

The Difference and Its Study of the Cultures of West and East Germany Around the Reunification in 1989

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The then West and East Germany originated from one nation, but there was big difference between their cultures before and immediately after the reunification in 1989. The difference is embodied in many aspects of the society, affecting deeply the individual life and national situation. Their formation has multiple causes, and various measures need to be made to bridge these gaps to reach the balance, so that Germany after the fall of Berlin Wall can go ahead prosperously, and brings benefits to all its people.

Keywords: culture, Germany, totalitarianism, system, balance

Introduction

As a single nation, modern Germany has a history just one century and a half, founded in 1871. On the territory of the current Germany, there have ever been a variety of tribes, city republics, and feudal states, and they had their own cultures. Culture is the feature of different states, and they have different culture policies. Thus, the culture in Germany is diversified, going through Weimar Republic, the National Socialist regime, the separation of two Germanies, and the reunification of the West and East Germany.

Culture is an umbrella term which encompasses the social behavior, institutions, and norms found in human societies, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, and habits of the individuals in these groups (Edward, 1871). Hence, every aspect of the society is affected by its culture. Culture policy is a government act, guideline, sponsorship, initiative, etc., enacted to regulate the development of the state. There are distinctions on culture policies for the West and East Germany before and after the reunification, and this article serves as the study and analysis of those distinctions on some respects of the social life.

Difference and Analysis of Culture Policy Between West and East Germany

Cultural Distinction

Material supply. Before the World War II, Germany had been in an advanced trend economically. In the wake of the separation, West and East Germany set foot on different developing paths. West Germany experienced an economic miracle, with stable growth and large percentage of rise. It was reported that “from 1951 to 1961 West Germany’s gross national product (GNP) rose by 8 percent per year—double the rate for Britain and the United States and nearly double that of France—and exports trebled” (Britannica, n.d.a). Conversely, East Germany was with a slow economic growth compared to the West. It was showed that the

actual income of the people living in East Germany was only one third or one fourth of the people living in the West (Sinn, 1992). With reference to the material supply and its quality, the West was manifestly superior to the East.

The culture related to this aspect is mainly political culture. Material supply is part of the economy, and it is a subject shaped by politics. Production relations affect the productivity, and material supply is the form of expression of productivity. Owing to the fact that the East and West Germany have ever braced two different political ideology, they two had different supply situation, and different political culture. In the East, collectiveness and planning were the main characters, while in the West market and supply based on demand prevailed.

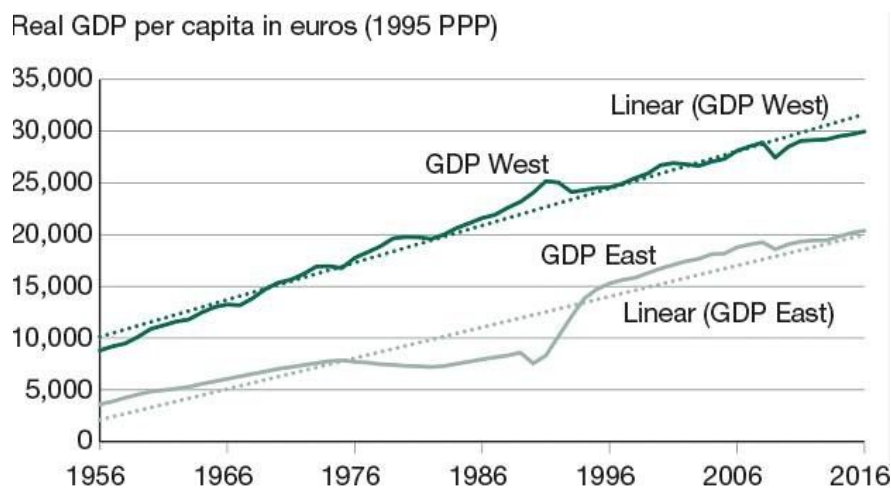


Figure 1. Contrast of GDP per capita of West and East Germany.

Life style. The two concepts of culture and life style are intertwined to some extent, and the life style of a nation is influenced by the culture this nation harbors, and it is documented as “a way or style of living” (Etymonline, n.d.). All the members or residents in a group have some similarities more or less, though those of individuals may be different. The East and West Germany are belonging to one country originally, so they have characters in common in life style, and these common points exist more in their life habits, such as their love of beer, nature, preference to limousines, etc.

Following the separation after World War II, the living backdrops and conditions respectively in German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) became different, as well as their life styles. Life cannot do without necessities, but many necessities were scarce in GDR. People there had no labor incentives, so their production efficiency was very low, and the population GDR always faced great pressure of life, and had to toil for those. Under such circumstances, their life quality was very poor. The economic conditions in GDR were jeopardized, so the life there was limited. East Germany’s industrial sector lacked quality controls and technological innovation (Etymonline, n.d.).

Life in FRG was different, where there were abundant materials and supplies, so life was easy and comfortable. Before the reunification with the East, FRG had been an economic powerhouse in Europe, and liberty and freedom were their life melody. The different life style caused different life culture and the view to the country. The residents in GDR fled to the West more often than not, and even 30 years after the

reunification and the fall of Berlin Wall, the eastern people still lacked trust and confidence to the institutions. There is little good opinion in their impressions imposed by the GDR government.

Moral life. The life style is different in GDR and FRG, so is that in moral. In fact, these two aspects are similar, and they are the acts affected by the reality, other than the reality itself. The people in the East have their special experience, first dominated by Naziism, and then by communism. Their moral world was tortured by these two kinds of totalitarianism, till the reunification. The country's communist leadership regarded the arts as an extension of politics by other means (Schuster, 2017), so moral life is the sphere interfered in by the GDR government, while the moral life in the West Germany is based on liberty and democracy, out of the control of the authority, as it is a realm that government could not set foot into. With the growth of its economy, the FRG people were able to get out of toil and emphasis on to enjoy the life.

These two different moral conditions must lead to different culture to be adapted to them, one with aspiration of freedom, democracy, and civilization, while the other with complaints, grumble, dissatisfaction to the authority and the government. In FRG, many of the Germany traditions were retained, and the culture was various and flourishing. People behaved to trust the government, and kindly reacted to others, as they were treated kindly too. While in the East, there was the lack of trust among all the people, as well as between the people and the governmental institutions, where "the cultural work of all organizations was funded by the state" (Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends, 2019), and collectivism and spirit of dedication was emphasized and advocated in public. It's a political and cultural phenomenon rooted in the moral life in GDR for decades.

Why These Distinctions Took Shape

The cause of state system. The state system was the most predominant factor underlying the difference. In the West Germany, it was carrying out Market Economy which guided the economic activities, and the allocations of resources was according to the market, and price and profit led the production, just as the saying that "the major characteristic of a market economy is the existence of factor markets that play a dominant role in the allocation of capital and the factors of production" (Altwater, 1993, p. 57). As a result, the materials were substantial and ample, and the citizens extended their support to the regime. Accordingly, the culture policy was marked with freedom, democracy, and prosperity.

Different from the West Germany, Command Economy prevailed in the East before the reunification, where the economic activities in the whole society were organized based on the official orders or economic schemes, in line with the highly centralized political system in the country. In command economies, important allocation decisions are made by government authorities and are imposed by law (Mariana & Barkley, 2003, p. 7). This economic mode always failed to provide enough materials to the demand, as the government could not calculate precisely the entire demand and supply within the society. If the outputs are perceived as unable to meet the demands of the citizenry, trust in the authorities will be in short supply (Easton, 1975, p. 437), so the culture policy by the East Germany government was tight, so as to put all the society under its control. Surely, this is connected with the nature and character of the then government in the East.

On the other hand, it was the ideology and thinking. In GDR, mind control was an important part of the political system. Communism and Naziism have something in common that they both allow one political thought to exist in the country, and both were booming in Germany. They "theoretically permits no individual freedom and that seeks to subordinate all aspects of individual life to the authority of the state" (Britannica,

n.d.b). Under such a managing mode, the thoughts of the people tended to be simplified and unitized, and no one was encouraged to be different from all others. Innovations, creations, and inventions rarely emerged.

Thoughts in the West Germany were varied, and federalism, individual freedom, liberty and democracy were adopted. The people there could think and act freely. In such a way, a great number of new institutions and political bodies were built, and people contested to bring about new ideas and tactics in life and production. As a result, the social life was vigorous, and the working efficiency was highly developed. Following that, the culture and its policy were diversified. This was the outcome led to by different social and political systems.

The cause of historical factor. Before the separation of two Germanies, it was the fact that Nazi Germany was defeated by allied forces. American forces opened up the 2nd front line in the west, while Soviet Union advanced from the east. The eastern battles were much fiercer than that in the west, and many terrible fights took place in the east line, and the battles on the Eastern Front of the Second World War constituted the largest military confrontation in history (The Atlantic, 2011), so the situation and aftermath was very similar with that of the early days of the Soviet Union, and it was more acceptable for it to implement the similar political and cultural policy as Soviet Union did at its beginning after taking power, and such policies have their profound affect till the reunification.

The partition of East and West Germany offered the strongly contrastive grounds for capitalism and communism after WWII. Prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, clearly the economy of FRG had topped the East, but decades of years after the reunification, the East still lags behind the West, which indicates that the negative influence of communism to a country is persistent. The country with Planned Economy is structurally different from that of capitalism, so it is not easy to change and transform the economic structure from communism to capitalism. The structure who has suffered communism system is doomed to experience hardship. In the contrast, it is found that “the communist experience had enduring effects on the population in the East, including their economic outcomes, political attitudes, cultural traits, and gender roles” (Becker, Mergele, & Woessmann, 2020). Thus, the history of harboring communism for four decades has left the lasting negative impact for GDR.

The cause of geographic factor. Historical Germany consisted of a crop of city states with respective governments, and they were unitized by Prussia in 1871. Prussia was a state with strong idea of power, might, and militarism, so it could do the job by violence. East Germany was closer to Prussia geographically, so was apt to being affected by that thought. That was the soil similar to that of the communism, and it nurtured the environment of its culture. The state of Prussia went to its end in 1945, but its army traditions were inherited by the military force of GDR. The culture there was easy to accept totalitarianism and obedience, and that is suitable for the existence of Naziism and Communism culture.

Another geographic factor is the economic layout of Germany. It was the traditional fact that the west was richer than the east in Germany history, and the west was the producing area of many agricultural products, such as corn, cotton. The Rhine area in the west has been the most prosperous place in Germany and even in Europe since the middle age, and in current Germany the most developed regions are located in the west. It was reported that the industrial output in the east was only taking up 18% of the nationwide output before the World War II. In the confronting times, the land area, resources, and populations in the east were also far less than that in the west.

The relationship between poverty and terrorism has been discussed many times, especially after the 9/11 attack in the US, and the theory is also applicable to the link between poverty and totalitarianism and

communism. A man living in a dystopian collectivist society which has eclipsed the individual to such a degree that words such as “I” and “my” has no longer even existed (FEE Stories, 2016), as a man in a poor society has denied himself any hope or capability to flourish, and he desires to find a strongman who can lead him to succeed and rise above others. This is the theoretical foundation for totalitarianism and authoritarianism, as well as their culture. Such was what happened in the east, but the west was opposite, and this brings the big different in culture and policy between them.

Problems Brought by the Distinctions

Mental unification. All the distinctions above-mentioned have been accumulated for decades of years before the fall of Berlin Wall, and it is difficult to root them out in a short term, even after decades of reunification, even over three decades of years after that fall. The reunification is more than economic unification, but also that of consciousness, particularly that of viewpoint of values.

Viewpoint refers to the way people see the various things or events with what perceptive, comprehensibility, and standing point. If living under the rule of totalitarianism for a long time, the rightness and wrongness will be confused, as the authority will intentionally take such acts against its people to stabilize its rule, and the people suffer from such thoughts.

In totalitarian states, political power is often held by autocrats, such as dictators and absolute monarchs, who employ all-encompassing campaigns in which propaganda is broadcast by state-controlled mass media in order to control the citizenry (Conquest, 1999, p. 74), so the people under totalitarianism will be brainwashed, and their perceivable ability will be disabled, and their opinion about value is just opposite to the ordinary ones.

In addition to that, their past experience, on which they rely to live for subsistence in the society, will affect how they see the future events in their lives. For example, around six-in-ten adults in former West Germany (61%) are satisfied with the way things are going in Germany, compared with 37% who are dissatisfied (Pew Research, 2019), as to the survey made to the German people after 30 years of the reunification. It is linked with their different experience of living under different political systems in West and East Germany. In the East Germany, political lies prevailed everywhere, and democracy was only a pretext for political movements, so it is difficult for populace to believe in the concept of democracy indeed. In fact, it is also a problem of institutional trust, and the performance of the government affects how the people have the institutional trust, as well as democracy from the authority.

Psychological unification. Psychological unification should include two aspects: national identify unification and individual identity. National identity is a person’s identity or sense of belonging to one or more states or to one or more nations (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). It means a subjective cognitive agreement a person holds that he is a member of a state. The agreement is cohesive, and difficult to take off, and he aspires to have it as a national of this nation. Such national identity includes many aspects, such as language, culture, history, tradition, life habits, and common awareness of the nation.

Before the separation of two Germanies in 1940s, these two parts just spent less than one century together as one nation, since the unification in 1871, but the partitioning time was more than 40 years. Speaking from this point of view, it’s a challenge for the two Germanies to admit to the one nation concept. But it has been more than 30 years since their reunification, so the aggregate time they stay together has outpaced one century, and the national adhesion has been tight enough. The nationals have longtime memory, historical common points, and life habits, and they are beneficial for the national identification.

Individual identification is another aspect of national identification, in the matter of fact. It is not the personal identity, but a sense of belonging. Though individualism is emphasized in the western culture, but it is undeniable that the sense of belonging is needed by every individual, as “a human emotional need to affiliate with and be accepted by members of a group” (Cherry, 2021; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). This is comprehensible that the society is just a big group, where other smaller groups exist, and people need to give a label for themselves, and these groups are just the coordinates. It is a foundation with which people can obtain stable psychological status.

A survey in Germany has found that up to more than half of the interviewees, who had been living in East Germany, see themselves as second class citizens in the unified Germany. The survey was made in 2019. It's unexpected that so largely proportionate people hold such views after so many years of the reunification. Germany has been the largest economic entity in Europe, but the issue of individual identification is so poor. This problem obviously stems from the drastic contrast of economic achievements between the two sides, but it's still astonishing that the percentage was so big. Thus, it is an arduous task to bridge this gap.

Concrete Measures to Solve Problems

Perfect and unified educational systems. It is self-evident that education is important both to an individual and to a country. In recent decades and centuries, the fact has been verified that the counties with developed educational systems can have excellent citizen quality, and the comprehensive national strength will be heightened. Understanding how education and training interact with the economy can help explain why some workers, businesses, and economies flourish while others falter (Radcliffe, 2022). The most direct role of Education is that it can improve the working skills, so that the whole labor productivity can be improved, and the national wealth will be added, so the country is rich.

The root of the imbalance between West and East Germany is the imbalance of economic development, as the west is rich and the east is poor relatively. This is the radioactive center of all other problems. This issue has a long history, and complex realities, but perfected and improved education is able to bridge the gap between the two sides, as “the education and training of a country's workforce is a major factor in determining how well the country's economy will perform” (CaixaBank Research, n.d.). This can be realized by activating the huge potential of the common people in the east, enhancing the employment rate. More people become qualified for better jobs, so the entire wealth of that region will be increased, and violence can be reduced, and society will be harmonized. At the meantime, becoming more qualified citizens can make a better social and cultural environment.

Push for integrated economic construction. There is a saying that all social problems are economic problems, which is thought to be one-sided. Social issues include at least five aspects, namely law, politics, culture, military affairs, and economy, but economy plays a very vital role in the whole, as it relates to the life of everyone in a country. “If you look around carefully, you will see that scarcity is a fact of life” (OpenStax, 2016), so economics is very important, as people always want more, and economics can meet their demands.

The cultural problems West and East Germany face is the imbalance of economics in the final analysis. Economic development can affect and decide the cultural issues. The first is the balancing in region. The East is lagging behind the West economically, and this imbalance is formed historically, so more economic resources and opportunities of being employed should careen to the East to bridge the imbalance to pursue the economic and cultural balance.

Furthermore, reinforced population flow between the two regions will reconcile the imbalance, and especially improve the positive views of the eastern people to the country. These people are mixed, and their ideas, views, and hopes can get blended together, to develop optimistically. Finally, the distribution of wealth should be fair enough. As Mr. Mahatma Gandhi said that the world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed, so a good distributing system can bring a good result of balancing of materials and culture between the West and East Germany.

Promote erection of fair system and policies. The promotion for fairness in the system and politics is the fundamental measure to take to correct the imbalance between the two sides. The fairness of rules cannot do without the fair process of making the rules, and a good procedure of making rules is important likewise.

Linked with the actual situation of the two regions, the first fairness should be that of voting system. The German voting system is too sophisticated for common people to understand and master, and so much so that the procedure of general election in 2009 was judged to be unconstitutional. Too complicated voting system is a kind of unfairness to someone who cannot master it, and those may mainly sit in the eastern part, as their experience with electoral history is shorter.

Based on the improvement, a verity of policies, including economic, cultural, and political ones, etc., ought to be fairer to the East. There is no absolute fairness, and any fairness should consider the reality, and be based on that. Fairness relates to rules, and impartial rules can extinguish any complaint and dissatisfaction to the reality. Meanwhile, it's a persistent process to check and correct the rules all the way. Another system for checking the fairness is also necessary.

Conclusions

The cultural policy of a country is decided by multiple factors, including history, economy, and traditional perception of its nationals, so is China. The cultural ideas of the Chinese people are formed based on a series of historical events, economical developmental levels, and geographical topographical territory, etc. For example, in the Spring and Autumn period, the spirits of Chinese people were brilliant, but as the totalitarianism got tightened, their spirits became monotonous; China is besieged by seas, mountains, and plateaus, so the Chinese culture is apt to conservative, scarce of aggressions; Chinese economic level has been low traditionally, but the Tang Dynasty was highly developed, so the culture then was more open. It's the same principle that the culture of most of the countries in the world is forged in this way.

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