

Many allegations originating from Beijing, nonetheless, were demagogic. This involved the contentious issue of Japanese Prime Ministers, and the Emperor, visiting the Yasukuni Shrine. This place commemorates soldiers who died for Japan from 1867 onwards, including, unfortunately, war criminals. Several Chinese individuals, including Yinan He, have pointed out “the contrast between German and Japanese official positions is evident if one compares the typical visits by German leaders to Nazi concentration camps on war anniversaries with Japanese leaders’ worship at the highly nationalistic Yasukuni Shrine”<sup>42</sup>. However, such a comparison is substantially flawed. Setting aside the point that Germany’s leaders commemorate the memory of (as they assert) “also many German citizens” in the camps, the murderers of whom are increasingly referred to as indeterminate “Nazis”. Conversely, the Yasukuni Shrine is dedicated to all Japanese soldiers killed post-1867, serving as a form of symbolic war memorial. To fairly consider Yinan He’s comparison, one would have to presume that democratic German leaders never present wreaths at cemeteries and memorials dedicated to German veterans, which may include those containing the graves or names of Waffen-SS soldiers. Even a reader with limited knowledge would understand that such a statement bears little resemblance to reality<sup>43</sup>. It is worth mentioning that neither

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<sup>41</sup> Jun Hongo, *Filmmaker to paint Nanjing slaughter as just myth*, “The Japan Times” 25 January 2007 <https://arquivo.pt/wayback/20091009095809/http%3A//search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20070125a3.html> [accessed: 30 January 2021]; In Japan, denial over Nanjing, still holds sway after 70 years, “The Christian Science Monitor” 14 XII 2007, [accessed: 30 December 2021]. On the other hand, in 2009, Matsuoka Tamaki made a documentary film that confirmed the truth of the massacre, featuring interviews with participants of the massacre (Lee Min, *New film has Japan vets confessing to Naging Rape*, 31 March 2021 [https://www.salon.com/2010/03/31/as\\_film\\_japan\\_massacre\\_documentary/](https://www.salon.com/2010/03/31/as_film_japan_massacre_documentary/) [accessed: 28 December 2021])

<sup>42</sup> Y. He, *The Search for Reconciliation*, p. 292.

<sup>43</sup> In May 1985, Chancellor Helmut Kohl and President Ronald Reagan notably laid flowers at the Bitburg military cemetery, where, amongst the 2,000 soldier graves, 49 were attributed to Waffen-SS soldiers; according to Kohl, 72% of Germans in the Federal Republic of Germany commended such a gesture (cf. D. Lipstadt, *The Bitburg Controversy*, “The American Jewish Yearbook”, vol. LXXXVII (1987), pp. 21–37). In 2008, on the occasion of the People’s Day of Mourning (*Volkstrauertag*), representatives of the German embassy in Warsaw

Emperor Hirohito nor his two successors have visited Yasukuni since the introduction of plaques bearing the names of the war criminals executed in 1948.

Moreover, the question posed in 2006 by PRC Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing, “what would Europeans think if German leaders visited [monuments] associated with Hitler and the Nazis?”<sup>44</sup> can be answered relatively easily. There stands the mausoleum of the largest genocide in history (Chairman Mao Memorial Hall, Máo Zhǔxí Jìniàn Táng), erected in the place of honour at Beijing’s Tiananmen Square, where tributes are consistently paid by the leaders of the People’s Republic of China...

Moreover, the prevalent belief in the PRC that the Japanese authorities have not apologised for their compatriots’ crimes is inaccurate. Prime Minister Yoshida already carried out such an act when he signed the Treaty of San Francisco in 1951; the absence of PRC representatives in the room was not his fault. This apology was reiterated by Minister Shiina Etsusaburo when establishing relations with South Korea in 1965, and the same sentiments were communicated to the country’s leaders throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The reunion of Prime Minister Tanaka in 1972 was kept under wraps at Mao Zedong’s behest. Contrary to frequent claims, Emperor Hirohito was prepared to apologise: however, he was barred from doing so by the government, which adopted an extremely narrow interpretation of the prohibition on political speeches by the head of state. Nonetheless, the Emperor conveyed his regret during a visit to the USA in 1977, as well as when receiving South Korean President Chun Doo-hwan in 1984 and again during a meeting with Philippine President Corazon Aquino in 1988. Although he never visited China, as he would not have been welcomed there, his son and successor Akihito did in October 1992, expressing his “deep sorrow” over “the unfortunate period during which my country inflicted great suffering on the people of China”<sup>45</sup>. A year later, Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro declared that Japan’s last war was “aggressive and unjust”<sup>46</sup>. On the semi-centennial anniversary of the end of the conflict, Socialist Chief Executive Murayama Tomiichi stated: “I regard, in a spirit of humility, these irrefutable facts of history, and express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology. Allow me also to express my feelings of profound mourning for all victims, both at home and abroad, of that history”<sup>47</sup>.

It is evident that the Beijing regime, which periodically resorts to anti-Japanese sentiment, has claimed more lives of its own citizens than the Japanese invaders (a rough estimate

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laid flowers on the graves of Wehrmacht soldiers interred in the Northern Cemetery in the Polish capital, despite recommendations that this gesture should instead honour those who fell in the First World War.

<sup>44</sup> *China Playing the Hitler card*, “The Japan Times”, 16 November 2005 [https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2005/11/16/national/china-playing-the-hitler-card/#.W1dO6\\_krLIU](https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2005/11/16/national/china-playing-the-hitler-card/#.W1dO6_krLIU) [accessed: 20 December 2021]. It is worth noting that the leaders of the Taiwanese Republic of China have paid visits to Yasukuni on at least two occasions.

<sup>45</sup> J. Polit, *Hirohito*, pp. 870, 881, 883; <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/28168/api001.pdf>, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/24/world/japan-s-emperor-tells-china-only-of-his-sadness-on-war.html> [accessed: 29 January 2021]

<sup>46</sup> *Stop the Denial, Says Hosokawa: Prime minister wants Japan to face its past*, “Los Angeles Times”, 17 August 1993 <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-08-17-me-24500-story.html> [accessed: 20 December 2021]; *Hosokawa in Strongest Apology for Role in War*, “South China Morning Post”, 24 July 1993, <https://www.scmp.com/article/41551/hosokawa-strongest-apology-role-war> [accessed: 20 December 2021]

<sup>47</sup> Source: O. Barbasiewicz, *Is there a Universe Pattern for Reconciliations? Successes and Failures of European and Asian Reconciliation as a Tool for the Balkans?*, in: A. Jović-Lazić, A. Troude (eds), *Security challenges and the Place of the Balkans and Serbia in a Changing World*, Belgrade 2020, p. 140.

suggests about three times as many). However, the situation in the Polish People's Republic was different. Imagine if the Bierut and Gomułka team ("pre-October" Gomułka, general secretary of the Polish Workers' Party) had killed not tens of thousands, but 18 million Poles (that is, exactly three times as many as the foreign invaders in 1939–1945). Would the Polish public then have demanded an apology from Germany with the same passion?

It is a given that true reconciliation is impossible when there is not readiness for it on both sides<sup>48</sup>. According to surveys conducted in the early 21st century (in connection with the idea of establishing the Centre Against Expulsions, German: *Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen*), about a quarter of Poles were not prepared at that time (2002) to forgive the Germans or ask for their forgiveness; surprisingly, this figure is surprisingly low<sup>49</sup>. In China, however, proponents of "forgiveness" (a mere dozen or so percent?) are in the minority, perhaps because, as Hannah Arendt once noted, "forgiveness" is a phenomenon specific to Christian culture, "discovered" by Jesus of Nazareth<sup>50</sup>. (We should note that Confucianism tends to emphasise accepting the consequences of one's actions to the end). Following the author of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, we can question whether "reconciliation" and "forgiveness" (these terms are not interchangeable)<sup>51</sup> are possible at all under a totalitarian or quasi-totalitarian dictatorship (we should note here that in Poland, the Catholic Church, as the only institution *de facto* independent from the dictatorship, was able to sidestep this issue in its well-known address to the German bishops<sup>52</sup>). A potential negative answer to this question casts a specific light on the situation in the People's Republic of China.

The conclusions derived from the above will not be particularly groundbreaking. The foundation for reconciliation must be the alignment of historical memory, at least in a broad sense. The phrase often employed by politicians is "overcoming the past" (German: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*). However, in practice, there is often a "return to the past" (German: *Rückkehr in die Vergangenheit*). The past persists.

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<sup>48</sup> This was brought up during the discussion of the speech given by the author of this text, Professor Mirosław Dymarski.

<sup>49</sup> Estimates quoted by Die Welt correspondent, Gerhard Gnauck: G. Gnauck, *Muzeum ojcowizny*, "Tygodnik Powszechny", 22 June 2002.

<sup>50</sup> H. Arendt, *Kondycja ludzka*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 257–258.

<sup>51</sup> The observation that only those who have personally endured injustices (and not, for instance, their descendants or moral heirs) can "forgive", while the latter can indeed "reconcile", appears accurate. Consequently, forgiveness is something more challenging than reconciliation.

<sup>52</sup> H. Arendt, *Odpowiedzialność osobista w warunkach dyktatury*, w: eadem, *Odpowiedzialność i władza sądzienia*, Warszawa 2006.

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**Jakub Polit**, historian, professor of humanities, employee of the Department of Modern General History of the Jagiellonian University. Research interests: history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with particular



emphasis on the Far East. Author of thirteen books, including: *Lew i smok. Wielka Brytania a kryzys chiński 1925–1928* (Kraków 2006), *Pod wiatr. Ciang Kaj-szek 1887–1975* (Kraków 2008), *Chiny 1946–1949* (Warszawa 2010), *Gorzki triumf. Wojna chińsko-japońska 1937–1949* (Kraków 2013); *Japońska polityka zagraniczna 1895–1945* (Kraków 2015 i 2020), *Wojny chińskich warlordów 1916–1928* (Zabrze – Tarnowskie Góry 2017), *Hirohito. Tajemnica cesarza Shōwa* (Kraków 2019 i 2021); *Polityka zagraniczna Republiki Chińskiej 1911–1949* (Kraków 2023). Co-author of *History of Poland* (Kraków 2005).

ORCID: 0000-0002-8209-5124