

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

# Joint DIJ History and Humanities and Social Science Study Group



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## ***Choosing Ways of Remembering: Comparing Student Narratives about World War II in Japan and Germany***

When individuals, be they political elites, bureaucrats, members of civil society organisations, or “ordinary” people on the street, talk about conflicts, they frequently recur on the narrative form – in other words, they tell stories. Devising and passing on narratives are basic human sense-making methods and thereby contribute to shaping social reality. This paper studies the narratives about World War II German and Japanese students tell based on a mixed-structure online questionnaire, paying particular attention to how these narratives depict their respective home countries.

2015 marks the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, but the war remains an important reference point for how Germany and Japan perceive of themselves and are perceived of by others as public perception of “self” and “others” greatly affects (foreign) policy planning. Both German and Japanese governments choose their ways of remembering World War II, especially through school curricula. In this context, exploring World War II narratives as told by current German and Japanese university students is significant. While much scholarly attention has been devoted to analyzing school curricula and how these curricula are reflected in school textbooks, little is known about how the official version of national/international history is retained by and shared among university students. Our research addresses this question in two parts: first, we compare the sources and the depth of World War II knowledge of German and Japanese students. Second, we examine whether their narratives about World War II include critical or non-critical assessments of their home countries’ roles. As current students will play a crucial role in creating their countries’ national images, capturing how they choose to remember their countries’ World War II past can indicate what kind of reference points may shape Japan and Germany’s future outlook.

**Ingvild Bode** is JSPS International Research Fellow with joined affiliation at the United Nations University and the University of Tokyo. Her research has been published in journals such as *Global Governance* and she is also the author of *Individual Agency and Policy Change: The People of the United Nations* (Routledge, 2015). Bode’s research interests include the human element in international relations, conflict narratives, UN peacekeeping and state recourse to the use of force.

**Emilia Seunghoon Heo** is Assistant Professor in International Relations at Sophia University and the author of *Reconciling Enemy States in Europe and Asia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). She has a career background in diplomatic service and regularly lectures at the Korean Parliament. Heo specializes in European politics and International Relations and in her research focuses on actors in processes of reconciliation between countries.

The joint DIJ History and Humanities and Social Science Study Group is organized by Miki Aoyama-Olschina, Steffen Heinrich, Phoebe Holdgrün, Carola Hommerich, and Torsten Weber. All are welcome to attend, but prior registration ([weber@dijtokyo.org](mailto:weber@dijtokyo.org)) is greatly appreciated.

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