
human beings enjoy a “privileged” status in nature. Aptly enough, Rubin calls this chapter “The Mind O’erthrown.”

THE WAGES OF GUILT: Memories of War in Germany and Japan. By Ian Buruma. Farrar Straus. 330 pp. \$25

To Ian Buruma as a child, the first enemies were the Germans—this despite his having been born in the Netherlands six years after World War II ended. The old animosity persisted in Holland, where adults kept it fresh for children too young to have experienced the war’s reality. Despite the cultural similarities between the two nations, or because of them, the Dutch after the war drew clear borders, geographical and mental, to keep the Germans beyond the pale.

In his early forties, Buruma began to wonder how the Germans remembered the war. Having lived in and written about Asia for many years (he was the arts editor of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*), he also began to wonder the same about the Japanese. So in his fourth book, which blends history, sociology, political commentary, and cultural appreciation, he set out to explore the complex psychological legacy of World War II for the two defeated nations.

A clear-eyed observer alert to rote pieties and practiced evasions, Buruma is curious why so many Germans today are obsessed with the war and the Nazis, with mourning and remembrance, when 30 years ago they were accused of being unable to mourn. The turning point, Buruma found, was the broadcast of the American miniseries *Holocaust* on German television in January 1979. Although it was entertainment, not art, it struck home with the Germans as nothing had before, unleashing the introspection that continues to this day. Buruma believes German memory is now like “a massive tongue seeking out, over

and over, the sore tooth.” Although many of those old enough to have lived through the Nazi years would prefer to forget, the young especially want the past rehearsed, to establish a moral superiority over their parents and to “crack their guilty silence.”

This German preoccupation with guilt over old horrors puzzles the Japanese, who are far more reluctant to come to grips with their wartime past. Why is the collective German memory so different from that of the Japanese? Buruma suggests various possible reasons: Japan is an

Asian shame culture, Germany, a Christian guilt culture; the Japanese were responsible for much unspeakable cruelty—the atrocities the army committed against the Chinese at Nanjing in 1937 were kept hidden for years from the Japanese

public—but for no Holocaust; finally, to some Japanese, the atom-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki argue powerfully that they were victims.

For Buruma, the explanation lies less in the history of the war than in the history of the postwar political arrangement imposed on the Japanese, “a generous version of the Versailles Treaty: loss of sovereignty without financial squeeze.” The Japanese were encouraged to get rich, while matters of war were taken out of their hands. The same corrupt party stayed in power for more than 40 years. The settlement helped to stifle public debate and has, in his view, kept the Japanese from political maturity: “As far as the history of World War II was concerned, the debate got stuck in the late 1940s.”

Buruma believes that Japan will not develop a grown-up attitude toward the past until it is allowed political responsibility over matters of war and peace. That the justice minister in the Japanese government newly come to power in the spring of 1994 could dismiss the massacre at Nanjing as a “fabrication” shows the distance still to be traveled. That he was fired three days later shows there is hope.

