



**Christoph Cornelißen, Lutz Klinkhammer, Wolfgang Schwentker, ed.** *Erinnerungskulturen: Deutschland, Italien und Japan seit 1945*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003. 368 pp. EUR 12.90 (paper), ISBN 978-3-596-15219-3.



**Reviewed by** Evelyn Zegenhagen

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**Commissioned by** Janet G. Valentine (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College - Dept of Mil Hist)

## Memory and War

This book presents essays by twenty-three scholars from Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, and the United States exploring the ways in which the three former Axis states from the Second World War have dealt with their past since 1945. By presenting a wide range of research, this edited collection makes readers aware of the imminent importance of the subject in the respective countries over an era of more than fifty years. Methodologically, the book follows the concept of *Erinnerungskulturen* (cultures of memory). And, as the variety of essays proves, there is good reason to use the term in a plural sense because all three states chose, and continue to choose, differing approaches in their conflicted dealings with their past. Within the countries, the variety of agendas, issues, and interpretations is even greater. The editors claim that processes of memory take place in an intense exchange among individual experience; scholarly, objective history, and cultural commemoration allows the book's contributors to offer diverse starting points for the study of this topic.

The editors are well aware of the difficulty in com-

paring three societies as different as Germany, Italy, and Japan. In a solid introduction, as well as in the well-written essay by Wolfgang Schieder, "Kriegsregime des 20. Jahrhunderts. Deutschland, Italien und Japan im Vergleich" (War Regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Germany, Italy, and Japan in Comparison), the authors illuminate the advantages and problems of a comparative study on the subject. And, while the editors rightfully stress the necessity of a comparative study, Schieder points out that after 1945 each of the former Axis regimes dealt exclusively with its own past; historical similarities between the former Allies were largely ignored in an attempt to make the historical memory more bearable for each respective nation. Schieder is the only author to try a direct comparative study in his essay; all other authors—for very good reasons—deal with their respective countries of research only. But this in no way impairs the quality of the book as a comparative study. Following the introduction, the book is divided into six chapters that deal with different aspects of forming memories in various strata of society and by various political groups: the retribu-

tion of the victors, the demystification of former rulers, historians and their interpretations of the past, remembering the past in politics and public culture, mass media as agents of collective memory, and generational shifts and cultures of memory. Thus, the book includes studies of different cohorts of experience (*Erfahrungskohorten*). The essays examine political elites as well as state institutions and the public sphere.

It is impossible to discuss all of the twenty-three contributions. But it quickly becomes obvious that the essays dealing with Japan and Italy follow their topics to the present, while German scholars are focused principally on the past long gone, on events that took place long before the German reunification in 1989. None of the essays dealing with Germany's rapprochement with its past explores the changes that the new Germany experienced after 1989. For instance, they do not examine the rise of neo-Nazis in the 1990s, the new interpretation of history in memorial sites of former concentration camps in the eastern part of the country, or the way East and West Germans define themselves and their relationship with the Nazi past since reunification. Unfortunately, the German section of the book, therefore, offers less new material than the other sections, despite the thoughtful and interesting studies by Jeffrey Herf, in "'Hegelianische Momente'. Gewinner und Verlierer in der ostdeutschen Erinnerung an Krieg, Diktatur und Holocaust" ("Hegelian Moments": Winners and Losers in the East German Remembrance of War, Dictatorship, and Holocaust); Hans Mommsen, in "Zum Erscheinungsbild Adolf Hitlers in der deutschen Öffentlichkeit vor und nach dem 9. Mai 1945" (The Image of Adolf Hitler in the German Public before and after May 9, 1945); and Edgar Wolfrum, in "Die Suche nach dem Ende der 'Nachkriegszeit' Krieg und NS-Diktatur in Öffentlichen Geschichtsbildern der 'alten' Bundesrepublik Deutschland" (Looking for the End of the "Postwar Era": War and NS Dictatorship in the Public History of the "Old" Federal Republic of Germany).

One of the advantages of the editors' approach is that it confronts the reader with a specific topic from many different angles, and from the perspectives of various authors. Some ten essays discuss the Nanking Massacre of December 1937, when Japanese troops killed approximately two hundred thousand Chinese civilians, prisoners of war, and deserters. Repetitions and contradictions can hardly be avoided under these circumstances, but they increase rather than diminish the pleasure of reading. While some essays reflect on the international context of the Nanking Massacre—David Cohen, "Öffentliche Erinnerung an Kriegsverbrecherprozesse in

Asien und Europa" (The Public Memory of War Crime Trials in Asia and Europe), and Franziska Seraphim, "Kriegsverbrecherprozesse in Asien und globale Erinnerungskulturen" (War Crime Trials in Asia and Global Cultures of Memory)—others deal with a variety of subjects concerning how the Nanking Massacre was and is reflected within Japanese society. Petra Buchholz's contribution, "Krieg und Kriegsverbrechen in japanischen Eigengeschichten" (War and War Crimes in Japanese Ego-Stories), describes the *jibunshi undō* (movement for our own history), a widespread grassroots movement among average Japanese people to describe their experiences during World War II in a style that is open, artistic, and engaging. This kind of individual reflection in dealing with the Axis past is fairly unknown in Germany or Italy. Other essays deal with the role that the interpretation of the Nanking Massacre played in politics (for instance, the role of the *Tennō* in society and politics, the description in school books, and even the influence on Japanese religion). Many of these aspects are fairly unknown and understudied in the Western world, and the book's broad representation of Japanese scholars is therefore a special merit of the volume.

The essays dealing with the Italian approach to the cultures of memory are no less fascinating. Quite a few authors draw their lines from 1945 to the present—not surprising, considering the role of Fascist and neo-Nazi powers in Italian contemporary society. Alessandro Campi's work, "Mussolini und die italienische Nachkriegsgesellschaft. Italien zwischen Erinnern und Vergessen" (Mussolini and the Italian Postwar Society: Italy between Remembrance and Forgetting), describes today's Italy as "torn between the duty to remember and the attempt to conceal, striving more to forget than to understand, and paying the price in creating distortions and omissions" (p. 115). This description, no doubt, could be applied to the difficult, contradictory, and painful process of dealing with the past and the shaping of memories in each of the three nations studied in the book.

In short, this collection with its diversity of facts, interpretations, and opinions makes the book a fascinating read. The editors succeeded in putting together a book showing that cultures of memory will remain a controversial and fascinating subject of study far beyond the immediate topic of World War II. The authors's plea for a sensitive approach to the collective memory, for a careful evaluation of historical facts and agents, cannot be overestimated, since the forming of collective memory, both the communicative and the cultural one, will always be an ambiguous process. Or, as Sebastian Con-

rad put it in “Krisen der Moderne? Faschismus und Zweiter Weltkrieg in der japanischen Geschichtsschreibung” (Crises of Modernity? Fascism and Second World War in Japanese Historiography), the dilemma of the *âgeteilte Erinnerung* is that a shared memory is always also a divided memory (p. 178).

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