

Introduction to the Topic: Memory, Responsibility, Reconciliation

“War Responsibility Revisited: Auschwitz in Japan”

Miriam Silverberg

July 11, 2007

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Miriam-Silverberg/2470>

“War, War Crimes, Power and Justice: Toward a Jurisprudence of Conscience”

Richard Falk

January 23, 2012

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Richard-Falk/3681>

“German-Polish Reconciliation in Comparative Perspective: Lessons for Japan?”

Lily Gardner Feldman

April 19, 2010

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Lily-Gardner-Feldman/3344>

“Japan’s Historical Memory: Reconciliation with Asia”

Kazuhiko Togo

December 23, 2008

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Kazuhiko-TOGO/2997>

“Maritime Asia and the Future of a Northeast Asia Community”

Wada Haruki

October 27, 2008

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Wada-Haruki/2934>

This section will familiarize students with the concepts of “memory,” “war responsibility” and “reconciliation” in global perspective. Miriam Silverberg’s essay, “War Responsibility Revisited: Auschwitz in Japan,” asks how intellectuals deal with war, why they support war, and how they revisit war. Referring to Japan, she points to the ambiguity of the term “war responsibility,” and introduces a variety of views expressed by intellectuals, including philosophers and literary critics, on Japanese war responsibility. As the title suggests, she includes in her discussion a review of how Japanese intellectuals have addressed the issue of Auschwitz—the legacy of the largest concentration camp in Nazi Germany, and pre-eminent symbol of the destruction of European Jews.

Then, Richard Falk discusses the issue of criminal accountability, “of those who commit crimes against peace, crimes against humanity, and war crimes on behalf of a sovereign state,” and traces the quest to achieve global justice through the use of international law from the Nuremberg Trials in Germany and the Tokyo Trials after World War II, to the foundation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2002. Falk notes that the common tendency of the victors, or those with the most wealth and power, to selectively prosecute and distribute judgment unfairly, poses significant challenges to justice and equality. As one example of the consequences of such “victor’s justice” judgments, Falk points to the continued threat and proliferation of nuclear weapons after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Finally, Lily Gardner Feldman proposes the example of German-Polish discussions about war and genocide as a possible framework for Japan's process of reconciliation. She gives a working definition of "reconciliation," explains the role of "history" in reconciliation, and introduces institutions involved in reconciliation activities in Europe. As former diplomat Kazuhiko Togo explains, though, the reconciliation process in Japan has been hindered by the sharp split between right-wing and left-wing historical views among Japanese. Overcoming this division, in Togo's opinion, is the main task Japanese face before they can come to terms with their past and achieve reconciliation with their Asian neighbors. Then, Wada Haruki offers a forward-looking perspective, expressing hope that national boundaries will be transcended and the creation of an East Asian Community, or, as he calls it, a "Common House of Northeast Asia," will be achieved. However, the basic condition, Wada stresses, is dialogue about historical issues and true reconciliation between Japan and its neighbors about their common past. As an example of how to reach reconciliation, he quotes the resolution adopted by both houses of the U.S. Congress on Nov. 23, 1993, which apologized for overthrowing the government of the Hawaiian Kingdom and declaring Hawaii an American protectorate in 1893. Without similar steps by Japan, Wada claims, true reconciliation in East Asia will be difficult to achieve.