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Collective Memory: Why Culture Matters

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On December 7, 2001, almost three months after the September 11 destruction of New York's Twin Towers, President George W. Bush marked the sixtieth anniversary of Pearl Harbor on the USS *Enterprise*, an aircraft carrier just returned from duty in the Afghanistan war. Television news gave Pearl Harbor unprecedented coverage, explaining its entrenchment in American memory. CBS commenator Bob Schieffer compared the Japanese assault with al-Qaeda's: "If we should forget what they did [at Pearl Harbor] we will risk forgetting what we can do. And only then will the terrorists win." Newspapers, magazines, and television journalists consulted experts to compare the two events. How did September 11, 2001, differ from December 7, 1941? What did the latter teach us about the former? After the Japanese American internments, would the government now protect Muslim citizens? Would September 11 occupy as large a place in American memory as December 7? Withal, commenators assumed that their viewers knew what American memory meant in the first place, a major assumption, for the Twin Towers calamity, meaning different things to so many different people, challenges rather than affirms any notion of a "collective" remembrance. How could that event mean the same thing to liberals and conservatives, blacks and whites, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the airline and bus industries, insurance companies and stockbrokers, automobile makers and the hotel industry? The term "collective memory" has become part of popular language, but its meaning is far from clear.

Since different individuals possess different beliefs about the past, some critics have denied the possibility of an authentically collective memory. Their protests raise more problems than they solve. If collective memory is dismissed, are we to deny collective opinion (public opinion), too? Since different people say different things with different accents, do we conclude that common language is a fiction? Yet, the problem of definition remains: What, precisely, does collective memory mean?

DEVELOPMENT OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY STUDIES

Collective memory is an umbrella term covering the *relations* between history and commemorative symbols on the one hand, and, on the other, individual beliefs, sentiments, and judgments of the past. (For detail, see Funkenstein, 1989; Olick and Robbins, 1998.) Thus conceived, collective memory does not mean “shared memory” or even interpretations on which most people agree; it means that individuals form beliefs about the past through interaction with others. When Americans were urged to “Remember Pearl Harbor” in 1942, most remembered where they were and what they were doing when they first heard about the attack over the radio or from another person. When Americans are urged to “Remember Pearl Harbor” in 2001, most remember what they have read in school, watched on television documentaries, or witnessed at the Hawaii shrines and memorials. The basic fact of collective memory is that different individuals and generations interpret and commemorate the same event differently.

French scholar Emile Durkheim, pioneered the research that made collective memory a science. In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1965), Durkheim demonstrated that periodic commemoration rites were the earliest means for keeping the past alive (414–33). Durkheim’s student Maurice Halbwachs made memory a sociological specialty covering a wide range of topics: in *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Memoire* (*The Social Frames of Memory*, 1975), he dealt with the social context of individual remembering and forgetting. *La Topographie Legendaire des Evangiles en Sainte-Terre* (*The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land*, 1941), a study of religious commemoration, concerned the sites of events connected with the life of Christ and the origin of Christianity. *The Collective Memory* (1980) contains Halbwachs’s theoretical essays, written during the late 1920s and 1930s, describing the relationship between “historical,” “collective,” and personal memory.

Before 1980, the year *Collective Memory* appeared in English, most American sociologists ignored Halbwachs. Lloyd Warner, the only American then addressing seriously the problem of collective memory (*The Living and the Dead*, 1959), did not even mention him. After 1980, however, Halbwachs was cited time and again, even though his two major books, *The Social Frames of Memory* and *The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land*, were available only in French. Therefore, Halbwachs’s discoveries could not have caused the great current of collective memory research that began in the 1980s and 1990s; they were swept into it.

The culture in which Halbwachs worked during the 1920s and 1930s provides important clues to both his interest in collective memory and the enthusiasm with which his colleagues read his work. The sociology of memory, as a branch of the sociology of knowledge (Mannheim, 1936, 1952), “takes on pertinence under a definite complex of social and cultural conditions in which shared orientations diminish and are overshadowed by incompatible differences, where one universe of discourse challenges all others and statements and truth claims are assessed in terms of the social interests of those who produced them.” (Merton, 1957: 459). Collective memory became part of sociology under such conditions – the years of disillusionment and cynicism between World Wars I and II – and has since lent itself mainly to the disparaging of the past. Because collective memory studies have the

best chance of development in circumstances marked by challenges to tradition, its "perspective can then be understood in terms of such phrases as 'seeing through,' 'looking behind,' very much as such phrases would be used in common speech – 'seeing through the game,' 'looking behind the scenes' – in other words, 'being up on all the tricks'" (Berger, 1963: 30). Collective memory scholarship plays a prominent role in the modern art of mistrust.

During the 1980s and 1990s, as sociology's debunking motif matured, collective memory studies became politicized and assimilated history and commemoration as objects of political struggle. This new "politics of memory" not only challenges flattering historical accounts but also emphasizes historical shortcomings. Three overlapping perspectives – multiculturalism, postmodernism, and cultural conflict – embody these tendencies.

Multiculturalism, an egalitarian ideology, emphasizes the virtues of "marginalized" peoples. Assuming that understandings of the past are determined by the dominant community's interests and sensibilities, multiculturalists conclude that conventional history necessarily marginalizes outsiders. The elevation of Abraham Lincoln, for example, is said to assert the supremacy of individual white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant males. Multicultural perspectives have led to a new and more inclusive "history from below" that attends to the experiences of ordinary people as well as prominent leaders. Relying on the doctrine of "multiple truths," multiculturalism asserts that every minority group is entitled to interpret the past as it pleases, independently of "Eurocentric" male concepts and proofs (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1973; Schlesinger, 1992; Taylor, 1994).

Postmodernism's entry into social science curricula (Rosenau, 1992) has also affected our understanding of collective memory. The "postmodern turn," occurring during the third quarter of the twentieth century (1950–75), altered American historical consciousness in many ways. Focusing on the "petit narratives" of minorities – African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, women, and homosexuals otherwise written out of the historical record – postmodern theory feeds the multicultural program and makes traditional understandings of the past appear wrongheaded and irrelevant. As Jean-François Lyotard (1984: xxiv, 14, 37) suggests, there can be no single grand narrative, only separate narratives of separate groups.

Conflict theorists, like multiculturalists and postmodernists, treat memory as a contested object of differently empowered communities, but their main concern is to know how the privileged produce historical images that induce subordinate classes to be content with their lot, and how the latter resist by asserting their own version of the past. Conflict theory takes two forms. In the radical theory of the politics of memory, historians and commemorative agents create a dominant ideology to manipulate the attitudes of their audience in the service of society's privileged strata (Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner, 1980; Gillis, 1994). The fascinating insights of the radical theory are to be found in many sources, including Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), which depicts commemoration being used as an instrument of social control (rich people controlling the poor) during Europe's democratic revolutions; Ana Maria Alonso (1988) on state histories performing a similar control function in authoritarian nations; John Bodnar (1992) on America's "official" and "vernacular" memory, which supports the interests of the elite and the masses respectively; Lyn Spillman's (1997) analyses of centennials

and bicentennials reflecting the changing distribution of power in America and Australia.

The second, more subtle, strand of the politics of memory literature works on two levels: on the first, societal, level, power is diffused rather than concentrated, and commemorative objects emerge out of a context of cross-cutting coalitions, networks, and enterprises rather than a ruling elite's interest in maintaining its privilege. In the fate of artistic and presidential reputations, Holocaust memories, place-naming and monument-making, and the organization of museums we find collective memory's reflecting and maintaining pluralistic networks of interest and power (Barthel, 1996; Fine, 1996, 2001; Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz, 1991). On the second, psychological, level, the politics of memory is animated by definite cognitive and affective dynamics. Eviatar Zerubavel (1992, 1993, 1998, 1997), for example, shows how "mnemonic communities" maintain "mnemonic traditions," teach new generations what to remember and forget through "mnemonic socialization," the monitoring of "mnemonic others," and the fighting of "mnemonic battles." Thus, remembering comes into view as a control system revealing not what *can* be remembered but dictating what *should* be remembered. Historical beginnings, endings, and periodizations are so conceived as to legitimate the state's regimes and policies, civil society's values, and individual identities.

PROVINCIAL TRUTHS

Multiculturalism, postmodernism, and conflict models have enriched collective memory scholarship, for much is at stake in the outcome of groups struggling among themselves over the meaning of the past. Debates over historically rooted affirmative action claims in the United States and Palestinians and Israelis fighting over the same land in the Middle East exemplify such struggles. Since different collectivities see the past according to their own interests and present experiences, perception of the past sustains and often intensifies social conflict.

As a research agenda, however, the politics of memory present many problems. Proponents believe that the past cannot be known because distortion is the rule of historical understanding, because historical accounts are always hostage to the conditions of the present rather than the preponderance of evidence. They over-emphasize oppressive actions, challenge the majority's monopolization of dignity and virtue but rarely investigate the merit of minority claims. They assume conflict is the natural state of society but fail to acknowledge, let alone understand, consensual understandings of the past. Strong liberal biases cause social scientists to be fact-oriented when addressing the "dominant" society's sins (Columbus's atrocities against Indians are taken for granted) and fact-averse when addressing the dominant society's virtues (facts about Henry Ford's accomplishments are not facts at all, but "constructions" designed to make us love capitalism). Rooted in a progressive strain of thought, such theories define the national past as a burden and seek to liberate the present from the grip of the past.

Behind these problems is the cultural and historical context in which the sociology of memory plays itself out. Collective memory study emerged after World War I as common values eroded and individuals became alienated from their institutions and traditions. "In a world of change, memory becomes complicated. Any revolution,

any rapid alteration of the givens of the present places a society's connection with its history under pressure" (Terdiman, 1993: 3). Conditions underlying the post-World War I memory crisis are similar to those of our own time: the weakening of the individual's connection to his or her society, the replacement of a traditional sense of continuity by a momentous "psychohistorical dislocation" (Lifton, 1993: 14-17) – the breaking of the bond that once linked men and women to vital symbols of their culture. This rupture of present and past leads Pierre Nora to assert, "Memory is constantly on our lips because it no longer exists" (1996: 1). Only the most provincial academic imagination would take Nora's claim seriously, but how do we retain the great insights of collective memory scholarship while avoiding its excesses? Since collective memory study was inspired in the West, established in the West, and practiced mainly in the West, its insights and excesses must be bound up with Western values.

LOOKING EAST

Culture's ethos and worldview require us to see the past as a force in its own right, as less a reflection of present meanings than a source of past meanings in the present. Culture's tone, character, life quality, mood, moral and aesthetic character define its "ethos." Peoples' ideas about who they are, their image of nature and their society, how the order of nature and society sustains itself, make up its "worldview" (Geertz, 1973: 126-7). That commemoration is an important part of culture's ethos; history, a key aspect of its worldview, became apparent to one of the authors when he collaborated in a study of the Chinese communist regime's representation of Confucius before, during, and after its 1966-76 Cultural Revolution.

Tendencies to distort the past occur when a regime's legitimacy or a nation's pride is at stake, but the past of many cultures is too authoritative to be distorted. The Chinese people's reverence for Confucius has varied across generations, but they have never felt free to reconstitute his life and teachings. This does not imply that they agree totally on what his life and teachings mean. How much emphasis to place on Confucius's defense of slavery or on certain statements that acknowledge materialism, what he had in mind in advocating universal education, whether his conception of ethics is consistent with contemporary mores – these questions have always been subject to debate. That Confucius stood for order, hierarchy, and tradition has always been beyond debate. To recognize that each generation has reevaluated Confucius, assigned him more or less prestige, is not to say that it has "reconstructed" him. Confucius's image varies because the Chinese people have "critically inherited" it, consciously embracing some parts, consciously rejecting others (Zhang and Schwartz, 1997).

Heroes emerging in a tradition-weak society, like America, are susceptible to reconstruction, while Confucius, emerging in a tradition-steeped society, resists reconstruction. For reconstruction of the past to occur, moral sentiments must be pliable and open to change. "If they were too strong, they would no longer be plastic. Every pattern is an obstacle to new patterns, to the extent that the first pattern is inflexible" (Durkheim, 1950: 69). Asian consciousness is not totally inflexible, but it is stable, and by comparing it to our own, we gain knowledge of the conditions attaching the individual to his or her nation's history.

JAPAN AND AMERICA

Differences between Western and Eastern consciousness are evident in many places, especially where feelings aroused by the past are crucial factors in the management of international relations. Many of these feelings stem from the pivotal event of the twentieth century – World War II. Since we live today in the shadow of this war, national experiences of atrocity and suffering show up in national self-conceptions. Many things written about the war have provoked recriminations, regret and repentance, ambivalence, and indifference, but they are important for what they tell us about practical affairs among nations and about what we need to know to improve the present body of knowledge on culture and memory.

Given the most visible aspect of war memory, the recent wave of official apologies offered by former aggressor states and institutions to surviving victims and representatives (Trouillot, 2000), Kazuya Fukuoka, Sachiko Takita-Ishii, and I (Barry Schwartz) administered questionnaires and conducted interviews in one American and two Japanese universities between January 1998 and August 2001. We asked more than 1,500 students in these two countries to identify historical events of which they were most ashamed and most proud and to explain their choices. We also asked students to indicate whether they considered themselves and/or their generations morally responsible for the historical offenses of their forebears. To distinguish cultural preferences in judging offenses from the seriousness of the offenses themselves, we asked respondents in each country whether they considered young adults in the *other* country responsible for their nation's wrongdoing.

Findings from China, Korea, Germany, and the United States (Zhang and Schwartz, 1997; Schwartz and Kim, 2001; Schwartz and Heinrich, 2004) show us how powerfully the Western ethos of dignity, which celebrates individual rights, and the Eastern ethos of honor, which celebrates individual obligations to family, community and nation, affect historical consciousness. American and Japanese university students do not and cannot represent America's and Japan's cultures, but our data is defensible in one respect: the *difference* between American and Japanese students' judgments of the past approximates the *difference* between judgments of all American and Japanese adults.

Judging the past

When American students were asked to name the "three events in American history of which you do not merely disapprove but which, in your opinion, degrade the United States and arouse in you as a citizen (rather than private individual) a sense of dishonor, disgrace, shame, and/or remorse," 41 percent mentioned slavery; 34 percent named the Vietnam War; 32 percent, offenses against American Indians. The next four most commonly mentioned events, named by less than 18 percent of the respondents, were segregation, Civil War events, internment of Japanese-Americans, and the use of the atomic bomb.

The events condemned by Americans are widespread historically. Three of the eight events displayed in table 16.1 – slavery, treatment of Indians, and the Civil War – occurred in the nineteenth century; one event, segregation, endured throughout the twentieth century; another event, the use of the atomic bomb, occurred in the mid

Table 16.1 Frequently named sources of “dishonor, disgrace, shame” in American history (n = 1,109)

<i>Event</i>	<i>Percentage of respondents naming</i>
Slavery	41.2
Vietnam War	34.0
Treatment of Indians	32.1
Segregation	17.4
Civil War	12.7
Internment of Japanese-Americans	11.9
Atomic Bomb	9.1
Watergate	7.3

twentieth century; all other events, in the late twentieth century. To this broad range of events corresponds a broad range of victim communities, from African-Americans, Indians, Hispanics, and Japanese-Americans to citizens of Vietnam and Japan.

The events embodying Japan’s sense of historical shame are more concentrated in time (table 16.2). The three events students mentioned most frequently were part of World War II, namely, military aggression against China and Korea (War in Asia, 54%) and the “Pacific War” against the United States (Pacific War/World War II, 25%). In all, more than half the respondents named events occurring between the early 1930s and 1945 – a period of less than 15 years. American and Japanese students are similar, however, in their regret over their nations’ use of power. Both define shameful acts in terms of unjust violence and exploitation.

Table 16.2 Frequently named sources of “dishonor, disgrace, shame” in Japanese history (n = 423)

<i>Event</i>	<i>Percentage of respondents naming</i>
Japan’s War in Asia[a]	54.4
Pacific War / World War II[b]	24.6
Politics/politicians[c]	10.9
Domestic Discrimination (Koreans in Japan)	5.7
War in General	4.7
AUM Shinrikyo Cult	4.7
Japanese Foreign Policies	4.5
Hideyoshi’s Korean Invasions (16th century)	4.3
Teen Crime	2.1

^a *Japan’s War in Asia* includes responses such as War in Asia (in general), Korean Annexation and Occupation (1910–45), Manchuria Incident, Sino-Japanese War (1931–45), Comfort Women Issue, Nanjing Incident/Massacre (1937), Unit 731 in China, and Twenty-One Demands Against China (1915).

^b *Pacific War* includes responses such as War Against the US and Pearl Harbor Attack.

^c *Politics/Politicians* responses concern politics in general (including controversy involving former Prime Minister Mori).

The difference between American and Japanese students' identification with their nation's past offenses is remarkable. Nine percent of Georgia students agreed with both forms of the statement "My generation is [or I personally feel] morally responsible for the enslavement of tens of millions of black people over more than one hundred and fifty years." Nine percent agreed with the statement "My generation is [or I personally feel] morally responsible for the forced internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II." When asked about moral responsibility for the "killing, forced expulsion, and other maltreatment of millions of Indians," the percentage agreeing was 11 percent.

American students were more lenient when asked about Japan's young people's responsibility: 5 percent agreed with the statement asserting that Japanese young people are responsible for their nation's past wrongdoing. That Americans' attitudes are general rather than specific to the Japanese is shown in their response to the statement that German young people are responsible for the Holocaust (not shown in table 16.3): 3 percent agreed.

Americans and Japanese differ most on the matter of moral responsibility (table 16.4). No less than 42 percent of Japanese agreed with the statement "My generation [or I personally feel] morally responsible for the Korean Annexation and rule (1910–1945)." Forty-two percent also agreed with the statement "My generation [or I personally feel] morally responsible for the so-called Nanking Incident" (1937

Table 16.3 Sense of moral responsibility for national misdeeds (United States)

- (1) My generation is [or I personally feel] morally responsible for the enslavement of tens of millions of black people over more than one hundred and fifty years.
- (2) My generation is [or I personally feel] morally responsible for the killing, forced expulsion, and other maltreatment of millions of Indians.
- (3) My generation is [or I personally feel] morally responsible for the internment of Japanese-American men, women, and children in prison camps during World War II.
- (4) I believe the present generation of Japanese [or Japanese young people] is morally responsible for Japan's war crimes against Chinese and Korean civilians during World War II.

	(1) <i>Enslavement of black people (n = 383)</i>	(2) <i>Maltreatment of Indians (n = 383)</i>	(3) <i>Internment of Japanese- Americans (n = 382)</i>	(4) <i>Japanese younger generation's responsibility (n = 106)</i>
	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Strongly Disagree	59.3	53.8	54.8	54.7
Disagree	19.2	20.9	23.6	21.7
Somewhat Disagree	7.0	9.1	8.6	9.4
Neutral	5.2	5.0	3.9	9.4
Somewhat Agree	3.6	6.0	3.9	2.8
Agree	3.6	2.1	2.6	1.0
Strongly Agree	2.1	3.1	2.6	1.0

Table 16.4 Sense of moral responsibility for national misdeeds (Japan)^a

- (1) My generation is [or I personally feel] morally responsible for the Korean annexation and rule (1910–1945).
 (2) My generation is [or I personally feel] morally responsible for the so-called Nanking incident (1937).
 (3) My generation is [or I personally feel] morally responsible for the so-called Comfort Women issue during the War years.
 (4) I believe that American young people are morally responsible today for the enslavement of tens of millions of black people over more than one hundred and fifty years.
 (5) I believe the present generation of Germans is morally responsible for the Holocaust – Nazi Germany's murder of six million Jews during the War II.

	(1) Korean annexation and rule (n = 318)	(2) Nanking incident (n = 430)	(3) Comfort women issue (n = 481)	(4) American younger generation's responsibility (n = 315)	(5) German younger generation's responsibility (n = 310)
	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	14.1	12.7	13.3	8.3	15.8
Disagree	15.0	15.1	12.5	9.5	15.2
Somewhat Disagree	11.9	12.3	11.9	9.8	16.1
Neutral	15.4	15.5	17.7	17.1	18.4
Somewhat Agree	21.0	20.2	18.7	21.6	14.5
Agree	14.7	14.1	13.7	18.4	9.7
Strongly Agree	6.6	8.1	9.6	11.1	6.1
No Response	0.9	1.6	2.7	4.1	4.2

^a Question wording ("My generation is [or I personally feel] morally responsible") produces no significant difference in responses.

massacre of civilians by the Japanese army). For the so-called "Comfort Woman" practice (inducting Korean women, then colonial subjects, as sex slaves during the war years), the same percentage, 42 percent, accepted moral responsibility. Japanese students also ascribed more responsibility to Americans than Americans ascribed to them: 50 percent judged American young people to be morally accountable for slavery. Interestingly, only 30 percent judged German young people to be morally responsible for World War II atrocities.

The relationship between historical writings and moral responsibility in Japan is opposite to that in the United States. The Japanese government and its textbook writers are committed to a policy of silence about the atrocities of World War II (Hashimoto, 1999), but Japanese students know about these events and feel connected to them. In contrast, American textbooks describe past transgressions in detail and American institutions routinely apologize for them; yet, American students reading these textbooks and hearing these apologies feel no relationship to the events they describe. The reasons for this difference are evident in the way Americans and Japanese explain their responses.

After eliciting responses to closed questions about individual and generational responsibility for slavery, we asked a block of University of Georgia students to explain why they accept or deny responsibility. We repeated the question by randomly substituting oppression of Native Americans and internment of Japanese Americans. We did the same in Japan after students had responded to closed questions about the Annexation of Korea, Nanking and Comfort Women.

Individuals giving the simplest response in the denial category emphasized that they could have had no connection let alone be morally responsible for any event that occurred before their birth. Among all students responding to this question, 30 percent of Americans compared to 28 percent of Japanese gave this answer (see table 16.5). Forty-two percent of Americans gave the second group of reasons, recognizing that a wrong had occurred and sometimes identifying the offender and blaming him, but insisting such blame could not extend to themselves. Only 9 percent of the Japanese students offered this reason. Some individuals, while denying responsibility, not only recognized the occurrence of a wrong but also declared their wish to learn from it, to make certain that past failures are not repeated, to abolish harmful mindsets, or even to make amends in the form of material reparations. Six percent of these respondents were Japanese, while 18 percent were American.

The second category of respondents, located in Table 5's last row, includes those who hold themselves morally responsible for their forebears' crimes. Individuals giving this response feel they must learn from the past, prevent recurrences of past offenses, and oppose residual racism not *despite* their lack of participation but *because* they identify themselves and their generation with that historical era in which the offenses occurred. Fifty-seven percent of the Japanese students accepted responsibility for these reasons compared to 9 percent of the American students.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY AS A CULTURAL SYSTEM

Before we can ascribe to culture the differences between Japanese and American orientations toward the past, we must consider both the quality of the events to which they are responding and the time they occurred. During the second quarter of

Table 16.5 Reasons for denial or acceptance of moral responsibility for past wrongs

	<i>American respondents assess own responsibility (n = 87)</i>	<i>American respondents assess German and Japanese responsibility (n = 162)</i>	<i>Japanese respondents assess own responsibility (n = 240)</i>
	<i>Percentages</i>		
1. Respondent (or subject) not born at the time of offense. Not morally responsible.	29.9	54.9	28.0
2. Respondent recognizes (or subject should recognize) the gravity of the offense and condemns its perpetrators, but is not morally responsible for it.	42.5	24.1	8.9
3. Respondent feels (or subject should feel) obligation to address present wrongs and to prevent reoccurrence of past wrongs, but is not morally responsible for past wrongs in which he or she had no part.	18.4	17.3	5.9
4. Respondent feels (or subject should feel) obligation to redress present wrongs, prevent reoccurrence of past wrongs because he or she is morally responsible for them.	9.2	3.7	57.2

the twentieth century, the Japanese government conducted war and persecutions that led to the death of many millions of people, mostly civilians. Throughout the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth centuries, American slaveholders protected, even insured, their bondsman's lives; yet, they also valued and insured the lives of their animals. The number of human beings enslaved at a given period of time never exceeded four million, but far more than a hundred million were captive during the slavery era. On the other hand, slavery ended long ago while Japanese atrocities exist in living memory, still part of many "family secrets."

The timing of slavery and atrocity goes some way in explaining why Americans are less inclined than Japanese to accept responsibility for past wrongs, but it does not go far enough. Not only have Americans enslaved generations; their regret, as our data show, is no more or less intense than their regret over the internment of Japanese Americans in the 1940s. Recency and objective harm done by Americans and Japanese cannot account for the vast differences in their feelings about the people they have offended.

The imagery of World War II and slavery differ. Japanese atrocities are relatively recent, while graphic films of mass murder, photos of living skeletons in prisoner of war camps, are unparalleled in the representations of slavery. However, if the harm of slavery and the oppression of minorities seem less serious to Americans than Japan's atrocities against China and Korea, and if this difference affects ideas about moral responsibility, then American students would attribute less responsibility to themselves for minority oppression than they attribute to Japan for naked slaughter. In fact, Americans' assessment of their own and Japan's and Germany's responsibility is similar (table 16.2); therefore, cultural differences rather than unequal gravity of past wrongs must explain their different perceptions.

Cultures identify with the past in different ways. Eviatar Zerubavel (1997) introduced the term "sociobiographical memory" to refer to the fusion of one's personal past with the history of one's society. Sociobiographical memory can explain the shame we feel about historical events only if we experience history as part of our own lives. The disposition to deemphasize the past and segment it from the present is more characteristic of American than Japanese culture (Kluckhohn, 1951). "We live in a society that encourages us to cut free from the past, to define our own selves," Robert Bellah observes (1985: 154). To define ourselves and choose the groups with which we wish to identify is to define our own memories and to choose our own traditions; yet, if memories and traditions can be deliberately chosen, they can be readily abandoned.

Independence and self-determination have always been distinctive features of American culture. Alexis de Tocqueville noted in 1832 that Americans, free of the stultifying interdependencies of late-feudal Europe, have convinced themselves of their own self-sufficiency and have "acquired the habit of always considering themselves standing alone. . . . [N]ot only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart" (1945: 105–6).

The contrast with Japan's ethos could not be greater. In Japan, "[v]irtuous men do not say, as they do in America, that they owe nothing to any man. They do not discount the past. Righteousness in Japan depends upon recognition of one's place in the great network of mutual indebtedness that embraces both one's forebears and one's contemporaries" (Benedict, 1946: 98–9). Much of what Westerners call ancestor worship exemplifies this profound sense of debt, but the obligation involves neither true worship nor attitudes toward one's ancestors; it is an "avowal of man's, indebtedness to all that has gone before" (98).

By "indebtedness to all that has gone before" Benedict is referring to Japanese gratitude for past benefits received, but what of *debts* transferred to generations unborn when they were incurred? Americans, from the eighteenth century to present, have refused to honor such debts. Thomas Jefferson believed it to be "self-evident that the earth belongs in usufruct to the living: that the dead have neither powers nor rights over it. . . . By the law of nature, one generation is to another as one *independent* nation is to another" (1975: 443; emphasis added). The Japanese, in contrast, cannot conceive themselves as being independent of the past, and this feeling enhances their shame for past wrongs.

Japanese people experience shame and guilt under different circumstances, but morality's burden, as Benedict noted, falls on the former. Japan's is a shame culture,

and “[s]hame is a reaction to other people’s criticism.” Where shame is society’s major sanction, men and women experience no relief when they make their fault public. “So long as his bad behavior does not ‘get out into the world’ he need not be troubled and confession appears to him merely a way of courting trouble” (1946: 223). No wonder that the massacre at Nanking and impressment of Korean “comfort women” are more frequently named as sources of shame than military aggression leading to a Pacific war and the maltreatment of British and American prisoners. Since China and Korea criticize Japan more often and more loudly than do Great Britain and the United States, the suffering of previous Chinese and Korean generations has become an enduring presence among the Japanese people.

CULTURES OF MEMORY: RESIDUAL, DOMINANT, AND EMERGENT

Japanese and American memories differ, but they cannot be explained by separate theories – one theory for American memory, another for Japanese memory, and yet another for German and for Korean memory. There can be only one theory that explains different modes of history, commemoration, and belief in terms of common principles. One such principle is plain to see in both the United States and Japan: detraditionalization coexisting with tradition-maintenance (Heelas, Lash, and Morris, 1996). Tradition-maintenance is conspicuous in Japan; detraditionalization, in America; yet, the *rate* of detraditionalization is faster in Japan while tradition-maintenance, precisely because it goes against the grain of the culture, is more conspicuous in America.

The relation between tradition’s permanence and erosion is complex. “A nation,” according to Ernest Renan, “is a soul, a spiritual principle. Only two things, actually, constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. . . . One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of remembrances; the other is the actual consent, the desire to live together, the will to continue to value the heritage which all hold in common” (Renan, 1947, 1: 903). In Japan, these memories are losing relevance, while Americans cultivate nationalism without identifying closely with their forebears. Individuals who fail to identify with their nation’s past cannot feel obligated for its wrongs, but those who identify closely with their nation’s past seek to excuse or justify them (Doosje et al., 1998). Only in the middle range, where identification is strong but not total, do individuals feel responsibility for their conduct. American culture is located closest to the first extreme, where identification with the past is minimal; Japan is located closest to the middle, where identification with the past, although presently eroding, is strong relative to America’s. The Japanese people’s weakening attachment to previous generations has the effect of strengthening their recognition of past wrongs.

Recognizing differences in degree is vital to understanding culture and memory. Diminished rather than lost engagement with the past distinguishes the United States from Japan. The adjective “diminished” must be underscored, for “diminishings” are more difficult to describe and comprehend than disappearances. In the United States, collective memories evoke a “residual” pattern of reverence, a “dominant” pattern of affectively neutral admiration and weak attachment, and an “emergent” pattern of indifference and even hostility. The relationship among these patterns is ironic. The residual pattern is exemplified by Americans’ continuing recognition of

national heroes, including George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin Roosevelt, and history-changing events, like the attacks on Bunker Hill, Fort Sumpter, and Pearl Harbor. These exist at the preconscious level – rarely contemplated but latent in the mind of the individual and available for mobilization in the case of crisis. The residual pattern “has been effectively formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present” (Williams, 1977: 122).

Residual patterns of belief often reflect deliberate efforts to renew ties to a past that emergent (multicultural, postmodern, antihegemonic) trends challenge; yet, the latter are sustained by established residual patterns. Millions of American viewers, for example, watch film dramas and television documentaries about slave life, debate the merits of reparations for slaves’ descendants, and read about slavery – a topic that has engaged the public more during the last several years of the twentieth century than ever before. Debates over Thomas Jefferson’s fathering children with his slave Sally Heming, the films *Amistad* and *Beloved* celebrating the spirit of freedom; *The Wind Done Gone* satirizing *Gone With the Wind*, newspapers apologizing for accepting advertisements for runaway slaves, insurance companies apologizing for insuring them, the making into a national shrine of Anderson Cottage, where Lincoln drafted the Emancipation Proclamation, the revelation that slaves helped build the US Capitol Building, the making of slavery exhibits in museums throughout the country, news about contemporary slavery in Africa and elsewhere – all these events have heightened interest in America’s slavery heritage. True, Americans do not hold themselves responsible for slavery, but they have not forgotten it. There has always existed alongside racism in America a powerful tradition of antislavery sentiment, from the Founding Fathers, who used the Exodus as a metaphor for their struggle against Great Britain, through popular literature, most notably *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, to the celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation at the peak of the Jim Crow era. In our own day, the antislavery tradition is reflected in American university students ranking slavery as the nation’s primary sin.

Just as we can see residual elements still alive in American memory, we can see emergent elements in Japanese memory. Recent displays of national symbols, as Otsuka points out, do not necessarily imply nationalistic feeling: “Simply, when they sing the Japanese national anthem, *kimigayo*, in the stadium, they do not seem to bear in their mind pre-War Japanese history, the Okinawa issue, or even the prosperity that the anthem was meant to symbolize” (Otsuka, 1999: 384; see also Schuman, Akiyama, and Knäuper, 1998). Otsuka’s observations prompt us to ask what Western scholars, including Maruice Halbwachs, would have written if they had been born and reared in Asia. This question is difficult to answer because Asian intellectuals have borrowed so heavily from the West.

At the core of Japan’s emerging postmodernism is the emperor’s diminishing presence in the public imagination:

The Japanese imperial household is becoming less and less a site of contested memories, a place where people might critically reflect upon the meaning of their recent history and its relevance to contemporary political issues. Nor is the locus of an authentic aura to be found in the imperial household of modern Japan. Instead, the emperor and other members of the imperial household have gained a kind of fake aura in their

transformation into simply other commodities, to be consumed. As Benjamin put it about movie stars, like "any article produced in a factory." (Fujitani, 1992: 847)

When Fujitani describes the members of the imperial family, he refers to their "fake aura," their having become "commodities, to be consumed" and to "contested memories." Citing Walter Benjamin in particular, Fujitani makes the emperor and family seem almost as American as the president and his family.

"Almost," however, refers to a big gap. Newspapers, television programming, and textbooks tell us what communication and academic elites believe about the past; they do not necessarily tell us what ordinary people believe, or how they feel about what they believe. Having demonstrated the magnitude of this discrepancy in both Japan and the United States, we must hesitate before importing theories from one part of the world and applying them to another. We must be cautious about Japanese scholars projecting their own Eastern beliefs upon a changing but still tradition-directed Westernized society.

CONCLUSION

Western theories of culture are predicated on the rupture of historical continuity. Culture is self-healing, however, because the individual needs categories that only culture can provide – rules, standards of judgment, and behavioral programs acquired from moral communities of the past. No society could provide these anchor points if its temporal rupture were total (Shils, 1981: 326–7). Western elites' assertion that the lives of their countrymen are rootless and pointless is contestable at best.

That people fail to sense past realities in themselves can only mean they no longer identify with the institutions embodying history. The more Americans look at Asia, however, the more they see the residual part of themselves and the more plausible they find the theories describing it. The premise of all collective memory research is that we remember the past as members of society, that as the structures and values of society change, different parts of the past gain and lose relevance. To say that successive generations see the same past differently, however, does not mean that successive generations create the past anew. If one examined a 1930 editorial about Abraham Lincoln in a library microfilm collection, one would have no trouble identifying it as an editorial about the Lincoln everyone knows today. Aside from new emphases and, less frequently, new facts, therefore, most of what we know about the past is inherited from previous generations. The authority of the past has eroded, but an adamant core of memory remains on which we depend for meaning, inspiration, and moral authority (Schwartz, 1998).

When Abraham Lincoln drafted the opening line of his Gettysburg Address ("Four-score and seven years ago" – the year of the Declaration of Independence and birth of the American nation) he declared that the Civil War was a continuation of the American Revolution. That continuity made meaningful an embattled people's sacrifice and grief. So today, we see the attack on the Twin Towers and death of 3,000 people acquiring meaning within the framework of Pearl Harbor. "Something like this has happened before," we say to ourselves, and the way we then apprehend it provides a pattern for reacting to the present disaster. In Michael Schudson's words, "People... seek information to arrive at a view. They seek to

know what is right, what is true. They seek some kind of direction when they are aimless. They seek in the past some kind of anchor when they are adrift. They seek a source of inspiration when they despair" (1992: 213).

The past is a guide for the present because it is less mutable than we have been led to believe. Living memory, witnesses, corroborating testimonies, the heritage and history industries, insider accounts, and unforgettable trauma limit the past's susceptibility to revision – mainly in democratic societies but to some degree everywhere (Schudson, 1989; see also Schwartz, 1991, 2000). Collective memory, like all cultural systems, remains what it has always been: a pattern of "inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz, 1973: 89). This is why Pearl Harbor's relevance rose after September 11, for no past event better articulated the trauma and meaning of sudden, massive death at the hands of an enemy. Pearl Harbor is part of the floor below which American memory cannot fall.

In America, no less than Japan, the past is more than a mirror reflecting present needs and concerns: it is a lamp elucidating our intentions, moods, and actions. The orienting power of collective memory is affirmed in Heilman's ethnography of faithful Jews invoking the past as a means of reforming and completing ("traditionalizing") the present (1982: 62–3), Bellah's writing on "communities of memory" (1985), Lowenthal on the past as a source of identity, guidance, and enrichment (1994), Rusen on traditional memories as "indispensable elements of orientation" in historical consciousness (1989: 44), Schuman and Rieger's (1992) research on the uses of past wars (Vietnam and World War II) as historical analogies to sustain support for or opposition to the Gulf War, Olick's (1999) treatment of commemoration having a tradition-sustaining history of its own, and Schwartz and Kim's (2001) analysis of Korean history's most shameful events shaping individual identity.

Individuals everywhere rely on culture to sustain their perception of the past, but cultures are everywhere different. In Japan, more clearly than in the United States, collective memory is a *program* defining its present values and goals and a *frame* organizing and assessing the moral significance of present experience (Schwartz, 2000). Since all societies possess so much in common, the Japanese case can reveal aspects of collective memory that are present but opaque in the individualistic West, just as the American case can reveal what is present but opaque in the communitarian East. Considered together, Japan and the United States teach us about a wide range of experience and memory, showing why present understandings of collective memory, derived from mainly Western societies, are so inadequate.

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