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# Apology in Japanese Foreign Policy: Why an Apology Is Made by a State Leader

TAKASHIMA, Asako

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## 1. Introduction

In last three decades, the history problem became an issue for foreign policy in East Asia. As public apologies by Prime Ministers increased since 1990, the words “apology” and “historical problem” started to be widely reported at the same time<sup>1)</sup>. These trends in East Asia have received wide spread attention in the world and have often been compared to that of Europe<sup>2)</sup>.

As the history problem became an issue for foreign policy, the issue started to be targeted academically. In these studies, the relationship between Germany and France has been referred to as a “succeeded example,” while the relationship

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- 1) The word “apology” in connection with World War II increased from three times in the 1970s and 25 times in the 1980s to 77 times in the 1990s. (It subsequently declined to 39 in the 2000s and 1 in the 2010s.) On the other hand, “historical awareness” increased from 3 times in the 1970s and 36 times in the 1980s to 622 times in the 1990s, 942 times in the 2000s, and 962 times in the 2010s. *Yomidasu Rekishikan* (Yomiuri Database Service), (<https://database.yomiuri.co.jp/rekishikan/>).
  - 2) Washington Post, “Germany won respect by addressing its World War II crimes. Japan, not so much.”, August 13, 2015. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/08/13/germany-won-respect-by-addressing-its-world-war-ii-crimes-japan-not-so-much/>) (accessed on December 25, 2022)

between Japan and China or South Korea is named as a “failed example” (Lind, 2008; Berger, 2012; Hall, 2015). These studies focus on apology by a State to reconcile with other countries.

There are also plenty studies in Social Psychology which shed lights on conditions in successful apologies in foreign policy (Blatz, 2014; Gibney et al., 2007; Okimoto et al., 2015). It seems convincing that apology matters in reconciliation and some apologies are effective<sup>3)</sup>. However, it is not crystal clear why a state leader apologize even though it might fail to reconcile with other countries. On the contrary, some apologies by a state leader could gain severe “backlash” by his own society (Lind, 2008; Hall, 2015). To answer this question, I shed light on partisanship and ideology of the government and strategy of the regime in Japan. By doing so, I will identify the occasion that gave rise to the apology.

## 2. Theory and Hypothesis

### 2.1 Apology in Foreign Policy

Many studies which countries' history problems have laid focus on the concept of apology. Lind (2008) compares Japan and Germany, and analyzes that “apologetic” remembrance determines reconciliation. Similarly, Berger (2012) makes it clear that “narrative” is the essence of apology<sup>4)</sup>. Both studies point to how a government and society narrate the history of their own country as the determinant of reconciliation, and both concluded that the Japanese government and society could not make an apologetic narrative to reconcile,

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3) See Blatz, C. W., Day, M. V., & Schryer, E. Official public apology effects on victim group members' evaluations of the perpetrator group. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science / Revue canadienne des sciences du comportement*, 46(3) (2014), pp. 337–345; Gibney, M., Howard-Hassmann, R.E., Coicaud, J. -M., & Steiner, N. (Eds.). *The age of apology: Facing up to the past*. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Okimoto, T. G., M. Wenzel, and M. J. Hornsey. Apologies demanded yet devalued: Normative dilution in the age of apology. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 60 (2015), pp. 133–136.

4) Jennifer Lind, *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics* (Cornell University Press, 2008); Thomas U. Berger, *War, Guilt, and World Politics after World War II* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

compared to Germany, who successfully managed to do so.

On the other hand, Feldman (2012) analyzes Germany's case, and shows that there were steps in reconciliation between Germany and foreign countries. She points that history, leadership, institutions and international contexts are the variables for reconciliation<sup>5)</sup>. For example, she concludes that the reconciliation between Germany and France was much smoother than that between Germany and the Czech Republic.

Takashima (2017) shows how apologetic narratives emerged in Japan and Germany from the point of view of international politics and leadership<sup>6)</sup>. These two dimensions are important, because (1) there should be an incentive to have an apologetic narrative, however, even if there is an incentive, the apologetic narrative of the government sometimes clashes against that of society. Therefore, (2) leadership is important to converge narratives of government and society. Hall (2015) brings emotion into International Relations and also shows that politics always precedes society in terms of showing the emotion of guilt<sup>7)</sup>.

## 2.2 Narratives in Apology- International Relations and Social Psychology

Many studies in International Relations point to how apologies are key to reconciliation, but it is not clear how and how deep one should apologize to reconcile with neighboring countries. This invites the question; how can one determine some narratives as "apologetic" and others as un-apologetic? Lind defines that "most apologetic remembrance is that which thoroughly addresses both admission and remorse<sup>8)</sup>." Tsutsui (2009) further classifies seven stages of apology: denial, justification, evasion, projection, displacement, remorse, and

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5) Lily G. Feldman, *Germany's Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

6) Takashima Asako, "Shazai no Keisei: Dainiji Taisen Go no Nihon to Doitsu wo Hikaku shite" (Forming of Apology: Comparative Studies of Japan and Germany after World War II), *Kokusai Seiji*, 187 (2017), pp. 114-130.

7) Hall, Todd H. *Emotional diplomacy: official emotion on the international stage* (Cornell University Press, 2015).

8) Lind, *op cit.*, p.16.

universalism<sup>9)</sup>. There are also plenty of studies in Social Psychology which focus on finding conditions that successful apologies contain (Blatz, 2014; Gibney et al., 2007; Okimoto et al., 2015).

However, as an apology is an interaction between two actors, it is possible that an apology will not be recognized as an apology by the country receiving it. Although Tsutsui makes it clear that Japanese society's apology became deeper from 1945 to 2004, according to Lind and Berger, the Japanese apology did not succeed. Similarly, Hall demonstrates that the emotion in diplomacy can be misunderstood by the counterpart<sup>10)</sup>.

An apology which is accepted by an apologized country can be different according to situations. If the country being apologized to needs reconciliation, it is possible to reconcile with a lower level of apology. On the other hand, if the apologized country does not need reconciliation, it is possible for the country to not be satisfied even with a higher level of apology. In this situation, the question should not be which apology is more apologetic or not, but why an apologizing country would make an apology even when it may not be accepted. Does a country make an apology even if it has no merit? Should it only be explained by morality or ethics? To answer these questions, this paper will shed light on how the Japanese government apologized to other countries from the viewpoint of political narrative.

First, in section three, I will analyze the Japanese Prime Ministers' annual greetings, which are made every 15th August on the Japanese anniversary of the end of the WWII. The change of narratives in these greetings will show whether there was an apology or not. I will also analyze the Prime Ministers' talks which are presented around 15th August regarding the anniversary of the end of the War.

Tracing differences in narratives and the frequencies of talks can tell us which administration was more active for apologizing, and which was not. This will further allow us to understand why an apology is made. In section four, I

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9) Kiyoteru Tsutsui, "The Trajectory of Perpetrators' Trauma: Mnemonic Politics around the Asia-Pacific War in Japan," *Social Forces*, 87(3) (2009), pp.1389–1422.

10) Hall, *op cit.*, pp. 6–7.

will analyze the Abe administration and its narratives in apology, because it will be clear in section three that Prime Minister Abe Shinzo changed the narratives in annual greetings on 15th August. Detailed analysis of the Abe administration, which is seen as inactive to apologize, can tell us why an apology is made or not.

### 3. Apology by Prime Minister

#### 3.1 Greeting in Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead

There are two sources from which to analyze Japanese Prime Ministers' statements about the responsibility of WWII. The first is the greeting in the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead (*Zenkoku Senbotsusha Tsuitou Shiki*). The Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead was first held on 2nd May 1952 by the government in Shinjuku<sup>11)</sup>. This ceremony was influenced by the campaign of the Japan War-Bereaved Welfare Federation (*Nippon Izoku Kousei Renmei*), which was formed in 1947. The federation later formed another foundation and changed the name into Japan War-Bereaved Families Association (*Nippon Izokukai*, hence forth referred to as "*Izokukai*"), which aims to help families of the war -bereaved economically and emotionally.

The Memorial Ceremony was not annual at first, and the date and place were different every year. In 1982, it was decided by the cabinet that the Memorial Ceremony would be held on 15th August every year in *Nippon Budokan*<sup>12)</sup> (Martial Arts Hall) and the Prime Minister, the Emperor and the Empress would attend<sup>13)</sup>. By this time, *Izokukai* had established a deep connection with the Ministry of Health and Welfare (*Kouseishou*), particularly with regards to the pension and subcontracting of collecting ashes of War Dead<sup>14)</sup>. *Kouseishou* is responsible for the clerical work of the ceremony. *Izokukai* also identified deeply with the Liberal Democratic Party, and all presidents since

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11) *Nippon Izokukai* (Japan War-Bereaved Families Association) homepage, "Nippon Izokukai ni tsuite" (about Japan War-Bereaved Families Association) (<http://www.nippon-izokukai.jp/category/japanese/>) (accessed on December 25, 2022)

12) The building was first build for the competition of Judo for Tokyo Olympics in 1964.

13) Other politicians also attend on the ceremony, for instance, Speaker of House of Representatives.

the third president, Yasui Seiichiro, have been politicians of the Liberal Democratic Party.

The events that take place during the Memorial Ceremony are as follows: After the Emperor and Empress enter the venue, the ceremony is proceeded by the singing of the national anthem, a greeting from the Prime Minister, a silent prayer, a speech by the Emperor and the offering of flowers to the war dead by politicians who attend. The most important part of the ceremony is a one minute silent prayer from 12:00, and the greeting of the Prime Minister is right before this prayer<sup>15)</sup>. Since the first ceremony at the *Budokan* in 1982 until 1993, the greeting was mainly about mourning the more than 3 million war dead, as well as wishing the world eternal peace<sup>16)</sup> (“*Kokyu Heiwa*”).

On 9th August 1993, the first non Liberal Democratic government was formed since 1955. The cabinet was a coalition of eight parties, and Hosokawa Morihiro became the Prime Minister. Hosokawa was a former journalist and governor of Kumamoto Prefecture, and was known as an innovator of Japanese politics after he left the LDP.

At the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead on 15th August 1993, Hosokawa expressed mourning (*Aitou*) for “the war dead and their families in neighboring Asian countries”. It was the first time that the Prime Minister mentioned war responsibility at the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead. Until then, the ceremony was only for the Japanese war-bereaved and for this reason, Prime Ministers only mourned the Japanese War Dead. Former Presidents wished for eternal peace, but did not mention regret for the war. With this background, there was some criticism regarding the speech of Hosokawa from the bereaved<sup>17)</sup>.

After Hosokawa resigned as Prime Minister, Hata Tsutomu took over the

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14) This business is regarded as subcontracting of Ministry of Health and Welfare to *Izokukai*. The Ministry was merged with the Ministry of Labour in 2001 and became the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

15) It lasts about 2 minutes (about 700 words).

16) Building world eternal peace is also an aim of *Izokukai*; *Nippon Izokukai* homepage, “*Nippon Izokukai ni tsuite*” (about Japan War-Bereaved Families Association) (<http://www.nippon-izokukai.jp/category/japanese/>) (accessed on December 25, 2022)

government, but this only lasted two months from April to June 1993. As a result, the greeting at the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead the next year in 1994 was made by Murayama Tomiichi, who was the leader of the Japanese Socialist Party. The Socialist Party was the biggest left-wing opposition party in Japanese politics and was criticized for their “masochistic sense of history” (*Jigyaku Shikan*) by conservative politicians. Murayama expressed mourning and “deep remorse” (*Fukai Hansei*) for the war dead in Asian countries, who experienced “indescribably miserable sacrifice” (*Hitsuzetsumi tsukushigatai Hisan na Gisei*). Not only did he emulate Hosokawa’s apology, but strengthened the notion of apology to Asian countries. It is clear that the two politicians from opposition parties changed the custom of the greeting and the narrative, but there also remained unchanged phrases, such as “more than three million war dead” and the wish for “eternal peace”.

In January 1996, the Murayama cabinet lost power and Hashimoto Ryutaro, a politician from the Liberal Democratic Party, formed a new government. Hashimoto was known to have an especially deep connection with Izokukai, being very active for the welfare of the war dead, as well as becoming President of *Izokukai* (1993-1995). His greeting for the ceremony received wide attention, as he expressed “deep remorse” (*Fukai Hansei*) for the people in Asia who suffered<sup>18</sup>). In this phrase, one can see the continuity of the narrative of apologizing to Asian countries by the Japanese government. Hashimoto repeated a very similar greeting the following year, and this narrative was carried over to proceeding Prime Ministers from the Liberal Democratic Party, Obuchi Keizo and Mori Yoshiro.

Surprisingly, this continuity was also expressed through the Koizumi administration, which was believed to be very conservative, especially because of

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17) Yomiuri Shimbun, “*Senbotsusha Tsuitoushiki “Hosokawaryu” Shikiji Hannou Samazama*” (Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead: different reactions to the greeting of Prime Minister Hosokawa), August 16, 1993.

18) Though Hashimoto was known as a conservative politician and was a President of *Izokukai*, he was also known as a Minister of Trade and Industry in the Murayama cabinet. Murayama and Hashimoto had known each other since they were young politicians who dealt with health and labor (*Sharou-zoku*).



his regular visits to Yasukuni shrine. However, Koizumi stated “deep remorse” to the victims in Asian countries six times, through his administration from 2001 to 2006. This attitude and narrative was again carried over to successive Prime Ministers, Abe Shinzo, Fukuda Yasuo, and Aso Taro.

In 2012, the Democratic Party rose to power for the first time. The Democratic Party has many former members of the Socialist Party, and has a relationship with the Labour Union. However, the first Prime Minister for the Democratic Party, Hatoyama Yukio, never had a chance to make a greeting for the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead as he took office in September 2009 and resigned in June 2010. The next Prime Minister, Kan Naoto, made the greeting in 2010. Here, he mentioned “deep remorse” to the victims in Asian countries, and Noda Yoshihiko, the next Prime Minister from Democratic Party also carried over this phrase.

This trend changed during the second Abe administration. On 15th August 2013, at the first Ceremony after he became Prime Minister, Abe did not mention anything about neighboring countries or “deep remorse”. He also stopped referring to the “more than three million war dead,” but mentioned the sacrifice of the war dead “who wished for the happiness of the wife, children, father and mother” and “prosperity of his home” (*Furusato no Sanga yo, Midori nase*). These narratives had never appeared until then, and the description is very detailed. He also mentioned that “Japan helped each of the countries and regions right after the war” first.

This greeting marked a big change in the narrative of the annual greetings. Since then, Prime Minister Abe has attended the ceremony eight times, and has never shown remorse to people in neighboring countries. Instead, the greetings have changed every time. For instance, he stated that he went to the Independent State of Papua New Guinea to pray for the war dead in 2014. Since 2015, the Seventieth anniversary year since the end of the war, he started to mention the phrase: “we will never repeat the horrors of war.” These change are opposite to Prime Minister Koizumi, who also attended the ceremony six times but barely changed the narrative. After Abe administration, Suga Yoshihide and Kishida Fumio repeated the same narrative without “remorse.”

Since the Hosokawa cabinet in 1993, even LDP cabinets had carried over

the “deep remorse” phrase and showed mourning for the loss in Asian countries. Compared to this, Abe’s second cabinet did not refer to mourning or remorse for what the Japanese military did during the war. This change is drastic and interesting due to three points: First, as it is often said, Abe’s personal identity is very conservative and sympathetic to *Izokukai*. From this point of view, this greeting was expected. However, secondly, in the first Abe cabinet, he did mention mourning and deep remorse, and therefore it is worth exploring what caused this difference. Lastly, the way this greeting corresponds to the narrative in the statement by the Prime Minister around 15th August becomes problematic.

### 3.2 The statement by Prime Minister (Danwa)

The second form of recourse this paper will look at is the statement (Danwa) by Prime Minister around 15th August, the day of the end of war (*Shusen Kinen Bi*), although these statements are not released every year. There have been six statements by Prime Minister until today; two by Murayama, two by Koizumi, one by Kan and one by Abe.

On 31st August in 1994, then Prime Minister Murayama made a statement. This was the first official statement about the responsibility in WWII by a Japanese Prime Minister. Until then, Prime Ministers had not summarized the responsibilities of what the Japanese government did during WWII. For instance, Tanaka Kakuei apologized about the war at a dinner with Zhou Enlai before concluding the Joint Communiqué of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People’s Republic of China in 1972, but this was an individual and informal apology at a dinner party.

On the other hand, this was not the first time an official statement was made regarding War issues. During the Nakasone cabinet, Chief Cabinet Secretary made statements on history textbooks and official visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the Prime Minister and other Ministers<sup>19)</sup>. This style, a statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary was carried over to the Miyazawa cabinet. Since the beginning of 1990, comfort women became a problem in South Korea. The Japanese government started to investigate documents and then Chief Cabinet Secretary, Kato Koichi, published the result first in 1992. However, this

examination got criticism as not being enough, and in the next year, the Japanese government carried out a more thorough examination. Then Chief Cabinet Secretary, Kono Yohei, released another document and made a statement<sup>20)</sup>. Until 1994, however, this Danwa style was not used by a Prime Minister, only by other members of the cabinet such as the Chief Cabinet Secretaries.

In 1994, Murayama made a statement on war responsibility as a Prime Minister for the first time. He made another statement in 1995, for the “Fiftieth Anniversary of the End of World War II”<sup>21)</sup>. In this statement, Murayama stated;

During a certain period in the not too distant past, Japan, following a mistaken national policy, advanced along the road to war, only to ensnare the Japanese people in a fateful crisis, and, through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. In the hope that no such mistake be made in the future, I regard, in a spirit of humility, these irrefutable facts of history, and express here once again my feelings of deep remorse (*Tsuusetsu na Hansei*) and state my heartfelt apology (*Kokoro karano Owabi*). Allow me also to express my feelings of profound mourning for all

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19) Statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Miyazawa Kiichi on History Textbooks (August 26, 1982) (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/taisen/miyazawa.html>); Statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Fujinami Takao on Official Visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the Prime Minister and Other State Ministers on August 15 of this year (August 14, 1985) (<https://worldjpn.net/documents/texts/JPCH/19850814.S2J.html>); Statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Gotoda Masaharu on Official Visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the Prime Minister and Other State Ministers on August 15 of this year (August 14, 1986) (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/taisen/gotouda.html>) (accessed on December 25, 2022)

20) The Statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei on the result of the study on the issue of “comfort women” (August 4, 1993) (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/taisen/kono.html>) (accessed on December 25, 2022)

21) The Statement of Prime Minister Murayama on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the End of World War II (August 15, 1995) ([http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/danwa/07/dmu\\_0815.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/danwa/07/dmu_0815.html)) (accessed on December 25, 2022)

victims, both at home and abroad, of that history.

This statement was welcomed, especially from Asian nations<sup>22)</sup>. Furthermore, the Asian Women's Fund was founded in the same year. This Fund was made for individual compensation for comfort women to show remorse<sup>23)</sup>. The Murayama cabinet made an effort to reconcile with neighboring countries and that effort succeeded to some extent. Thus, it became a custom to make a statement on the anniversary year since then: Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro made a statement at the Sixtieth Anniversary, and Prime Minister Abe made a Seventieth Anniversary statement. In addition to these statements made every decade, some statements were made around August 15.

First, Koizumi made a statement on 13th August in 2001, which was not an anniversary year. This was because Koizumi had promised to visit Yasukuni Shrine on 15th August when he became Prime Minister. His promise made neighboring countries angry and suspicious, with South Korean and Chinese governments strongly criticizing the Japanese government. As the day of the end of war drew near, the criticism became stronger. This was why Koizumi held a conference on 13th and made Danwa. He stated that "Japan caused tremendous sufferings to many people of the world including its own people. Following a mistaken national policy during a certain period in the past, Japan imposed, through its colonial rule and aggression, immeasurable ravages and suffering particularly to the people of the neighboring countries in Asia. This has left a still incurable scar to many people in the region."

These statements were clearly similar to the Fiftieth anniversary Danwa of Murayama. On the other hand, he didn't express "deep remorse." Instead, he offered his "feelings of profound remorse and sincere mourning to all the victims of the war," "sincerely facing these deeply regrettable historical facts as they are." With this Danwa, Koizumi decided not to visit Yasukuni Shrine on 15th August,

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22) Asahi Shimbun, September 3, 1995.

23) "The foundation of Asian Women's Fund" (Digital Museum "The Comfort Women Issue and the Asian Women's Fund") (<http://www.awf.or.jp/2/foundation.html>) (accessed on December 25, 2022)

but on another day<sup>24)</sup>. It was clear that this Danwa was prepared rather hastily, because it was only published in Japanese and English<sup>25)</sup>.

On 15th August in 2005, Koizumi released the Statement on the Sixtieth anniversary of the end of the war. Even after the last Statement, he kept visiting Yasukuni Shrine every year, continuously becoming a problem in Asian countries. From this, it was doubted whether he would make Danwa on the anniversary. Despite this, the tone was not so different from the last Statement and Fiftieth anniversary statement:

In the past, Japan, through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. Sincerely facing these facts of history, I once again express my feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology, and also express the feelings of mourning for all victims, both at home and abroad, in the war. I am determined not to allow the lessons of that horrible war to erode, and to contribute to the peace and prosperity of the world without ever again waging a war<sup>26)</sup>.

However, there were slight differences from the Fiftieth Anniversary Danwa. First, Koizumi stated “more than three million compatriots died in the war...in the battle field thinking about their homeland and worrying about their families, while others perished amidst the destruction of war, or after the war in remote foreign countries.” This is a phrase which was always mentioned in the greeting in Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead on 15th August.

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24) The Statement of Prime Minister Koizumi (August 13, 2001) (<https://worldjpn.net/documents/texts/exdpm/20010813.S1E.html>) (accessed on December 25, 2022)

25) The first Murayama Statement was published in Japanese, English, and Korean. The second was published in Japanese, English, Chinese, and Korean. Even the Statement by Kono was published in Japanese, English, and Korean, so it was very irregular that the Statement was published only in Japanese and English.

26) The Statement of Prime Minister Koizumi on the Sixtieth Anniversary of the end of the World War II (August 15, 2005) (<https://worldjpn.net/documents/texts/JH/20050815.S1E.html>) (accessed on December 25, 2022)

Second, he referred to what Japan had done for other countries after the end of the war, for instance, “through official development assistance (ODA) and United Nations peace keeping operations.” This was very concrete in contrast to Murayama’s Statement, which mentioned: “the peace and prosperity of today were built as Japan overcame great difficulty to arise from a devastated land after defeat in the war. That achievement is something of which we are proud, and let me herein express my heartfelt admiration for the wisdom and untiring effort of each and every one of our citizens.”

Thirdly, Koizumi shed light on the future in the Statement. He said that “the post war generations now exceed 70% of Japan’s population” and “many Japanese are actively engaged in activities for peace and humanitarian assistance around the world, through such organizations as the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, and have been receiving much trust and high appreciation from the local people.” He also mentioned he intended “to build a future-oriented cooperative relationship based on mutual understanding and trust with Asian countries,” “through squarely facing the past and rightly recognizing the history.” The last part was similar to the Fiftieth Danwa.

In 2009, the governing party changed after a long time. The LDP lost power for the first time since 1994, and the Democratic Party of Japan came to power. Kan Naoto, the former activist, was the Prime Minister when the anniversary of the annexation of Korea came around. This anniversary had never been referred to by former Prime Ministers until Kan, but he decided to make Danwa on hundredth anniversary in 2010<sup>27)</sup>. In the Danwa, Kan introduced many new phrases, for instance, he mentioned that “the Korean people of that time was deprived of their country and culture, and their ethnic pride was deeply scarred by the colonial rule.” These emotional and sympathetic words had never been introduced in former Danwas.

Kan also decided “to have courage to squarely confront the facts of history and humility to accept them, as well as to be honest to reflect upon the errors of our own,” and furthermore, he mentioned that “(t)hose who render pain tend to

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27) Statement by Prime Minister Kan Naoto (August 10, 2010) (<https://worldjpn.net/documents/texts/exdpm/20100810.S1E.html>) (accessed on December 25, 2022)

forget it while those who suffered cannot forget it easily.” This strong and reflective narrative was genuinely original in Kan’s Danwa in 2010. He also carried over the words “deep remorse.”

However, in the latter half of the Danwa, Kan mostly referred to “build[ing] a future-oriented Japan-Republic of Korea relationship.” He didn’t use the phrase “postwar generations” which was mentioned in Koizumi’s second Danwa, but both used the word “a future-oriented” relationship<sup>28)</sup>. On the other hand, Kan didn’t repeat the phrase “three million war dead” which was first introduced in Koizumi’s second Statement.

In December 2012, the Democratic Party of Japan lost its power, and Abe Shinzo became Prime Minister again. He was strongly criticized from neighboring countries for the nationalistic speeches that he had done during his first government from 2006–2007<sup>29)</sup>. He also visited Yasukuni Shrine on 26th December in 2013, a year after his inauguration. His conservative preference has been widely known, and therefore great attention was paid to whether he would make the Seventieth Anniversary Danwa in 2015.

Consequently, he released a Seventieth Anniversary Statement on 14th August, one day before the anniversary day. Against most expectations, the length of the seventieth Danwa was the longest of all Danwas which had ever been released. He referred to “deep remorse” like former Danwas, but in a slightly different way. Abe mentioned that “Japan has repeatedly expressed the feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology for its actions during the war.” However, in the Q&A period after the Danwa was released, the Prime Minister promised that the term “deep remorse” which had been expressed since

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28) In Murayama’s first Danwa in 1994, he told that “a vast majority of people today have not experienced the war.” However, he added that “It is all the more essential in this time of peace and abundance that we reflect on the errors in our history, convey to future generations the horrors of war and the many lives that were lost, and work continuously for lasting peace.” This narrative is different from “a future oriented relationship” which was mentioned in Koizumi or Kan Danwa.

29) In the general policy speech in this first cabinet, he mentioned “a beautiful country, Japan.” He planned to disseminate this phrase. (<http://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/SENTAKU/syugiin/165/0001/16509290001003a.html>) (accessed on December 25, 2022)

Murayama cabinet would be carried over into Abe's and forthcoming cabinets. He also repeated the phrase "three million war dead" and "postwar generations," as was done in the Sixtieth Statement in Koizumi cabinet.

Abe also carried over the emotional narrative mentioned in Kan's Danwa. He mentioned that;

"Also in countries that fought against Japan, countless lives were lost among young people with promising futures. In China, Southeast Asia, the Pacific islands and elsewhere that became the battlefields, numerous innocent citizens suffered and fell victim to battles as well as hardships such as severe deprivation of food. We must never forget that there were women behind the battlefields whose honor and dignity were severely injured.

Upon the innocent people did our country inflict immeasurable damage and suffering. History is harsh. What is done cannot be undone. Each and every one of them had his or her life, dream, and beloved family. When I squarely contemplate this obvious fact, even now, I find myself speechless and my heart is rent with the utmost grief."

It was also mentioned for the first time that Japan's victory in "(t)he Japan-Russia War gave encouragement to many people under colonial rule from Asia to Africa," and that Japan started to isolate themselves before the second World War "with the Great Depression setting in and the Western countries launching economic blocs by involving colonial economies, Japan's economy suffered a major blow". It can be said that Abe succeeded most narratives in the Seventieth Danwa.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 The Beginning of an Apology

In the last section, the speeches of Prime Ministers were examined to investigate why Japan made apologies even if they may not be accepted. The changes in narrative of the apologies given can be seen clearly in Table 1 and 2. From two sources of apology, the greetings in the Memorial Ceremony for the



**Table 1: Narratives in the Greetings at the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead**

Year	Cabinet	characters	remorse	“3 million”	eternal peace
1993	Hosokawa	787	(*condolence)	○	
1994	Murayama	877	○	○	(*world peace)
1995	Murayama	705	○	○	○
1996	Hashimoto	879	○	○	○
1997	Hashimoto	808	○	○	○
1998	Obuchi	848	○	○	○
1999	Obuchi	809	○	○	○
2000	Mori	864	○	○	○
2001	Koizumi	858	○	○	○
2002	Koizumi	714	○	○	○
2003	Koizumi	635	○	○	○
2004	Koizumi	556	○	○	○
2005	Koizumi	520	○	○	
2006	Koizumi	554	○	○	○
2007	Abe	578	○	○	○
2008	Fukuda	748	○	○	○
2009	Aso	570	○	○	○
2010	Kan	611	○	○	○
2011	Kan	676	○	○	○
2012	Noda	589	○	○	
2013	Abe	610			○
2014	Abe	598			○
2015	Abe	577			
2016	Abe	586			
2017	Abe	600		○	
2018	Abe	575			
2019	Abe	676		○	
2020	Abe	691		○	
2021	Suga	684		○	
2022	Kishida	665		○	

Table 2: Narratives in *Danwa*

Year	Cabinet	Anniversary	characters	language	remorse	“3 milion”	postwar generations
1994	Murayama		1952	JP/EN/KR	○		
1995	Murayama	50th of the End of the War	1282	JP/EN/CN/KR	○		
2001	Koizumi		1160	JP/EN	○		
2005	Koizumi	60th of the End of the War	1135	JP/EN/KR	○	○	○
2010	Kan	100th of Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty	1018	JP/EN/KR	○		
2015	Abe	70th of the End of the War	3953	JP/EN/CN/KR	○	○	○

War Dead and the *Danwa*, it became clear who first apologized as a Prime Minister. In the greeting for the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead, it was Hosokawa Morihiro, who was then leader of Japan New Party.

On the other hand, Murayama Tomiichi, the leader of the Japan Socialist Party, apologized in 1993 for the first time through *Danwa*, and both parties were liberal parties (*Kakushin Seitou*). Also in 2010, Kan Naoto apologized in *Danwa* for the Japanese annexation of Korea, even though there was no such tradition before him. Democratic Party, in which he was a leader, was also a *Kakushin Seitou*. From this, it can be said that an apology was made by the Prime Ministers if the administration belonged to liberal parties. In other words, the beginning of an apology is defined by ideology and partisanship.

#### 4.2 The Change in the Narrative of Apology

Though liberal parties brought a change in the narrative of apology by a state, partisanship is not the only reason why a country makes an apology. As shown in Table 1, it may be possible for later Prime Ministers to change the narrative, as the second Abe administration did in the greeting in the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead since 2013. This brings forth a new question: why do some conservative leaders follow the change in the narratives of apology made by liberal parties, while others might not?

To answer this question, I will analyze in detail the Abe administration. As shown in Table 1 and 2, he changed the narrative in the greetings in the

Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead since 2013, while he succeeded the narrative in Danwa in 2015. Furthermore, he didn't change the narrative even in the greetings of the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead in 2007, when he first became the Prime Minister. I will show what is the difference between the first and second Abe administration, and how he expressed different narratives in the Memorial Ceremony and Danwa.

In September 2006, Abe Shinzo became the Prime Minister after Koizumi Junichiro, whose administration lasted more than 5 years. This was the third longest administration in Japan after World War II<sup>30)</sup> at that time. Abe became popular as the Chief Cabinet Secretary of Koizumi administration, and he was also famous for his family. His grandfather was Kishi Nobusuke, who was a former Prime Minister, and his father was Abe Shintaro, who was consecutively Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Agriculture, and the Chief Cabinet Secretary. It is quite often said that Abe was strongly affected by his grandfather, because his father was very busy visiting his electoral districts in Yamaguchi, and could not meet his son often, who lived in Tokyo with Kishi.

As the grandchild of an advocate of constitutional amendment, Abe's conservative ideology attracted attention at the first Abe administration. Abe published a book titled "Towards a Beautiful Country (*Utsukushii Kuni e*)" in 2006, and set this as a slogan for the administration. He mentioned "*Utsukushii Kuni*" 8 times in his general policy speech on 29th September in 2006<sup>31)</sup>. This was strongly criticized by liberal politicians and newspapers in Japan and abroad<sup>32)</sup>. The cabinet also experienced some scandal of Ministers, and the support for the government plummeted from 63% to 28%<sup>33)</sup>, and Abe resigned from illness on 25th September in 2007. His approval rating was 30%, while the disapproval rate was 56%<sup>34)</sup>.

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30) The first longest was the Sato Eisaku cabinet, and the second longest was the Yoshida Shigeru cabinet.

31) General Policy Speech at the 165<sup>th</sup> National Diet. ([https://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb\\_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigirokua/000116520060929063.html](https://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kaigiroku.nsf/html/kaigirokua/000116520060929063.html)) (accessed on December 25, 2022)

32) Asahi Shimbun, September 30, 2006.

33) Asahi Shimbun, July 2, 2007.

In his first cabinet, Abe succeeded most narratives in the greetings of the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead. He expressed remorse that Japan “caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations.” These are the same narratives from Murayama Danwa, which all succeeding cabinets took over. He also took over the narrative “overt the three million” and “eternal peace,” which was the original narrative of the greetings. Clearly, the narrative of the first Abe cabinet was not different from the former administrations.

However, things changed in 2013 after he became the Prime Minister for the second time. On 15th August in 2013, he suddenly mentioned the sacrifice of the war dead “who wished for the happiness of the wife, children, father and mother” and “prosperity of his home,” as I already showed in section three. Abe promised that he “would never forget that we are enjoying the peace and prosperity based on these sacrifices.” This was the original narrative of Abe, and he also emphasized “how Japan helped other countries to make a better world.” This was firmly connected to the idea, “future oriented” relationship. Thus, he declared that “he would make a hopeful future.”

This greeting garnered wide attention in South Korea, while it did not become an issue in Japan. Newspapers in South Korea strongly criticized that Abe did not mention “remorse” which all former cabinets after Hosokawa did<sup>35)</sup>. Despite this, Abe did not mention “remorse” again in his greeting the following year in 2014. As he did not mention “remorse,” the greeting became one of pure mourning for the war dead. When Hosokawa first introduced the idea of “remorse” into the greetings, many bereaved family members of war dead reacted against that. It can therefore easily be imagined that this greeting of “pure mourning” was welcomed by members of *Izokukai*.

The greetings in 2013 and 2014 were also characterized by their poetic expression. For instance, “*Furusato no Sanga yo, Midori nase*” in 2013 greeting can be translated as “to hope the mountain and river in the hometown would be fresh and green.” Similarly, in the 2014 greeting, Abe suddenly mentioned that

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34) Asahi Shimbun, July 31, 2007.

35) Asahi Shimbun, August 16, 2013.

“the chorus of cicadas covers Japanese mountains” (*Nihon no Noyama wo Semishigure ga Tsutsundeimasu*). These poetic expressions were very similar to what he emphasized in his policy statement at the 165th National Diet when he became the Prime Minister in 2006, “*Utsukushii Kuni*”. In that policy speech, he also mentioned the “beauty of the nature of Japan.”

However, in the policy speech in 2013 at the 200th National Diet, he never mentioned the words “beautiful” or “beauty<sup>36)</sup>.” This was a big change from the first Abe administration, and this strategy succeeded. The approval rating of the administration was 59%<sup>37)</sup>. These differences between the two policy speeches and the greetings in the memorial ceremony imply the possibility that the second Abe administration was choosing their words strategically. In short, after he learned from the failure in the policy speech of the first administration in 2006, which was very poetic and conservative, he changed the style of the policy speech into a more realistic one. It was clear that he carefully avoided making a slogan like “*Utsukushii Kuni*.”

On the other hand, at the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead, he newly inserted the poetic and conservative narrative into the greetings. This was because of the difference of audience. The audience of the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead is *Izokukai*, which is famous for its conservative values<sup>38)</sup>. In this arena, Abe emphasized his character as a conservative politician.

However, Abe has stopped mentioning poetic phrases since 2015. Instead, the pattern of the greeting has slowly transformed since 2015. In his greeting, he first mourns and emphasizes the sacrifice that the war dead made, and thanks the war dead. Then, he mentions what Japan did to make a better world after the war. Lastly, he promises to make a better future of Japan, and wishes the best for the bereaved family of the war dead. This pattern was established in 2015, when he had to make a Danwa on Seventieth Anniversary year after the World War II.

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36) Though he mentioned once “strong Japan,” he didn’t set as a slogan of the administration.

37) Asahi Shimbun, December 28, 2012.

38) Asahi Shimbun, August 16, 2013. It is stated that Abe ordered his Private Secretaries to make the greeting “from 0.”

In the greeting of the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead in 2015, Abe did not carry over any narratives from former cabinets. He even refrained from mentioning “three million” or the “eternal peace”, which the Prime Ministers from Liberal Democratic Party always carried over. These changes gained attention, especially from abroad, and the Abe administration was strongly criticized. Similarly, his experience as Prime Minister in 2006 made Japanese liberals cautious of his ideology.

Among this background came the Seventieth Anniversary after World War II. First, many news reported the possibility that Abe would not make a Danwa because of his conservative values. These opinions were based on what he mentioned and did not mention in the greeting for the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead. However, in February 2015, Abe declared to summon the conference to discuss the history problem. This conference was named “Advisory Panel on the History of the 20th Century and on Japan’s Role and the World Order in the 21st Century,” consisting of researchers, journalists, and business leaders<sup>39)</sup>.

The advisory panel was held six times and discussed mainly about how to interpret history and restore the relationship with former enemies<sup>40)</sup>. In April, the Prime Minister had a foreign visit to Indonesia and the United States. He had a speech at the Asian-African Conference in Indonesia, and a speech at the US Senate and House. In both speeches, he mentioned how Japan faces a history problem. Based on the report by the panel and these speeches, the Danwa on Seventieth Anniversary (Abe Danwa) was made.

The first and biggest difference of this Danwa to former Danwas was the length. Abe’s Danwa was characteristic for its length, almost 4,000 words. The second difference was that Abe mentioned Japan’s victory in the Japan-Russia War for the first time, as seen in section three. Even though it was criticized that he mentioned that Japan’s victory in “(t)he Japan-Russia War gave

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39) Prime Minister’s Office in Japan, “Advisory Panel on the History of the 20th Century and on Japan’s Role and the World Order in the 21st Century,” ([https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/21c\\_koso/pdf/meibo.pdf](https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/21c_koso/pdf/meibo.pdf)) (accessed on December 25, 2022)

40) Kaisai Joukyou (Dates and Agendas of Meeting) ([https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/21c\\_koso/index.html](https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/21c_koso/index.html)) (accessed on December 25, 2022)

encouragement to many people under colonial rule from Asia to Africa,” Abe still emphasized that “Japan lost sight of the overall trends in the world.”

Clearly, Abe was conscious to carry over all narratives of former Danwas, showing “deep remorse and heartfelt apology for its actions during the war.” As I showed in section three, he also mentioned “(m)ore than three million of our compatriots lost their lives during the war,” which he stopped mentioning since 2015 in the greetings of the memorial ceremony. Instead, he emphasized the “sacrifice of the war dead” in the greetings of the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead, while he mentioned “sacrifice” in another way in Abe Danwa.

In Seventieth Danwa, he not only mentioned the sacrifice of the Japanese war dead, he also mentioned:

Also in countries that fought against Japan, countless lives were lost among young people with promising futures. In China, Southeast Asia, the Pacific islands and elsewhere that became the battlefields, numerous innocent citizens suffered and fell victim to battles as well as hardships such as severe deprivation of food. We must never forget that there were women behind the battlefields whose honour and dignity were severely injured. Upon the innocent people did our country inflict immeasurable damage and suffering ...Each and every one of them had his or her life, dream, and beloved family. When I squarely contemplate this obvious fact, even now, I find myself speechless and my heart is rent with the utmost grief. The peace we enjoy today exists only upon such precious sacrifices.”

In this Danwa, the peace that Japan enjoys today was based not only on the Japanese people but also on foreigners who lost their lives or who suffered during the War with the Japanese.

It was apparent that Abe changed his narrative in the greetings of the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead and in Danwa. Although he did not succeed the “remorse” in the greeting in Memorial Ceremony and made it a pure mourning event, he took over every narrative in Danwa: “remorse,” “three million,” “postwar generations,” and even the poetic tone which the Kan cabinet made. What does this difference mean? How does it relate with his own

conservative ideology, which he showed in 2006 in “*Utsukushii Kuni*” speech?

In 2006, Abe did not hide his ideology in his policy speech and received a negative reaction by liberal politicians and media in Japan and abroad. Despite this, he did not try to change the narrative in the greeting of the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead in 2006. However, when he became the Prime Minister again in 2012, his stance changed to choose the narrative strategically. First, he never touched his conservative ideology in his policy speech. He just mentioned the problem of economics, restoration from the Great East Japan earthquake in 2011, and foreign policy. This was a big difference from the last policy speech which mentioned “*Utsukushii Kuni*” eight times and admired the beauty of Japanese culture and tradition.

This change also happened in the greeting of the Memorial Ceremony on 15th August 2013. Abe stopped mentioning the “remorse” and “three million” phrase, and made the greeting one of pure mourning. As analyzed already, this was for the *Izokukai*. It can be said that he chose different narratives for different stakeholders, and separated the arenas where each narrative was told.

Similarly, Abe chose the “proper” narrative in Danwa in 2015 for foreign audiences. Especially Abe Danwa was prepared in multiple languages—Japanese, English, Chinese, and Korean<sup>41)</sup>, it is clear that the main target of apology is China and South Korea. So Abe Danwa chose the narrative which would be welcomed by both countries. Even some doubted if Abe would make the Seventieth Danwa because of his ideology, however he decided to make it and carried over most of the narratives which he denied to carry over in the greetings of the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead. This was why his greetings in the Memorial Ceremony were totally different from Abe Danwa.

The above provided a detailed analysis of the narratives given by the Abe administration to answer why some administrations carried over the narratives which former cabinets made but some not. It is clear from my analysis that the answer is not the ideology of Prime Minister. Even though Abe is marked by his

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41) Danwa by Prime Minister ([https://warp.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/10992693/japan.kantei.go.jp/97\\_abe/statement/201508/1212349\\_9926.html](https://warp.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/10992693/japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201508/1212349_9926.html)) (accessed on December 25, 2022)



conservative ideology, he chose “proper” narrative in Danwa and carried over all narratives of former Prime Ministers in Danwa, which focused to make an apology for neighboring countries. The reason was therefore not his ideology, but his strategy to separate the narratives.

## 5. Conclusion

Why does a country make an apology for what it did in the war? The first occasion was introduced by the liberal parties, as they tried to shed light on what got no attention until then. Hosokawa from the Japan New Party first introduced the apology into the greetings of the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead, and Murayama from the Socialist Party made the first Danwa as a Prime Minister regarding the history problem. In 2010, Kan made the first Danwa about the Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty. Thus, liberal parties introduced new narratives into the history problem.

Most leaders from LDP followed this change, but one did not. As seen above, it was not because of the ideology of a leader, but the strategy to avoid the backlash from the society. Abe chose the “proper” narrative for *Izokukai* in the greeting of the Memorial Ceremony on 15th August, while he chose another proper narrative in Seventieth Danwa, given in multiple languages. The problem is this separation of narratives is effective or not.

As Lind (2008) already points out, a political apology by a country's leader receives backlash from society. Both in Germany and Japan, it became unpopular for a leader to apologize for wrongdoings during the war. For instance, the famous “Kniefall von Warschau” by Willy Brandt was hardly criticized by German citizens<sup>42)</sup>. However, Willy Brandt never changed his narrative and carried through “Ostpolitik” (East policy). This consistent attitude helped the reconciliation between Germany and Poland.

Similarly, Feldman (2012) tells the importance of the unification of the

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42) Alexander Behrens hg., *Durfte Brandt knien?: der Kniefall in Warschau und der deutsch-polnische Vertrag, eine Dokumentation der Meinungen* (Kempten(Allgäu): AZ Druck und Datentechnik GmbH, 2010); Berger, *op cit.*, p.63.

narrative politically and socially. It is possible that the separation of the narrative only causes the distrust between apologizing country and apologized country. It is, therefore, desirable for future research to investigate what the separation of the narrative of apology will bring to the history problem.