

## Issues in the study of the War History

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### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present my views concerning the study on the history of Shino-Japanese war as a historian. Although careful evaluation of the related books and papers is preferable, due to the limited space, I will focus mainly on the methods and frameworks for this study and provide materials for discussion.

Few will deny that in the study of history after WWII, the influence of "the Story" was lost, and the elucidation of groups of "a story" became mainstream in the historical narratives. Sympathy with Marxist views of history and its laws of development has dramatically decreased because of the failure of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the Chinese market economy, and the turmoil of Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Actually, the acts of describing history within a certain framework cannot be claimed as academic but rather as an expression of a political standing point. I believed that it was desirable to return the study of history to the original stance of emphasizing positivist methodology. Other reasons to revive the "positivistic study of history" are the improved conditions for perusal of the historical materials in Japan and the availability of the first rate historical materials made open to public in Taiwan and China during this period.

The late 1980's was a big turning point regarding the study of war history. In this period of time, the generation that was born in the 1920's and thus had experienced the war while socially maturing reached the age of retirement in various areas of society. This means that after this period of time the main spokespeople of the war in

such fields as politics, diplomacy, research, education and laypersons were gradually being replaced with the generation that did not experience the war. Previously, both Left and Right wing members who had tragic and pathetic experiences of the war implicitly claimed, "never to repeat such tragedies." However, with this transition to a new generation of leaders, their voices weakened. In the following I will discuss, how under this shift of generations the purposes of the study of war history changed and what pitfalls the new generation might fall into.

## **2. Scientific nature for historians**

When I aspired to the study of history about thirty years ago (in the late 1970's) my colleagues believed that history was a science; that people "develop" on a law and that the mission of historians was to "serve for people" to achieve such a development. Of course, we were aware of strong criticism towards such views, but those "criticisms" was regarded as a howling of "reaction" or "imperialism reaction" and we could easily dismiss them.

Therefore, the previously mentioned shift of conditions for study was very shocking. Those who studied China in those days of 1988 commonly raised the question: why did the People's Liberation Army point the muzzle to the people? This inevitably brought distrust and disappointment to us. In addition, many historians, including myself, expressed the view that "Al the same society" would be dismantled as the richness expanded in the society while the "reform and openness policy" was pushed forward and mostly accepted as an established route in China from the end of the 1970's.

The 1980's were also an age of big conversion for the society of historians in China. Turmoil in various fields in China due to the failure of the Cultural Revolution forced them to review the fundamental stance of Chinese contemporary history that was synonymous to the history of the Chinese revolution, the Chinese Communist Party, and the Mao Zedong line. There was a revival in the study of history of the Chinese economy, the Republic of China, and the Chinese culture that had

been long ignored. In addition, environmental change of Taiwanese democratization cannot be ignored. This was also the time in which the study of the history of the Shino-Japanese War started in full-scale.

The time of 1980's both in China and Japan was a beginning of the end of "an established story of human liberation in the view of Socialism or Marxism." A persuasive power of simple historical description based on good-bad dualism had been rapidly weakened and a quick return to "proof" was sought. In this progress, "the scientific nature" in the study of history due to following "the law", has been replaced by "the possibility of proof and disproof" based on historical materials. It was natural under this condition that the study theme became individualized and subdivided. Although there was some difference in degree by researchers, this meant a shift from the pursuit of "universality" to "individual" orientation. Those scholars who ignored or made light of the proof quickly went extinct.

From my view, this shift was a desirable phenomenon. However, it also presented us with a new, challenging problem. Our choices from the enormous amounts of historical materials that recorded innumerable events inevitably created big differences in the accomplished images of history.

In other words, even if we properly managed and never manipulated historical materials, we can still arrive at an intended conclusion with them. This risk is especially high in contemporary history since the amount of records of both primary and secondary historical materials is enormous.

Fundamentally historians do not suspect their own "scientific nature" and "objectivity", since they observe a procedure of "proof." However, because their choices have already become a premise when they pick up certain historical materials, what they mean by "objectivity" cannot exceed a level of "subjective objectivity" to say the least.

The radical economical growth in China led them to reclaim their national confidence and to become a politically influential country. On the other hand, in Japan, a feeling of economical stagnation has spread over "the lost 20 years" after the bubble burst and led to the economic collapse. This caused both countries to require "a dif-

ferent story" or "a small story" rather than a "human story" for the same historical events.

To summarize up to this point, we historians have the tendency to put too much confidence on historical "narratives" presented by academic researchers to be scientific and objective. Furthermore, we tend to look down on memories succeeded through oral transmission and regard them to be of a lower quality than records. However, ironically, the progress of "positivism-based history" provided a basis for creating a new "narrative based history," whose contents are directly and heavily reflecting feelings and desires of a nation and a race rather than the universal story of human beings. I believe that whether we accept the flooding of this pluralistic "narrative based history" as they are or whether we can regard groups of "narratives" by others in the same way as our own narratives, will determine a course of the study of war history, its way of "dialogue" and possibly lead to us overcoming conflicts due to history.

### **3. Is it possible for us to achieve historical reconciliation?**

History is a study to mobilize all "the intelligence" and "the reason". Particularly, in the case of the study of foreign history, there are so many tasks, such as acquiring their language, inquiring the path dependency of the culture, and approaching contemporary issues presented as a consequence of history and having an attitude to absorb related areas of study, such as economics, political science, sociology, and religious studies as tools for analysis. Inherently, the reason that the modern study of history tried to keep the stance to value the logical consistency was because they tried to avoid various confusions that will be produced by the complicated nature of this study.

The historian who went through sincere training is convinced that "the truth" is elucidated by his own "argumentation" because he takes abstinent and careful inspection; of course I am not an exception.

However, as stated before, it is a characteristic of the modern study of history that no one except a pseudo-scholar will show failure in a proof in their books and thesis. In other words, anyone can claim that their work is "the truth" and "an objec-

tive description" to the utmost.

Currently, ways for a historian to publish his results of study in history are restricted to a thesis and a book, and it is impossible to replace them with dancing or reading aloud an epic. Therefore, history is considered as a study of logos. Then, those concepts which were tightly connected with historical evaluation, such as "truth" "fairness" or justice" should have been philosophically examined. To my regret, the confidence arose from the accomplishment of "proof" which requires a tremendous amount of work that allows each historian to use the significant terms in a considerably arbitrary way. We keep dealing with the study results as a part of routine work, without affirming whether the "justice" of A and the "justice" of B are pointing to the same phenomena or state. I wonder if we can find the same phenomenon in such an important task as historical "reconciliation." In our daily lives, it is extremely difficult for us to accept, have a dialogue with, and forgive the person who hurts us.

In terms of post-war "reconciliation" in modern history, many people regard Germany and France or Germany and Jews (Israel) as a model case. This may lead to the question; "Why is it that the Japanese cannot make an apology, while the Germans could?" However, there have been many efforts to do just that including making a common textbook, which I cannot afford to explain here in detail. Rather, I would like to propose my personal view about the semantic difference of "reconciliation" and the structural difference of the "reconciliation" process between the cases of Japan and China and that of Germany and other Western societies.

I first checked the word "reconciliation" as imaged in our actual life experience in the representative dictionaries of Japan and China. I found out that the Japanese and Chinese languages in modern usage both share the common sense that the subject of "reconciliation" is the "party concerned" and "both parties". This confirms that such a structure is a process or a civil code for reconciliation in which party A and party B both claim their opinions, put them into an entangled situation, reach a compromise, and finally terminate the dispute (settlement) and make a contract.

(Shin Horitsugaku Jiten, 3rd edition, Yuhikaku 1989, p.1484) We may consider such a legal image firmly established in our everyday language usage.

(2) By contrast, a speech by Richard von Weizsacker, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, on May 8th, 1985 in a time when the Cold War had not yet reached the end, shows how his hope for reconciliation with Jews and a reflection to war crimes, had a considerable distance from our "common sense." I quote:

The vast majority of today's population was either child then or had not been born. They cannot profess guilt of their own for crimes that they did not commit. But their forefathers have left them a grave legacy. All of us, whether guilty or not, whether old or young, must accept the past. We are all affected by its consequences and liable for it. It is not a case of coming to terms with the past. That is not possible. It cannot be subsequently modified or made not to have happened. However, anyone who closes his eyes to the past is blind to the present. Whoever refuses to remember the inhumanity is prone to new risks of infection. Precisely for this reason we must understand that there can be no reconciliation without remembrance. Remembrance is experience of the work of God in history. It is the source of faith in redemption. This experience creates hope, creates faith in redemption, in reunification of the divided, in reconciliation. Whoever forgets this experience loses his faith. We must erect a memorial to thoughts and feelings in our own hearts. (Speech by Richard von Weizsacker, President of the Federal Republic of Germany)

Later, Weizsacker recalled this speech in the following way: "In this speech, I borrowed a certain religious thought that was not my own faith: "Seeking to forget makes exile all the longer; the secret of redemption lies in remembrance." This was an old Jewish wisdom. We cannot relieve ourselves nor make it not-happened. We have gone through an abyss and participated in it. However, there is one thing we can and should do, which is to look directly into the abyss faithfully. It is significant for that fact and the future. ("Reminiscences by Weizsacker" Iwanamishoten, 1998, pp.232-233)

His choice of the word for reconciliation in Germany was "Versöhnung." This word means reconciliation with god or redemption by god and obviously indicates his theological position. His position is also found in his attitude to face the history with premising his own impotence and helplessness, and speak to others while respecting other's inherent thinking process. His conviction for "reconciliation" is based on the faith system and not by the mediation by the transcendental nor reason nor science.

Furthermore, this structure can be expressed as a vertical direction of "reconciliation" in which it is first given by the transcendental, then the concerned parties are "relieved" and make mutual concessions with each other as a gift of that relief. On the other hand, the Japanese and Chinese way is a simple process of horizontal reconciliation. Indeed, this interpretation of reconciliation is truly a special feature of Weizsacker as a person who experienced ministry. This speech was made possible due to common spiritual background imprinted in people of the Jewish and Christian worlds, in which they seek "the transcendence".

By contrast, we cannot find the similar religious and spiritual ground in Japan and China. As most of the endeavors towards the reconciliation between Japan and Korea are done by Christianity clergyman and believers on both sides, the absence of "a common narrative" is a big factor which makes it difficult to pave the road for sharing the common historical understanding between Japan and China. Of course, a continuous effort for dialogue in a dimension of intelligence and reason, such as making a "common textbook" by Japan, China, and Korea should be highly evaluated, but after all "the monument of wisdom and feeling" can be established only through mutual understanding which embraces a dimension of sensitivity and emotions.

#### **4. Conclusion**

So far, I have written up quite a bit about contents that I had some difficulty with putting into this language, but here I would like to summarize my argument. First, an image of "reconciliation" for Japan and China has been that of legislation

and reason. Therefore, we can be easily fall into a dualistic way of thinking such as "good and evil" or "victim and perpetrator" which makes the conflict worse. Secondly, whether historians become convinced of the limitation of standard "narrative", which emphasizes reason based on the proof through documents, will be a factor in determining the course of "dialogue" from this point forward. It is needless to say that the proof work must be pursued thoroughly, but each one of us has to be aware of the solemn fact that the very subject to do so is not omniscience and omnipotence and realize the danger to "judge" another person by a limited being like us. For my own self-discipline, I would like to emphasize that even "the objective historical fact" cannot escape from the fact that it is a subjective objectivity. Lastly, we historians need to be tolerant and recognize the value of different methodologies for historical studies when we deal with the historical issues, and to approach these different methodologies thoroughly in the future.

The potentiality of history is great, and the proverb of "Never forget the past and learn from history" is extremely persuasive. However, it is necessary for us historians to humbly admit that there exists narratives emerged from the invisible metaphysical or theological "mind". We need to keep a distance from our pride as a historian or faith in science and look into an actual process of "reconciliation." The next question I wish to answer is: "Where can we allow ourselves to take a leap on historical interpretation, mobilizing imagination and sympathy?"

I will eventually disappear from this world, most likely within the next 30 years. Yet, in this short amount of time I cannot help but contemplate on why a small creature such as ourselves still attempt to conduct studies and pursue the education of history.

[Comment] This report is a revised version of the content of the lecture on July 9, 2011 "Issues in the history of studying Nanjing Massacre-discourses in the history study." However, I have made an extended amount of revisions because I needed to review previous studies and expand my argument if focusing on "Nanjing."