

War Guilt - Japan vs Germany
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Anybody who puts on the same plane Japan's behaviour during World War II and the German one, and who comments unfavorably on Japan's post war response to its defeat with the German one is either very ignorant or needs a serious reset of his moral compass.

For a start, Nazi Germany embarked on a centrally planned and directed policy of physical extermination of the Jews and of the educated and leadership classes of "inferior" nations, such as the Poles. This was done systematically and supported by an ideology that stressed the supposedly inhuman, disease like nature of the Jews and racial inferiority of the Slavs. By contrast, the Japanese never had either a racist ideology (so that they can't repent of it today) nor a systematic policy of extermination or enslavement. In fact, the Japan's official ideology during the War put a stress on racial equality, the liberation of Asia from European colonialism and the brotherhood of Asian peoples. Of course, for some Japanese, including many of the leaders, this was only convenient propaganda, but thousands of others sincerely believed in it, and so did thousands of people in many Western colonies, where even today one can meet strong pro-Japanese sentiment.

One consequence of the Japanese official "anti-racist" ideology, was the treatment of the small number of Jews who found themselves living in Japan during the war. In spite of Japan's alliance with Germany, these Jews were treated as citizens of the countries whose passports they held. In particular, Jews with German passports were accorded the same treatment as other German citizens, in spite of repeated protests from Germany. One such person, Joseph Rosenstock, was appointed a conductor of the Nippon Philharmonic Orchestra and gave concerts throughout the Pacific War, in spite of boycotts and protests by German diplomats.

The Japanese certainly committed atrocities and war crimes, but these were not as a rule a matter of official policy. For example, although the treatment of allied prisoners of war was generally bad (for reasons which would take too long to explain here) there were attempts by individual camp commanders to ensure correct treatment. Such was, in fact, the situation in the prisoner of war camp at Hakodate, when Shigeo Emoto was camp commander. Emoto, a former College English Professor was aware of international law and ensured that it was strictly obeyed. There were other cases of this kind, but there was no general policy. It was the lack of such a policy rather than the existence of any deliberate policy of cruelty that was responsible for the bad treatment that the majority of prisoners of war received.

The same applies to Japanese behaviour towards prisoners taken on the battlefield. While there were cases of spontaneous massacres, there were also cases of spectacularly chivalrous behavior. Such was the case of the Lieutenant Commander Shunsaku Kudo, who commanded

the destroyer Ikazuchi. On March 2, 1942, Kudo ordered his ship to rescue several hundred sailors from one British and American destroyer that had been sunk. He did this, in spite of the fact, that while rescuing the enemy sailors, Ikazuchi was in great danger of a submarine attack. After their rescue, the British and American sailors received exemplary treatment on board of the Ikazuchi. Yet the fact of the rescue remained completely unknown until 1996, when one of the rescued sailors, the British diplomat Sam Falle, described it in his book, by which time Kudo had died. While there are many examples of brutal treatment of prisoners and civilian population by the Japanese, there are also plenty of examples of good treatment.

A great deal of anti-Japanese propaganda today originates from Korean nationalists and concerns supposed horrendous crimes that the Japanese committed against Koreans during the 40 years when Korea was a Japanese colony. But most of this is no more than propaganda and exaggeration. Japan indeed colonized Korea and attempted to assimilate the Korean population, just as it had successfully done with the population of Okinawa. The original motive was to prevent Russia doing exactly the same thing; in fact Japan fought a war with Russia in 1904-05 precisely over this issue. The war, by the way, started with a sudden Japanese attack on the Russian navy at Port Arthur, ten days before war was officially declared. The reaction of the British, who were Japan's main ally at that time, was ecstatic, the London Times wrote "The Japanese Navy has opened the war by an act of daring which is destined to take a place of honour in naval annals." The reaction of the American press was similar. Japan's colonization of Korea was done with full support and advice from the British and with tacit approval of the United States. For many years afterwards, the Japanese rule was described in the West in glowing terms. It introduced general education, hugely improved health, reduced inequalities and so on. But it also inflicted a huge humiliation on Korean national pride, which had just been born, due to the Japanese attempt to assimilate the Koreans and make them abandon their own language and culture and become Japanese.

Such things had successfully been done for centuries, from the Romans in their entire empire to the English in Scotland and Ireland. After the partitions of Poland both Russia and Prussia attempted to assimilate the Polish population in the same way. In fact, the Japanese used very little violence in their rule over Korea. In terms of human lives, the total losses that Korea suffered during the 40 years of Japanese rule are smaller than in just one of the many Polish uprisings against Russian rule. Far more Koreans died fighting as volunteers in the Japanese Imperial Army (over 20,000 are enshrined in the Yasukuni Shrine) than in all the acts of resistance against the Japanese rule. More than 800,000 Koreans volunteered to serve in the Japanese military as part of the Japanese volunteer soldier system for Koreans during the years 1938-43, of which the Japanese accepted just under 18,000. One of them was Park Chung-hee, later dictator and president of South Korea and the father of the current, extremely anti-Japanese, president Park Geun-hee.

Koreans also served as guards in Japanese prisoner of war camps. 23 Koreans were executed by the allies as war criminals in post-war trials, including general Hong Sa-ik, who was a camp commander. Most of them were later declared "victims of injustice and of Japanese imperialism" by a Korean government commission.

One of the most often repeated and most distorted myths concerning Japan's supposed crimes against Korea, concerns the so called "comfort women". This is too large a topic to discuss here but I refer anyone interested to my article (still incomplete and full of typos etc), which can be found here: <http://www.mimuw.edu.pl/~akoz/>

Finally about the claims that Germany has properly "atoned" for its crimes while Japan has not. Let me just consider only one aspect.

In 1965 the Korean government of Park Chung-hee signed a treaty with Japan, normalizing the relations between the two countries. Under the treaty South Korea received very large amounts of economic aid, grants, loans and, significantly, compensation for victims of Japanese rule. The Japanese government at that time offered to compensate individual victims, but the South Korean government refused the offer and insisted that it should receive all the money and itself compensate its citizens. Very little of this money was paid to individuals and instead was used for economic development of South Korea.

Nobody can dispute that Poland suffered far greater damage in human and economic terms at the hands of Germany than Korea at the hands of Japan (Poland lost nearly one fifth of its entire population, just over half of that number being Polish Jews) but the total compensation received both by the Polish state and individual Polish citizens from Germany is only a fraction of what Japan paid South Korea. In fact, after the war the Soviet Union made the Polish communist government it had established renounce its claims against East Germany and united Germany simply "inherited" this renunciation.

There is one more quite significant but almost totally unknown matter. The German Wehrmacht had military brothels system in many was quite similar to the Japanese "comfort women" system, except that it actually involved more abuse and compulsion. In occupied countries, such as Poland, the German authorities banned "private" prostitution, which made it possible to give women accused of being prostitutes the choice of going to prison or to Wehrmacht brothel. It is estimated that at least 30,000 women found themselves in such brothels. While the Japanese government has apologized for its comfort women system (which actually was an extension of the licensed prostitution system that existed both in Korea and Japan before the war and which involved a large number of Japanese prostitutes as well as those from other countries), Germany has never apologized or paid any compensation to any former Wehrmacht prostitutes. In fact, nobody has ever demanded any such things, since these women, which rightly or wrongly were viewed as collaborators in the occupied countries, never found any supporters or defenders.

The Soviet Union, of course, did not have any legal prostitution. Instead, the Soviet troops raped an estimated over one million women in Germany and in the "liberated countries", over 200,000 of whom died as a result. In fact, even women liberated from German camps were raped in large numbers. Of course not only has the Soviet Union or Russia never apologized for this but nobody has even even demanded such a thing, obviously because everyone knows very well what the response will be.