

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

DIJ History and Humanities Study Group



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Collective Subjectivity and Apology Under the Gaze of the 'International Community': A Lacanian Analysis of the Apology Issue in Japan-China Relations

The dispute over the memory of the wartime past and apology has become a political ritual in current Japan-China relations. Whilst previous literature in reconciliation mechanism provided abundant theory that explains why Japan's apology-making 'doesn't work', it tends to treat Japanese apologies in an instrumentalist manner. Therein exists a lack of appreciation for 1) the larger global and historical context and 2) the subjective dimension of Japan's apology-making. In fact, geographically speaking, collective apology-making has been a global phenomenon; historically speaking, this global phenomenon has been a relatively new one emerging since the 1990s. To untangle the geographical-historical (spatial-temporal) character of Japan's collective apology-making necessitates 'opening up' and 'tracing back' rather than 'focusing down' on those apology statements *per se*.

Informed by Lacanian-Zizekian theory of ideological fantasy, I ask how Japanese apologies offered to China were historically and ideologically conditioned. I contend that Japan's apology-making has been a part of a global trend in which collective groups become increasingly fantasised as speaking subjects with numerical identities rather than inhuman agents. Such a fantasy was grounded on the fetishised object of the 'international community'. For Japan in particular, what set in motion this fantasy of the 'international community' was the judgment of The International Military Tribunal for the Far East. Joseph Berry Keenan, the chief prosecutor in the Tokyo Trial, on May 3 1945, used the term 'Judgment of Civilisation (*bunmei no sabaki* 文明の裁き)' to encapsulate the essence of the Tokyo Trial. A close reading of Keenan's *Demand of Civilisation* (*bunmei no yōkyū*, 文明の要求), with reference to Japan's pre-war and post-war discourses on 'civilisation', reveals a revolutionary ideological transition that Japanese national subjectivity had undergone – that is, an ideological shift from a highly racialised discourse of 'civilisation' in the pre-war era to a new discourse of 'civilisation' conditioned by the gaze of a fantasised Other – the 'international community'. At the end of this paper, it will be argued that Japan's apology-making has been a result of this ideological shift.

Hai GUO is a PhD candidate in the Department of East Asian Studies, University of Leeds. He is now conducting fieldwork in Japan with sponsorship provided by the EAJS. His dissertation title is *Subjectivity and Discourse of War History: A Lacanian Analysis of the Sino-Japanese 'History Problem' Discourse (1982 – 2015)*.

The DIJ History and Humanities Study Group is organized by Miki Aoyama-Olschina and Torsten Weber. All are welcome to attend, but prior registration (weber@dijtokyo.org) is greatly appreciated.

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