

Settled history?

(Fifth draft 19 August 2015)

Andrzej Kozlowski

The University of Warsaw

The battle

A battle is being waged over a obscure episode in the history of the War in the Pacific involving two close allies of the United States, which has been having a damaging effect on US foreign policy while largely escaping the attention of the US public.

The dispute concerns the so called “comfort women”, a euphemism for military prostitutes (or, as one of the competing versions would have it, “sex slaves”) used by the Japanese military during the Second World War.

The battle ground has largely been the United States, both at local and national levels. The weapons are [monuments](#) [[LADN](#)] being built in various parts of the United States, newspaper articles and lately school textbooks and the strategic aim is a long term influence on American public opinion.

The Textbook Controversy

The latest episode in this ongoing struggle involves a McGraw-Hill school history textbook, authored by a J.H Bentley and F. Ziegler [[BZ](#)]. Here is how the Wall Street Journal [[WSJ1](#)] presented this story:

In December, Japan’s foreign ministry asked U.S. publishing company McGraw-Hill Education to alter the Ziegler textbook’s description of Japan’s “comfort women” program during the war. That prompted a letter of protest from a group of prominent U.S. historians.

Unfortunately the offending passage is not quoted and neither is the letter of the protesting historians, who are described as “prominent” although it is not clear in which areas of history and how related they are to the matter in dispute.

So let’s now look at the full statement that so upset the Japanese government.

Women’s experiences in war were not always ennobling or empowering. The Japanese army forcibly recruited, conscripted, and dragooned as many as two hundred thousand women age fourteen to twenty to serve in military brothels, called “comfort houses” or “consolation centers.” The army presented the women to the troops as a gift from the emperor, and the women came from Japanese colonies such as Korea, Taiwan, and Manchuria and from occupied territories in the Philippines and elsewhere in southeast Asia. The majority of the women came from Korea and China.

Once forced into this imperial prostitution service, the “comfort women” catered to between twenty and thirty men each day. Stationed in war zones, the women often confronted the same risks as soldiers, and many became casualties of war. Others were killed by Japanese soldiers, especially if they tried to escape or contracted venereal diseases. At the end of the war, soldiers massacred large numbers of comfort women to cover up the operation. The impetus behind the establishment of comfort houses for Japanese soldiers came from the horrors of Nanjing, where the mass rape of Chinese women had taken place. In trying to avoid such atrocities, the Japanese army created another horror of war. Comfort women who survived the war experienced deep shame and hid their past or faced shunning by their families. They found little comfort or peace after the war.

An intelligent adult person reading that Japanese army forced 200,000 women into prostitution and that these women had to cater to between 20 and 30 men per day will naturally want to know the size of the Imperial Japanese Army in the “war zones”. In fact, one only needs access to the Internet and a browser to find out. One way is to look up the [United States Strategic Bombing Survey \[USS\]](#). We find

The Japanese built up their army ground forces from a strength of approximately 1,700,000 at the outbreak of war, to a peak strength of approximately 5,000,000. Japanese army medical records indicate that the aggregate number deployed in the Solomons, New Guinea, Marshalls, Gilberts, Carolines, Marianas, Philippines, Okinawa, Iwo Jima, and the Aleutians was approximately 668,000, of whom 316,000 were killed in action; some 220,000 were deployed in Burma, of whom 40,000 were killed; and 1,100,000 were deployed in China, of whom 103,000 were killed. Most of the remainder were in Manchuria, Korea, or the home islands, and did not actively participate in the decisive campaigns of the war.

Thus altogether there were less than 2,000,000 Japanese troops in all the war theatres. Even if all of them participated in sexual activities with 200,000 women, it is hard to imagine where

they would find the time and the energy to do any fighting. Even if the attrition rate for “comfort women” was 10% (higher than for the Japanese army in China) or even 20%, it would still imply an unrealistically high level of sexual activity, in addition to the huge cost of having to cater for such a large number of women.

However astonishing the claims made in the Ziegler textbook, they are still modest compared with what the Wall Street Journal’s [“China Real Time” \[WSJ2\]](#) blog seems ready to uncritically accept. According to it:

Recent Chinese research puts the total number of wartime comfort women across Asia at around 400,000, at least half of them Chinese.

Presumably these Chinese “researchers” discovered the additional 200,000 women in China, where just over 1,000,000 Japanese soldiers were deployed. This is particularly intriguing in view of the following description of the condition of the Japanese forces in Asia by the Japanese historian Ikuhiko Hata in the Cambridge History of Japan [\[IH2\]](#)

Because Japan’s limited national strength made it difficult to support the rapidly growing Co-Prosperity Sphere, Japan made up for its disadvantages by a ruthless policy of local plunder, reminiscent of early Spanish colonial policy. Land was seized for the settlement of Japanese immigrants in Manchuria; on the Chinese mainland business and enterprises were confiscated; and the Japanese forces fighting in China and later in the Pacific lived off the land. The army purchased daily necessities with excessive issues of unbacked scrip that inevitably brought local inflation. In modern history there has been no other instance of a foreign expeditionary force’s adopting a policy of local self-sufficiency from the very outset.

It is rather hard to imagine how an army living off the land in this fashion would be able to keep one “comfort woman” for every five soldiers, particularly if each of these soldiers had to engage in sexual intercourse 6 times a day.

The next natural question is : why was it necessary for the Japanese to “forcibly recruit, conscript and dragoon” so many women? Would it not have been easier to do what so many other armies have done: obtain the services of professional prostitutes? Thanks to its “official” military brothels (more than the desire to protect “racial purity”) one of the few war crimes the Wehrmacht did not commit on a mass scale was rape. After the second world war the United States Army maintained “official” military brothels in Vietnam, South Korea and even in Japan. During the Pacific War the an unofficial approach was used, described [here](#) [\[MMN\]](#) . Why could not the Japanese Imperial Army avail itself of the same method? Was there a shortage of prostitutes in Korea, China and Japan itself? (That would certainly come as a big surprise to anyone who recently visited any of these countries). Or perhaps Korean prostitutes were too patriotic to perform their work for Japanese soldiers unlike the 800,000

Korean men (including the father of the current president of South Korea) who volunteered to fight for Japan under the “volunteer soldier system” during the period 1938-43 [BP] One might expect that at least some of the comfort women were prostitutes who got paid for their services: there exists advertisements for comfort women published in Korean newspapers in the 1930’s offering pay many times higher than a graduate of the most prestigious university could obtain.

It would also seem natural that many Japanese soldiers would have preferred Japanese women. Indeed there certainly were Japanese “comfort women”, although the Ziegler textbook fails to mention them. Why is there such a reluctance to mention this fact? Is it perhaps because even American school children would find it hard to believe that the Japanese soldiers “forcibly recruited” into their military brothels their own wives or sisters?

Let us now turn to the letter of protest from the group of what the Wall Street Journal calls “prominent American historians” [AD, HA] It begins in this astounding manner.

As historians, we express our dismay at recent attempts by the Japanese government to suppress statements in history textbooks both in Japan and elsewhere about the euphemistically named “comfort women” who suffered under brutal system of sexual exploitation in the service of the Japanese imperial army during World War II.

Historians continue to debate whether the numbers of women exploited were in the tens of thousands or the hundreds of thousands and what precise role the military played in their procurement. Yet, the careful research of historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki in Japanese government archives and the testimonials of survivors throughout Asia have rendered beyond doubt the essential features of a system that amounted to state-sponsored sexual slavery. Many of the women who were conscripted against their will and taken to stations at the front where they had no freedom of movement. Survivors described being raped by officers and beaten for trying to escape.

Has any ever written a defence of anything more damning to the thing being defended than this? *Historians continue to debate whether the numbers of women exploited were in the tens of thousands or the hundreds of thousands...* -but if so how can these “prominent historians” justify teaching American schoolchildren that the number was 200,000, without any indication that it might be the subject of a debate within their profession?

...and what precise role the military played in their procurement - isn’t this another crucial issue? If the precise role of the military is “debated”, then how can one state in a textbook for children, who have no access to any other information that: *The Japanese army forcibly recruited, conscripted, and dragooned ... “ and The army presented the women to the troops as a gift from the emperor ?*

But an even more shocking distance separates the statements: *Others were killed by Japanese soldiers, especially if they tried to escape or contracted venereal diseases. At the end of the war, soldiers massacred large numbers of comfort women to cover up the operation* from the Ziegler textbook and *Survivors described being raped by officers and beaten for trying to escape* from the historians letter. Note the difference between not just the nature of the claim; murder vs. rape and beating for trying to escape (by no means uncommon in ordinary, civilian brothels) but also the degree of assurance of the assertion. It is impossible to believe that the authors of the letter somehow did not notice the horrendous implications of the claims made in the Ziegler textbook. They also must have been aware that not only is there not the slightest evidence of any of these alleged murders but the claims made contradict everything that is known about the behaviour of the Japanese Army at the time of its surrender as well as common sense. There is no doubt that the commanders of Japanese prisoner of war camps were perfectly aware of the war crimes committed in them and that they would be held responsible by the allies, but no steps at all were taken to cover anything up, least of all murdering the witnesses. The Japanese certainly did plan to kill all the prisoners of war if fight was continued to the death, but once they knew of the Emperor's decision to surrender they behaved with exemplary discipline. The British naval officer, diplomat and a prisoner of war of the Japanese in Indonesia Sam Falle [\[SF\]](#) describes how the prisoners were made to dig trenches that were meant to become their own graves once the allies landed but how suddenly the food rations improved and the camp commander addressed the officers in English: *Gentlemen the emperor has decided that in order to prevent further bloodshed the war should end. Gentlemen, you are now free. Next time, we win.* Some of camp guards were later tried and hanged. No attempt was made to cover up any evidence. The famous Jewish Indian general J.F.R Jacob also witnessed Japanese surrender in Indonesia, where he served as an officer in the British Indian Army. This is what he wrote about the Japanese surrender: *The Japanese in defeat were disciplined and behaved with dignity. The working parties provided by them were a model of efficiency. Once assigned a task they executed it silently and efficiently.* [\[JFR\]](#)

If they Japanese did not attempt to cover up any of the war crimes for which they were sure to be persecuted, why would they committed a terrible crime to cover up something for which they could be perfectly sure they wouldn't be? The victorious allies were perfectly aware of the existence of the comfort women system and yet there was only one recorded case of a war-crimes prosecution related to it. This case involved about 200 to 300 Dutch women who were recruited in an internment camp as "comfort women" for military brothels in Semarang, in Dutch East Indies. The story is described in detail in [\[CSS\]](#) p. 20, but it is so important that it is worth repeating here. An remarkably interesting fact is that the Dutch court decided that 65 of the women were forced into prostitution. It noted that one girl, who was discovered to be under 16, was sent back to the internment camp by the Japanese. Two months later a staff officer in the Ministry of War in Tokyo, Colonel Tadashi Odajima, discovered the fact of the forced recruitment during an inspection trip to Java. The women were immediately released and the three brothels in Semarang were closed. After Japan's defeat officers involved in the forced recruitment were tried by the Dutch and punished, one

by hanging.

Clearly, the most remarkable fact in this story is that the Dutch court decided that only a minority of the women were forced to work in the brothels, while the rest did so for other reasons. The same fact was confirmed by testimonies of survivors. By contrast, as pointed out is [\[CSS\]](#), according to Korean media (as well as American history textbook writers), all Korean comfort women were “sex slaves” who were either deceived or kidnapped into serving in comfort stations.

The historians who signed the letter of protest have are at least more concerned with protecting their reputation than Messrs Bentley and Ziegler. They carefully avoid associating themselves with any of the most outrageous claims made in their textbook (or on the Glendale plaque). They even admit the existence of a “historical debate” but they certainly do not treat the two sides equally. The letter is written, ostensibly, in defence of "Japanese historians" and "established" (or shouldn't one say "settled" as in “settled science”) history whose freedom is supposedly threatened by the Japanese government, conservative politicians and "right wing extremists". However, only one Japanese historian is named, Chuo University's Yoshiaki Yoshimi, whose reputation as a historian is based primarily on his discovery in 1993 of a document that confirmed what had always been known to all military historians of the Pacific war, namely that the Japanese Army set up military brothels in all the countries where Japanese troops were stationed. None of the historians who signed the protest letter is a military historian (most are not even specialists in modern history of Japan) but in their letter they refer to “established history” that “right wingers” and the government of Shinzo Abe are trying to “question” by “deploying legalistic arguments” and moreover, have “slandered the survivors”. What is not mentioned is that there is a number of distinguished Japanese historians, as “prominent” as the signatories of the American letter who, moreover, are specialists in modern history of Japan and who indeed have questioned the the Bentley-Ziegler version of history. In fact, 19 of them have a signed [letter](#) requesting changes in the textbook.

One of signatories of the letter of the Japanese historians is Ikuhiko Hata, the doyen of military historians of the Pacific war, author of numerous books and articles on its aspects, many translated and published in English, visiting professor at top universities such as Harvard and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Hata had of course known about comfort women long before the subject became controversial, he knew former Japanese comfort women, some of whom even attended reunions with former soldiers. Hata is the author of a careful study of the comfort women issue, the results of which are summarised [here](#). He estimates the total number of comfort women at 20,000 (about 40% being Japanese). The Japan Times article [\[JT\]](#) also mentions that Yoshimi’s estimate of the total number of comfort women is at least 50,000 based on there being one comfort women for 100 soldiers. But if that was the case then, assuming the distribution of the comfort women matched that of the troops, the majority of the comfort women would have been in Japan and Korea (where ordinary civilian brothels were available) and almost nothing stated in the Bentley and

Ziegler textbook would be applicable to this situation.

Another signatory is Tsutomu Nishioka of the Tokyo Christian University, a historian of Korea who has studied the comfort women issue closely and whose [article](#) I strongly recommend for more background and additional information on the issue.

Written from a very different ideological perspective but immensely valuable is the book “The Comfort Women” by C. Sarah Soh [[CSS](#)]. In some ways it is a strange book; it is created with the apparatus of leftist feminist sociology or anthropology, which is much like some of the less orthodox variants of traditional Marxism [[LK](#)]. As with Marxism, almost the conceptual part of the apparatus is thoroughly soaked in political ideology. For a conservative historian or even one that is merely “positivist” this apparatus is totally unusable and essentially worthless. Moreover, while this sort of approach is full of moralising judgements faintly disguised as analysis, unlike traditional Marxism it never really offers an alternative to what it condemns. For example, “capitalism” is the principal source of all evil for both Marxism and modern sociological leftism, but while former offers its own Utopia as the supposed cure, the latter stops at condemnation. The Marxist, because he commits himself to concrete (even though always shifting) alternative, is open to refutation (not that he ever accepts it) and experience has decisively shown the truth of the old joke: “capitalism is the exploitation of man by man and socialism exactly the reverse”. In the area that is the principal concern of the book, it could be argued that the behaviour of Soviet troops in “liberated” Europe and in Germany as well as numerous phenomena such as the persistence of [prostitution in Castro’s Cuba](#) [[MH](#)] of provide a powerful refutation of ideological claims of this kind, but leftist social science is immune to refutation. Surprisingly and fortunately ideology is far from all there is to be found in professor Soh’s book. If one skips the ideological passages and learns to ignore the irritating jargon, the book contains a great wealth of useful historical information and as well as a lot of traditional historical analysis based on sifting and comparing evidence from independent sources. In many ways, the results are more impressive than they would have been in a less ideologically one-sided text, and often seems that the author, while wearing red tinted spectacles is still able to see blue colours with almost perfect clarity. This actually gives the author the right to be regarded as another truly independent witness. In particular, Soh book provides evidence for the following points that are in clear opposition to the assertions made in the Bentley-Ziegler textbook:

1. That it is very unlikely that any Korean comfort women could have been recruited forcibly by the Japanese and that the primary force driving the recruitment of comfort women both in Korea and Japan was economic and social conditions that existed there even before the Pacific war and that the comfort women system was essentially an extension of Japan’s existing peace-time licensed prostitution system. Rape and abduction of women in war zones in China and Southeast Asian countries undoubtedly occurred, as it did in all war zones during the Second World War, but these were not part of Japanese military policy and tended to occur towards the end of the war when central control over

many of the Japanese troops had broken down. Many of the Korean women were sold by their parents or duped by Korean recruiters, which actually was a very common practice in recruiting “licensed prostitutes” in Korea and to a lesser extent in Japan.

2. That many of the “victims testimonies” that have had such a large impact on world opinion on this issue are manifestly and provably false (see the section “Stories That Make History” in Chapter 2 of [\[CSS\]](#)).
3. That the women in ordinary “comfort stations” (*ianjo*) were normally not “slaves” or no more so than prostitutes in licensed brothels in Japan and Korea where they normally worked for a limited time until they completed their contracts. It was not usual for violence to be used in ordinary *ianjo*. There seems to be evidence that what Soh calls “criminal *ianjo*” sprang up in some battle fronts, such as the Philippines, in the last months of the war, when central control over the army broke down. These “criminal *ianjo*” were set up by the troops and violence and rape were practiced against victims who were forcibly abducted. Obviously, these criminal *ianjo*, were not set up as part of the Army policy (they did not even follow the basic health regulations that were the main point of setting up ordinary *ianjo*) but examples of military marauding, which frequently occurs after a military defeat and for which, under the laws of war, the Army in which the marauders had previously served is not held responsible.
4. That the narrative on the comfort women issue in Korea has been driven to a large extent by Korean nationalists, who use invention, falsification and suppression of dissenting opinions in Korea.

The signatories of the letter of the American historians are probably aware of these facts, and the startling contradiction between the claims made in the Bentley-Ziegler textbook. One can only assume that they would argue that the purpose of their letter was to support these claims but to defend “academic freedom” (which in this case is the freedom of providing school children with the most extreme version of a view of historical events that are subject to an ongoing dispute between historians). Indeed, they even admit that Japan is not the only offender against this kind of freedom:

We recognise that the Japanese government is not alone in seeking to narrate history in its own interest. In the United States, state and local boards of education sought to rewire textbooks to obscure accounts of African American slavery or eliminate “unpatriotic” references to the Vietnam war, for example. In 2014, Russia passed a law criminalising the dissemination of what the government deems false information about Soviet activities during World War II. This year, on the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide, a Turkish citizen can be sent to jail for asserting that the government bears responsibility. The Japanese

government, however, is now directly targeting the work of historians both at home and abroad.

In view of the tone of the letter of the “prominent historians” it is perhaps not surprising that American “state and local boards” have been included along with Russia and Turkey (and of course Japan) among the worst offenders who attempt to “narrate history in their own interest”. It is also not surprising that the supposed offences are committed only by one side of the political divide as in the United States there is obviously no such thing as pressure from the political Left for ideologically preferred (“politically correct”) historical narrative. It is, of course, purely coincidental that the person who played a key role in getting the Bentley-Ziegler textbook approved by the California Board of Education happens to be the very colourful Chinese born former Democratic California State Senator Leland Yin Yee, currently facing charges of corruption and gun trafficking to Philippine Islamic terrorists. But still, it does seem surprising that Japan is the only one of the sides involved in this particular historical debate that is accused of “targeting the work of historians”. Perhaps the “prominent historians” feel that there is no point in naming North Korea or China (although the Wall Street Journal seems is ready to quote, seemingly with a straight face, “research by Chinese historians”) but would it not be appropriate to mention in this context South Korea, where prominent Korean scholars Ahn Byeong-jik , Lee Young-hoon and others have been subject to vilification, public humiliation, and even physical attacks for arguing that the version of the history of the “comfort women” offered to the American children in the Bentley and Ziegler textbook is largely nationalist propaganda?

The Origins

In 1977 and 1983 a Japanese called Seiji Yoshida, a member of the Japan Communist Party during its Stalinist period, published two books of war-time memoirs in which he confessed that as a soldier in the Japanese imperial army he had been involved in abducting 205 young Korean women on the Korean Jeju island, who were then forced to become sex slaves for the Japanese Army.

Yoshida’s books made him famous. He gave numerous interviews and lectures throughout Japan and in South Korea, where he publicly begged forgiveness for his crimes. A Korean television station serialised his story. Yoshida’s testimony was accepted at face value by the Japanese media and particularly Japan’s largest newspaper, Asahi Shimbun, which published 18 articles based on Yoshida’s books and testimonies. Yoshida’s Stalinist past, of course, never bothered anyone in the Asahi Shimbun. While it is well established [[AM](#)] that when Yoshida was JCP member, the party served essentially as an extension of the KGB residency in Japan, the newspaper itself served as a kind of public relations agency for the KGB during the 1970s. Concerning senior members of the Japan Socialist Party who worked for the KGB in the 1970s Mitriohin noted that their motivation was both “financial and ideological”. As has since become clear, that is also an accurate description of Yoshida’s motivation. For that reason and for convenience in what follows I shall refer to Yoshida’s and Yoshinda inspired

version of the comfort women issue as “the party line”.

In 1991 Yoshimi, a professor of modern history of Japan at Chuo University, discovered a Japanese government document that “proved” that the Japanese Army established and run “comfort stations”. This discovery made Yoshimi famous and, together with Yoshida’s “confessions” is thought to have been instrumental in leading Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary’s Yohei Kono issue an official apology to South Korea in 1993.

The significance attached to Yoshimi’s “discovery” was strange to any one with even a little interest in military history, since every professional military historian as well as many amateurs interested in the Pacific war had long known about the existence of Japanese military brothels just like every historian of the second world war in Europe has always been aware of the existence of analogous military brothels run by the Wehrmacht. What is significant is that the document found by Yoshimi is that it very different from what is implied in the Ziegler textbook. The document, dated March 1938, states that certain individuals who attempted to recruit women to work in “comfort stations” in China were arrested by the police and that, in order prevent damage to the prestige of the Army and prevent “social problems” , further recruitment should be carried out by proper personnel with cooperation with the police.

The document is clearly ambiguous and can be interpreted either as a statement that the process of recruitment should strictly followed Japanese laws, which allowed employment of registered prostitutes (of course with their own agreement) or that the Army should collaborate with the authorities in breaking the same said laws. It was the Asahi newspaper that immediately adopted the latter interpretation and then extended it, in a way bearing a remarkable resemblance to the standard practices of totalitarian propaganda, to a “proof” that the Japanese army had kidnapped or deceived between 80,000 and 200,000 Korean women (the document only refers to attempts to deceive Japanese women).

The rest of the story is that of a complete disintegration of the propaganda campaign in Japan and it’s subsequent transfer abroad, particularly to the United States. In 1992 Ikuhiko Hata travelled to Jeju island, where Yoshida claimed to have abducted Korean women. It did not take long to establish that Yoshida’s claims were complete fabrications. Four years later Yoshida himself admitted that he had fabricated his story. Asahi Shimbun desperately tried to extricate itself by repudiating all the articles it had published which depended on Yoshida’s discredited claims and by even presenting itself as a “victim of liar”. Eventually a public outcry forced the Asahi president’s resignation. Asahi is now being sued by more than 20000 Japanese living in the US, demanding that the newspaper runs advertisement’s in the US admitting and apologising for the lies it had published. The New York Times, which has never apologised for it’s own numerous Yoshidas, among whom Walter Duranty is only the most famous, proclaimed criticism of Asahi a grave threat to press freedom and democracy. At the same time it has been [backpedalling](#) on the “kidnapping claims” and even admitting that : *There is little evidence that the Japanese military abducted or was directly involved in*

entrapping women in Korea, which had been a Japanese colony for decades when the war began...

“Little evidence” actually means none at all. As usual, the New York Times keeps accusing “unspecified revisionists” of “denial” although it is never stated who exactly denies what. The New York Times is, of course expert in “denial” particularly at the time when it matters the most - it denied the Holocaust while it was going on [[LL](#)], it denied the [Holodomor](#) while it was going on [[HOL](#)], it is engaged in a [continual denial](#) of genocidal intentions on the part of Hamas, the PA, Hizbollah, and Iran against Israel and the Jews [[CA](#)], and so on, but it is always on the lookout for “deniers” when it loses an argument about evidence. Neither Hata nor any other respected Japanese historian “deny” that some of the comfort women were recruited by deception, some were sold by their parents, some may well have been even kidnapped by traffickers - the kind of things that were common in the civilian brothels in Korea and Japan. What they do deny is two crucial things: that the Japanese army was involved in a deliberate and systematic breaking of Japan’s own laws both in Japan and in Korea and that recruitment of comfort women was in any sense a “crime” committed by a colonial power (Japan) against its colony (Korea).

The “Victims Version”

Another effect of the exposure of Yoshida’s falsehoods was again something which strongly resembles “climate science”: that the claims and figures about the comfort women like those in the Ziegler textbook, are completely independent of Yoshida’s inventions and represented “settled history” confirmed by research of respected historians, while everybody who questioned it was a “right-wing nationalist”, “revisionist” and “denier” (the latter word intended to darkly hint at comparisons with Holocaust deniers).

But which historians confirmed the party line? The authors of the letter of the 19 US historians mention only one name and that is Yoshiaki Yoshimi. Unfortunately for this claim, Yoshimi has long since [given up](#) on the view that the Japanese army itself was involved in any kidnappings and has switched to the view that the Japanese army was guilty of not investigating the kidnappings, punishing the culprits and returning the victims to their homes [[JF](#)]. Yoshimi also blames the Japanese Army for setting up the comfort women system, which he the cause of everything else that followed. No sensible person can deny that the world would be better without wars, armies, prostitution, and many other things. But, as the experience of Ukraine has so clearly demonstrated, not having an army and relying on international guarantees, not only does not prevent war but encourages it. As the Soviet army so vividly demonstrated during its advance on Berlin, not having a military brothels system does not guarantee a better behaved military.

It is easy to agree with Yoshimi that Japanese army should have checked if all the comfort women were there voluntarily but if it had done so it certainly would be remarkably different from all the other armies both at the time of the Pacific war and after. All armies

dealt with prostitutes whether officially in military brothels or unofficially in civilians ones and trafficking of women was (and still is) very common. Moreover, in both Japan and Korea one of the most common ways for a young woman to become a prostitute was to be sold by her parents to repay a debt. The women had to work until the debt was repaid. Unlike in Christian societies of the West, prostitution, which existed in both countries from the most ancient times, carried little stigma. In fact, once Christian Portuguese arrived in Japan in the 16th century, many of them found the system very congenial:

Black slaves were even able to buy – or otherwise acquire – Japanese girls to take back with them to Macao; much to the disgust of the Jesuit missionaries, who strongly denounced but failed to stop the practice. These girls were mostly sold into servitude for a trifling sum by their own parents. Many of them came from the Shimabara Peninsula near Nagasaki, where the peasantry lived on the barest subsistence-line or below it. The Italian merchant-adventurer, Francesco Carletti, who visited Japan in 1597/98, was (or professed to be) horrified by this 'most shameless immorality' of the Portuguese. They hired the girls by the day, or the week, or the month, or for years on end, as they felt inclined, 'and in some cases married them themselves'. The Dutch and English who traded at Hirado from 1609 onwards, behaved in the same way. The Diary of Richard Cocks, 1611-1623, is replete with references to these women. [\[CRB\]](#)

Even when Japan was closed to all Westerners except for the Dutch, who were confined to the small artificial fan-shaped island Deshima in the bay of Nagasaki, the latter were still able to procure Japanese prostitutes. They were not allowed to take out of the country any children born out of such liaisons, but they were allowed to provide for their education. These practices continued until the end of the Edo period. After the Meiji restoration a system of licensed prostitution, modeled on European practices, was introduced, which required prostitutes to subject themselves to venereal disease examination. Unlicensed prostitution was criminalized.

The Japanese system of licensed prostitution was introduced into Korea about 30 years before Japanese colonization. Soon Korean entrepreneurs joined the Japanese ones, both as owners and recruiters. Buying young girls from their parents as well as various methods of deception were rife. When Imperial Japan Army decided to establish the comfort women system, it subcontracted its running to precisely the same entrepreneurs. There is evidence that it made some, but not very extensive, methods to stem the most obvious abuses. It certainly would be unrealistic to hold army to a much higher standard in this respect than the armies in other countries or indeed legal civilian establishments. There is, indeed, no reason to think that the United States military observed higher standards either during the Pacific War when it relied on “unofficial” services (described [here](#) [\[MMN\]](#)) or later when it set up official brothels for troops stationed in Japan, Vietnam and Korea. The Wehrmacht, as mentioned earlier had military brothels in all occupied countries and there is plenty of evidence that women in occupied countries, including a number of [Polish women](#), were victims of trafficking and were not free to leave [\[CG\]](#). There is plenty of evidence that the

treatment of the women in the Wehrmacht brothels was incomparably worse than in Japanese *ianjo*. The standard German procedure in occupied countries was to first declare all prostitution illegal, and then give real and alleged prostitutes the choice between prison and German “comfort stations”. It is estimated that there were about 35,000 women in the Wehrmacht military brothels in occupied Eastern Europe. (I am not counting here well known cases of sex slavery, rape and so on that were always a feature of concentration and death camps.)

Yet, unlike Japan, Germany has never apologised or offered to pay compensation or even been asked to do so (although it does not prevent chancellor Merkel from lecturing the Japanese on the subject of proper contrition). Moreover, there have been no demands for compensation, or apologies, no international resolutions. The women who worked in the brothels, whether rightly or wrongly, were regarded as collaborators by the populations of the occupied countries, and after the end of the occupation were lucky if they escaped retribution. Few voices have been raised in their defence since. In fact, the situation in Korea and China was the same, until the nationalist (and in China the communist regime) discovered that it could be used as a tool of propaganda war with which they could try to bludgeon Japan’s international reputation.

Having conceded defeat on the abduction issue left wing Japanese media turned to the treatment of the comfort women, who are invariably described as “sex slaves”. Since, however, this description is ambiguous and can be applied to most prostitutes working in civilian brothels in Japan and Korea before the war, the proponents of the argument that the employment “comfort women” by the Japanese army was a unique war crime, needed to find evidence of something much worse than one would expect of and that had to mean torture and murder.

However, there is not a single witness who has claimed to have actually seen such forms of abuse; at most there is hearsay.

The only “evidence” for the claims of kidnapping of Korean women, derive from a small number of surviving former comfort women. These former comfort women begin to come forward with their stories after Yoshida’s revelations, when their cause had been taken up by South Korean media and government. Since Yoshida’s story has been totally discredited (by others as well as by his own admission) it is, of course, a key element of the “party line” to argue that there was completely no relation between Yoshida and the Asahi Shimbun articles, and Korean TV serial’s based on them, and the sudden public appearance of ageing Korean comfort women. However, there are plenty of reasons to take a more cynical view of this matter, particularly in view of the strong and active involvement of the Korean government in the issue and significant discrepancies between the testimonies of the former comfort women given at different times . In fact C. Sara Soh in Chapter 2 of [\[CSS\]](#) gives details of spectacular differences between the testimonies given by the same women at different times that cannot possibly be explained as the effect of failing memory or trauma, see also Hata’s

article [[IH1](#)] for the 9 different versions of the “kidnapping” of the former comfort woman Lee Yong-Soo) .

The idea that the victims testimony is always right is always dangerous, and is vastly more so when the number of surviving victims is a tiny percentage of the total, and particularly when they find themselves in an atmosphere as charged as the one that exists today in South Korea. Can one imagine any elderly former comfort woman in Korea today publicly admitting that she decided to be a prostitute for the Japanese army because of the money (which was undoubtedly very good). And even if it could be proved that every one of the surviving Korean former “comfort women” was deceived or even kidnapped, would that constitute a proof of a systematic violation of Japanese law by the Japanese army in Korea, something that is in complete contradiction with everything we know about the conditions that existed in both Japan and Korea at that time [[MP](#), [BAS](#)].

The most disgraceful thing that is sometimes attempted in this debate is comparisons to Holocaust Denial. These are less likely to be made in debates between professional historians, but can be found in comments sections of blogs and on social media, where the historians who reject the party line on the CW issue are sometimes compared to David Irving. Of course, the same kind of disgusting statements can be frequently in the hate-filled world of climate-alarmism.

To introduce a personal note here: it is exactly this sort of thing that induced me to reluctantly enter into both of these disputes. To compare the evidence for the party line on the comfort women issue or the evidence for the catastrophic view of global warming to the evidence for Holocaust in itself constitutes the most insidious form of Holocaust denial. My father was a Jew born in what before the Second World War used to be Polish Ukraine. With the exception of just two persons, all of his relatives were murdered soon after the German army entered Ukraine following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. I learnt about these events from my father and my uncle, but it is most certainly not because of what I heard from them that I am sure that the Holocaust took place. There is a vast amount of independent evidence, of the kind that does not exist to support the claims of the Bentley and Ziegler textbook. I myself have been to Ukraine, where my grandparents and almost all the Jewish inhabitants of the town where my father was born were executed by the SS. A few years ago there were still living Ukrainians who could point to the place where the executions took place and describe what happened. These were independent witnesses, who had no motive to lie or even to embellish their accounts.

There are countless number of such witnesses all over Eastern Europe. And then, there are even more convincing ones. One of these was Axel von dem Bussche-Streithorst, a 23 year old Saxon aristocrat and a captain of the Wehrmacht, who taken part in innumerable battles in Russia, and had received the highest German decorations for bravery. In 1942 Bussche accidentally walked into a scene of mass extermination of Jews by the SS at the Dubno airport in Ukraine. The event scarred for the rest of his life. Following what he saw Bussche

joint the military conspiracy lead by Klaus Schenk on Stauffenberg and volunteered to try to kill Hitler in a suicide bombing. The plot failed because before the attempt could be made Bussche lost a leg in another battle with the Russians (for which he was awarded the highest German military distinction - the Knight's Cross). Bussche survived the war and has frequently talked in public about what he saw at Dubno airport. [[PH](#)]

Another remarkable witness was the Polish officer Witold Pilecki, and a member of the Polish Resistance. Pilecki voluntarily became a prisoner at Auschwitz, in order to find out what was going on there and to organize resistance. Although, as a Polish nationalist, Pilecki was not particularly sympathetic to the Jews, in his deeply shocking reports, he provided the first detailed information about their extermination. After the war Pilecki was arrested, tortured, tried and judicially murdered by the post-war communist regime. His reports, which have a shattering effect (and should be read by anyone who feels any temptation to compare the Japanese *ianjo* and the Holocaust) remained unknown until 2000 [[WP](#)]. An English translation is available [here](#).

It is of these, and an enormous number of other independent testimonies as well as material evidence, as well as numerous clear statements by Nazi leaders [[AR](#)] and the Nazi ideology, that the case for believing in the Holocaust rests on. Unless the Japanese are a truly demonic people, if the allegations made by Bentley and Ziegler were true, I have no doubt that there would be witnesses comparable in trustworthiness to von dem Bussche. Instead there is the self-confessed liar Yoshida. In addition, when crimes of the magnitude are committed, there is always an ideology that serves to justify them and to silence human consciences. But no ideology of this kind can be found in pre-war Japan, except in a grotesque demonisation in Chinese and Korean mass media.

There is also another aspect of the matter, where a better analogy comes from the debate about "catastrophic global warming". By profession I am a mathematician and like many mathematicians I have some interest in science and especially physics. However, I have never found atmospheric physics - the part of physics that is most relevant to climate, particularly interesting, mostly because it involves a rather pedestrian kind of mathematics. So when I first heard of global warming, I had no reason for scepticism. However, two things brought my attention to this subject. One of them, was the way the proponents of the impending catastrophe were from the beginning exaggerating the degree of certainty that could be produced by their models. The second thing, was the vehemence and even hatred with which people who pointed out this fact, obvious to anyone with basic knowledge of physics and statistics, were attacked. This kind of thing never happens in science unless something else, politics and ideology become involved. The same is true, of course, of history. One day I heard Freeman Dyson, one of the greatest physicists in the history of the subject, confirm openly what I had suspected: that the models on which these catastrophic predictions were based were worthless. The same thing was pointed out by many leading experts in atmospheric physics and other areas relevant to this subject, for example, Richard Lindzen of MIT, or more recently [Judith Curry](#), the former chair of the School of Earth and Atmospheric

Sciences, at the Georgia Institute of Technology. In every case such statements were followed by historical personal attacks, name calling, character assassination and all the methods which I knew so well from my childhood spent in communist Poland. These attacks often came from people who can barely tell the difference between carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide. It was always obvious that this has nothing to do with science just as a great deal of the “outrage” over the “comfort women” issue, particularly in Korea and among leftists world wide, has nothing to do with history.

An independent witness

As I mentioned above: it turns out that there is an independent and well informed and as objective witness whose testimony should be considered as among the most important documents on the subject of the "comfort women" and Japanese military brothels during the Pacific War. And yet, his unpublished but available on the Internet in the form of a photocopied typescript, seems to have been largely ignored in the debates of this issue. The witnesses name is Gordon Thomas and the document is entitled *RABAUL 1942-1945 An Account Of Four Years As A Prisoner Of War Of The Japanese* [GT]. The typescript is not dated, but it appears to have been typed soon after Thomas's release from captivity, probably still in the 1940s.¹

For three years, until Japan's surrender, Thomas was a civilian prisoner of war of the Japanese. However, unlike almost all other prisoner's of war, Thomas was not living in a prison camp but was attached to the Supply Headquarters of the Japanese Army in and around Rabaul in New Guinea. This gave him an almost unique on the Japanese soldiers and their life, which he could view as an outsider but from inside. Together with two engineers and a butcher, Thomas worked as a handyman and cook at the local ice-works where perishable foods, including fresh meet, was kept and issued and where ice could be obtained. Due to the obvious importance of the freezer in the climate of New Guinea, the freezer became a social centre of Rabaul, with soldiers of all ranks coming to get “ice water” and sometimes bringing beer and sake and even holding night-time celebrations. This, in spite of the fact that the freezer was plastered with signs “No entrance except on business”, “Don’t talk to foreigners, they are spies”. In fact, Japanese soldiers routinely ignored the signs and often brought the prisoners gifts of cigarettes and candy and talked on subjects ranging from their families and farms to English literature, in the case of the better educated ones, usually but not always, officers.

Before the war Thomas was a journalist and a magazine editor and his memoirs display a natural flair for writing and acute powers of observation. They also show a great deal of what today would be called “racial prejudice” but what at the time was was universally held to be

¹ After writing this article I learned that Thomas’ manuscript, with small changes, was published in 2012 under the title: “Prisoners in Rabaul. Civilians in Captivity 1942-45”, Australian Military History Publications, 2012.

merely worldly wisdom. At the very beginning, just after the Japanese take over of the island Thomas describes the natural social order: “The Europeans had sorted themselves out and were occupying the north side of the hall; Asiatics were on the opposite side; small bunches of natives squatted here and there trying to understand the situation which divested the sovereign white man of his customary role as leader and master in everything. This was a phase of the situation we were only beginning to realise: the general reversal of form. Here were some of the leading citizens of town herded together by a coloured race and shorn of every vestiges of authority”.

He is also conscious of the racial hatred that he, not without grounds, expects of the “...victory intoxicated guards who had for years been drilled to hate every member of the white race - the race from whom they their western knowledge and progressive ideas.”

He decides to familiarise himself with “the general mental set up of the Jap” soldier. His opinion of the ordinary soldier is not flattering: *The ordinary ranker was, as a rule, a simple-minded individual; child-like in his little vanities, in his love of power; susceptible to any form of flattery - especially from any member of the white race - and underlying it all, beneath the thin veneer of army discipline and mimicry of western organisation, there lay his original streak of savagery. Like the little boy who loves to pull the legs off flies, or singe the cat's whiskers with a match.*

The officers, in Thomas's eyes, are quite different. They are generally university graduates and have a surprising knowledge of western thought and literature. Thomas mentions discussing with them Shakespeare, Milton, John Stuart Mill, H.G. Wells, Tolstoy, Thomas Mann, Somerset Maugham and even more recent (in 1942) writers. Many speak more than one Western language and Thomas is often rather impressed with them, in spite of his conviction that eastern mind cannot fully grasp western ideas. In fact, Thomas remarks that higher ranking officers visiting the freezer were always jovial, good natured and “never showed any racial antagonism” (page 57).

Nevertheless, Thomas's overall view of “the Japs” was far from sympathetic. He thought it wise, however, to observe them as closely as possible in order to avoid antagonising them: *A prisoner is a fool if he deliberately antagonises his captives and one can attain one's own ends more easily with sugar than with vinegar. There was a decided analogy between the Japs and flies in this respect. Both were pests and pests needed control - if possible.*

Being so close to the Japanese soldiers it is to be expected that Thomas became acquainted with their regular companions - the “comfort women”. He saw them regularly and at close range, they frequently visited the freezer accompanied by soldiers and alone and he devotes many passages and of his memoirs to this topic. Given Thomas's far from favourable attitude to “the Japs” (as a people, because he has favourable things to say about surprisingly many individual Japanese) one would not expect him to be a propagandist for the Japanese military. Yet on finishing reading his memoirs I felt very doubtful of finding academic

historians, at least in the English speaking world, impartial enough or brave enough to give a full and fair account of them. Which, I thought, maybe the reason why I had never seen any mention of this very important document in any discussions of the “comfort women” issue. As it happens, while I was more than half-way through the memoirs, it was brought to my attention that an article based on Thomas’s book has appeared, in *The Asia Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* [HN]. I found it intriguing, for I know this particular section of this journal as a stronghold of the “party line” on the comfort women issue, so, somewhat cynically, I was wondering how Thomas’s writing could be made to serve this cause. It turned out that the article was written by the late Australian historian Hank Nelson (who died in 2012) who is considered, a Australian leading expert on the Japanese occupation of Papua New Guinea, whose name I had already come across in connection with a somewhat different matter. On 22 June 1942 an American submarine *USS Sturgeon* sunk a Japanese merchant ship *The Montevideo Maru*, which happened to carry on board 1000 Australian prisoners of war who were being taken to Japan. Many of them were friends of Gordon Thomas and the sinking is discussed at some length in the early part of the memoir. A discussion of this event on Australian television, in which professor Nelson took part can be found [here](#) [MS]. Concerning the question of whether anyone on board could have survived professor Nelson stated the following:

I think that most of the Australians would have gone down with the 'Montevideo Maru', that a few of them would have surfaced and that they would have been sadly abandoned to their fate by that disappearing Japanese crew.

It is unlikely that a Japanese destroyer would have stopped and remained still and picked up prisoners when they know that there are American submarines about.

Well, actually, this very unlikely thing indeed did happen, although probably not this time and in this place, but 2 months earlier off the coast of Indonesia, where a Japanese destroyer *Ikazuchi* commanded Lieutenant Commander Shunsaku Kudō rescued 442 British and American survivors from several sunk British and American destroyers, in spite of the risks from submarines which were believed to be in the area. The rescued sailors were treated by the Japanese in exemplary manner. The fact of the rescue remained unknown until 1996 (after Kudo’s death) when one of the rescued British sailors Sam Falle, wrote about it in his autobiography [SF]. Which shows that Western historians can sometimes underestimate the Japanese.

In fact, there is at least one more book by an Australian historian [CT], which discusses Thomas and his memoirs. However, the comfort women issue is only mentioned in passing, although in a rather curious way, to which I will return below.

The introduction to Nelson’s article, (written by someone from who signs himself GMcC) reads like an almost comical example of “climate science”. It claims that the article proves that the case of the critics of Japan’s prime minister Abe, while, if anything, it does exactly the opposite. It then demands that on that basis Australia should join Korea and China, US

and Canada in condemning Japan. The fact that this happens just at the time when the Abe government is attempting to build an Asian coalition involving India, Australia, Vietnam, the Philippines and others, backed by the US, to contain the growing power and increasingly explicit threats from China is, naturally, purely coincidental.

Nelson's article is a rather different matter. It is informative and mentions many of the facts from Thomas's book and other sources, including some that are quite damaging to the "party line". However his account also includes a number of omissions, which appear deliberate and even a distortion that is almost comical.

Let me first list the main points that are explicitly or implicitly stated by Thomas and most of which are accepted by Nelson.

1. The number of the comfort women.

At the beginning of the book Thomas, not yet employed at the Freezer, witnesses the arrival of a ship bringing about 200 Korean females. Later he gives an estimate of 3000 comfort women at Rabaul, however he himself only witnessed the arrival of about 200 on a single ship and he mentions that several other ship loads arrived later.

As Nelson points out, the usually very reliable United States Strategic Bombing Survey gives a figure 500-600. Nelson, however, seems to settle for a figure of 2000:

"What seems to have happened in Rabaul is that perhaps 2000 or more women were deceived and forced into prostitution of a most demanding kind – they were meeting the demands of men day and night."

The claim that the women were all "deceived" is based very flimsy evidence and actually contradicted by Nelson himself - I will come to this in the next section.

How did Thomas arrive at his number? There were only 100,000 Japanese troops in and around Rabaul. The women were organised into a number of brothels. Separate areas were allotted to the army, navy and the airforce and were guarded by their respective police.

According to Thomas, each soldier had a permit that entitles him to visit a brothel once every two weeks. I have interpreted this as meaning that on different days a soldier could visit different brothels but he had to wait full two weeks to return to the same one. This may not be the correct interpretation, but if one assumes the alternative, that is, that a soldier could have sexual intercourse with a comfort woman only once every two weeks, the number of the comfort women in Rabaul would have to have been even smaller than the United States

Strategic Bombing Survey estimate of only 600. Thomas states that he was reliably informed that each woman had between 25-35 clients ((compare this with 100 per day in the Honolulu brothels claimed by Maggie McNeill)). The number of roughly 3000 seems to have been obtained by dividing the number of soldiers (100,000) by the average number of clients per day, with some sounding. Even assuming that most soldiers had sexual intercourse every day this looks like an overestimate, since as Thomas himself states, not all soldiers made use of the brothels (Thomas gives an account of a curious interaction between the prisoners and a homosexual Japanese officer) and a common punishment for soldier was taking away of their brothel permit. Probably because of such considerations Nelson settled on the figure of 2000, but clearly it is only a guess and the number could be closer to the USSBS figure.

Thomas also mentions that some of the women were running a black market operation to get additional clients who paid with luxuries, such as sake. (This is also repeated by Nelson.) Thomas also describes a fierce battle between the the women belonging two two brothels, involving shouting, pulling hair and hitting with wooden clogs. The fight was only stopped by the arrival of the military police the Kempeitai who stopped the fight by pouring cold water on the combatants. This is mentioned by Nelson, but for some reason he ignores to add that this fierce fight was caused, in Thomas words “a client from no. 96 being invited to sample the charms of of the 94 ladies, which definitely was a breach of brothel etiquette”, 94 and 96 being the numbers of the two rival brothels.

One thus gets the impression that to some of the women, 30 clients per day did not seem excessive. In any case, even accepting Nelson’s figure of 2000 comfort women per 100,000 soldiers as the average, that would mean the maximum of 40,000 for the entire Japanese army in the war zones, which was under 2,000, 000 men. Given however, that the logistic of the Japanese Army in China (where about half of these troops were stationed) was very much inferior to that in Rabaul, the likely figure is much smaller and closer to Hata’s estimate of 20,000.

C. Sarah Soh mentions that the estimates cover the huge range from 20,000 (Hata) to 400,000 (Chinese claims) and then uses sociological jargon and “feminist scholarship” to conclude that the estimators are all driven by political and national bias or “derive from one’s social and historical location and reflect the researcher’s interest in gender, class, race and nationality”. A scientist or a military historian would mention other factors, such as human biological limitations or logistics that impose certain bounds on the possibilities, but such things are obviously outside the area of interest of feminist scholars.

Professor Soh points out that from a “moral standpoint” even the smallest number is “huge”. this is, of course, completely true, but it misses the point. The issues about which the biggest disputes range are those of political rather than moral responsibility. War almost by definition involves immorality, the laws of war apply to the conduct of war where it is given that a war is taking place. The immorality of war is not an issue. Politics, except in left-wing utopias, also often involves choices of lesser evils and any legal and political judgement must take

this into account. A good example of a choice between two evils is provided by the majority of the Dutch women in the Semarang incident, who chose work as comfort women over remaining in an internment camp. Clearly, they were offered only two very bad choices but under the conditions of war, their choice was considered a voluntary one by a Dutch government report produced in 1994 and based on the conclusions of the Dutch Ad Hoc Military Court in Batavia [[CSS](#) p. 21].

2. Japanese comfort women.

Gordon Thomas mentions the presence of Japanese comfort women in Raboul and Nelson confirms it, with additional details.

As I mentioned earlier, the existence of Japanese comfort women is a problem for the “party line” supporters: should not any apology, not to mention compensation be extended to them also? Even if setting up comfort women stations is going to be viewed as a “crime” of the Japanese army, what makes it a crime specifically against Korea and China?

(An additional layer of complexity is added when one recalls that there were both Korean and Taiwanese soldiers, including officers, in the Japanese army and they also were entitled to brothel permits).

However, professor Nelson does uncover a different kind of crime: “racial discrimination”. He gives a price list of a navy brothel, in which the customer had a choice between between a Korean and Japanese. The price of a Japanese girl for 30 minutes is 2.50 yen, while the price of a Korean is 2.0, but the price of either for an overnight session was the same: “ 10 yen”. Since the daily income of a second lieutenant of the Japanese Army was less than 2.50 yen, these were not cheap prices.

Nelson’s remark is worth quoting: “The racial discrimination that meant a Korean woman was cheaper than a Japanese, was strangely not applied to officers who chose to have one woman overnight.”

“Racial discrimination” or maybe supply and demand? Given the well know difference between the incomes and cost of living in Japan and Korea, and presumably the corresponding difference in brothel prices, I was shocked to see that the difference was small.

It should be also noted that in the entire book, covering all three years, the only kind of racial discrimination Thomas mentions is that by the Japanese against “the whites”. One of the examples comes early on, during a Japanese “inspection” of the prisoner’s possessions when the white prisoners are forced to stand in the sun and the Asian ones are allowed to rest in a shade. There is also the following passage:

The Japs, as a rule, treated the Chinese, both local and the soldiers prisoners-of war from Shanghai, far better than anyone else.

He attributes this to the bond between the two people deriving from their common usage of the Kanji characters. An interesting example (on page 24) is:

The brothels had been properly organised now and every morning hundreds of sailors and soldiers, dressed in their "number ones" (as they called their best parade uniforms to us) would march past in orderly crowds, laughing and chatting like so many school-boys bound for a picnic. Many of them would call in at the side-door of the Freezer and beg a drink of ice-water and in some instances pay with two or three cigarettes; sometimes I received as much as a whole packet for a drink of ice water. The more talkative visitors would explain for where they were bound. "Pampaia" (brothel) they would say, and then laugh with a mischievous look of a naughty boy, nodding their heads in the direction of the brothels. "Japan mary number one" was a fond expression boasting of the quality of their country-women and then would invariably follow a volley of questions concerning the attractions of Goshu (Australian) marys. The mere word "mary" immediately riled us when used in connection with Australian women, and we would turn our heads away in disgust, much to the amusement and loud guffaws of the little Nips, who could not understand our distaste for comparing our women with their Korean harlots or even Japanese wives.

If one wants to look for "racism" here is clearly not to be found in the attitude of the Japanese soldiers, whatever else one may think about it.

3. The recruitment

One of the most contentious points in the comfort women dispute was the issue of how they were recruited. In the "party line" version there is no room for the word "prostitute" at all. Apparently, either (unlike today) there were no prostitutes in Asia in those days or, at least the Korean ones, were far too patriotic to work for the Japanese military (unlike the thousands of Korean volunteers in the Japanese army) even for pay greatly exceeding that of graduates of the top Korean universities.

Early on in the book Thomas writes that he was told by a "somewhat irate" Korean worker that the women "were supposed to come for the purpose of working in factories and on cacao and coffee plantations. Only on their arrival in Rabaul did they discovered the real nature of their employment".

Both Nelson and Twomey [CT] refer to the arrival of the 200 comfort women watched by Thomas and other other Austrian internees (who are made by the Japanese guards carry their luggage) but while Nelson truthfully records Thomas's remark about a "somewhat irate" Korean worker (just "irate" in Nelson's version) telling him about the deception, in

Twomey's version the single worker becomes "Korean workers" who tell "Australian internees" that the women had arrived under false pretences. Actually, although Thomas did believe that the women had been tricked into prostitution he himself later expresses some uncertainty about this and even argues that had they staid in Korea they would probably have ended up doing the same work in worse conditions. These remarks are ignored by both Nelson and Twomey although, as mentioned earlier, the latter is not really concerned with this issue.

The question of whether the information about the deception came from just one Korean worker (as Thomas says) or many is not insignificant for a single worker could only have obtained this information by talking to a relatively small number of the comfort women. Since they arrived in a number of different shipments at different times and even from different countries (Thomas mentions both Korean and Japanese ones, but it is know that there were also Taiwanese comfort women in Rabaul, as well as Taiwanese troops), it unlikely that the evidence of one worker could be applied to all even the majority of the comfort women. Actually Nelson states that some of the women seemed to be "hardened prostitutes" and probably were working in Rabaul voluntarily but he asserts that they were a minority. This assertion, like several others of this kind in his article is made without giving any evidence. Most likely both types existed, but there as there is no evidence on which to base any judgement as to their relative proportions, it is difficult to see where Nelson gets the confidence to assert that the willing ones were a minority (even this is very far from the "party line" which does not contemplate the possibility of their being any one willing to perform this kind of job for mere money). Moreover, a Japanese combat medic Masayoshi Matsumoto, who worked at a comfort station in China and is a favourite witness of the "party line" supporters, is on [record](#) as stating that every "comfort woman" he ever treated had been a prostitute before becoming one [[HK](#)].

It is notable, in view of the constantly repeated claim that Seiji Yoshida's writings had absolutely no effect on the views of historians of this issue, not only does Nelson include Yoshida's fictitious book in the bibliography but he also cites it in the text as evidence supporting the claim of "forced prostitution". Indeed, one suspects it was Yoshida's testimony that is the "missing evidence" that lead Nelson do assert that the willing comfort women must have been a minority.

Of course all this uncertainty does not completely absolve the Japanese army of all guilt in this matter. Nobody would disagree that the women who were deceived, should have been offered the chance to go back or perhaps work on a coffee plantation, as promised. However, considering the enormous difference in pay between a "comfort woman" and a plantation worker and Gordon Thomas's belief, based on personal knowledge, that, had the women stayed in Korea most would have ended up in brothels in worse conditions, it seems doubtful that many would have accepted. In fact, Thomas's guess (he could not have known the prevailing conditions in brothels in Korea) is strongly supported by a lot of evidence given in [[CSS](#)]. There is plenty of evidence that violence against prostitutes was used a lot more often

by owners of brothels than by the military, who are often described as sympathetic.

4. The treatment

Since it has now been [admitted](#) even by the New York Times [[NYT](#)] that the case for kidnapping or forcible conscription cannot be established, the attention has moved to the question of how the women were treated and whether they were "sex slaves". It is concerning this that the Ziegler books makes the most outrageous claims and it is on this point that the Thomas's testimony is devastating for the supporters of the "party line". For almost three years Thomas saw these women at very close distance, starting with their arrival as a group of giggling young girls dressed in colourful kimonos, with fancy hair-dos for whom he was obliged to porter luggage to their departure to cheering crowds. Throughout two years the most notable thing about the women is their constant cheerfulness, on which Thomas comments more than once. At no point is there any sign of any mistreatment of the kind that alleged in the Ziegler textbook and the only violence involving them is the battle for clients between two rival brothels described in the previous section. Were they "sex slaves"? That of course depends on what one means by "slaves", and whether prostitutes in ordinary civilian brothels are to be considered sex slaves or not. In [[CSS](#)] an American scholar of Japanese legal studies J. Mark Ramseyer is quoted as disputing the description of Japanese prostitution as "slavery" by pointing out, among other things, that peasant women who became licensed prostitutes "did not have many attractive alternatives" and that "prostitution did pay well". Prostitutes generally signed six year indenture contracts, after which they quite with substantial savings.

The claim often made by the "party line" supporters that the "comfort women" may not have been paid, is totally disproved by Thomas' account, after all would they have fought so fiercely over a customer if no money was involved? In any case, Thomas had no doubt on this point:

They were doomed, those Little Ladies of Ten Thousand Delights, for after having catered untiringly to the desires of the services for nearly two years and collected a sum sufficient to pay of the mortgage on the old Korean homestead, their ships were bombed a day or so out of Rabaul, and only half-a-dozen or so escaped to tell the tale.

This significant passage is not quoted by Nelson. But there are many things in this short passage that have a high degree of relevance to the "comfort women" dispute. One is the fact that Thomas has no doubt that the women were going home and taking with them substantial savings. In fact, all the comfort women were evacuated in late 1943, when it became already clear that the Japanese were losing the war and Rabaul was subject to increasingly heavy aerial bombardment. Why should the Japanese have done that if they thought of these women as merely sex slaves for their troops, who were being left behind? Thomas describes the women leaving Rabaul: *amid a flourish of cheers and waving as they sped through the streets, seated on top of their beds and baggage. They were the last remaining splash of*

colour in a town of dark drab grey and green landscape and uniformed humanity. Cheering these women in public, in full view of prisoners of war, seems like a far cry from murdering them to “cover up the operation”. It is true, that most of them did not survive, but the reason for that was the the ship carrying them back home was bombed and sunk by allied airplanes. This sad fact, appears to hardly get a mention in writings or discussions of this issue. It has been often claimed, notably by Yoshimi, that the women were “slaves” because they could not refuse to have sex with a soldier whom they did not like. Actually, they certainly could refuse if the soldier failed to satisfy one of the a number of rules, listed in Nelson’s article. If he did satisfy them, they had to serve him as they would have had in any civilian brothel. But the soldier, as pointed out by Thomas, also had no choice: so far as he was concerned each woman was just a number in a numbered house. It was all a business relationship on both sides.

The women also seem to have enjoyed a great deal of freedom of movement. They came to the freezer without men and eventually made themselves a nuisance to the Australians. Nelson quotes two passages but omits significant parts and then, in a remarkable piece of manipulation, tries to use them as proof of “cruelty” and “ill treatment” that is never mentioned by Thomas. Here two passages in full, with the parts quoted by Nelson in bold print.

*We used to curse these Little Ladies after the novelty wore off. They would completely take charge of the place on some occasions, using my cooking utensils and crockery to cook some weird concoction of their own on my electric stove playing for hours on end some squeaky screeching Japanese records on the gramophone or going to sleep on our beds and calling for this or that. "Yagi San! Get me some water. Ice water. Quick!" one of them called me one evening. I was annoyed with her. For half an hour she had been cooking and, besides, **she was an unlovely-looking wench, apparently from some very rural district of Korea, where they bred them fat and strong in the hocks, and particularly stupid.** Little wonder that I ignored her demand for ice-water.*

Somewhat angrily she repeated the order.

Pointing to the cup I said: "You - you go get ice-water."

But that was not what she wanted. She wanted to have one of the one-time dominant White Race wait upon her. I realised this. Again she repeated the order. Tossle was engaged with Petal on his knee while he sketched nude women and so did not notice the little scene between Titzey and myself.

"No- you. You hurry up!" Titzey commanded.

"Baka ra!" I roared angrily, which was a popular Jap expletive. The actual translation being

only “foolishness” or “fool”, but the degree of intensity depended on the intonation, and I gave it the full marks- or tried to at any rate.

We stood roaring at one another for a few moments, neither understanding the other - which was just as well, I suppose, for after all, I was only a prisoner. Then in despair and rage Titzey called to Tossle for his aid. And immediately I knew that I had lost for he would support her; so I disappeared thorough the back-door and into the night where I sat on an empty box until I reckoned Titzey’s thirst had been assuaged.

Poor old Titzey! She must have been dumb, even in a professional way for, of all the harlots in Rabaul, she was the only one – so I was told – who had a baby, which of course died slightly after birth.

The other episode involves a Japanese woman:

*The evening lessons in English would invariably be interrupted by visits from Titzey and Petal, or the Governess from the brothels up in Chinatown. They would be in search of a small portion of ice. In fact their visits became so frequent that we were particularly instructed not to give them any ice-water or ice. Supply HQ thought we might succumb to their charms and in a weak moment present them with a case of fish or side of beef from out of the cooling chamber. **There was a wizened old Nip who came regularly, usually during the day time. She was a cook or a caterer for several of the brothels and looked for all the world like a little monkey. I remember one day Mac studying her close then turning with a smile remarked:***

“By God. No wonder she’s a cook.”

“I beg your pardon” I said, registering hurt dignity at my own calling being ridiculed. Get along with you Mac. That’s the result of your sex repressions coming to the surface. You know very well she looks more like Norma Shearer every day.

Nelson’s comment on all this: *In making his disparaging remarks about the women, Thomas was picking up the vocabulary then used about Japanese soldiers; he – and other ex-*

prisoners - were reflecting anger at their own treatment and the cruelty they had seen inflicted on others; and they were unlikely to tell the public and their wives and girlfriends that they had found the comfort women attractive.

It's difficult to know what to make of this passage. Obviously Thomas and Mac engage in the typical "he-male" (as Thomas would put it) banter, which is certainly not politically correct by the standard of present day public discourse in the West, but I am pretty sure is still quite common in private and not just only among Australians. Professor Nelson obviously can't conceive that any woman could be described as ugly or compare to a "monkey" unless there was some other motive behind it. But actually, Thomas never compares any Japanese soldiers to monkeys or calls them ugly, although he often refers to their short height (he notes that a Kempeitai, major nicknamed "Jeffreys" by the prisoners, was unusually tall for a Japanese). In fact, there is a Japanese medical officer, nicknamed "Lord Fauntleroy", who according to Thomas was good-looking by any standards.

So the Japanese get the blame not just for the "cruelty" which Thomas never actually observes in relation to the comfort women but also for the Australian sense of humour! As for the "anger at their own treatment": it is not just to someone like myself, to who WWII means primarily the occupation of Eastern Europe, but also Thomas himself, the treatment the he and the other three Australians who worked in the Freezer received seemed far from bad, and as in the first passage above, concern mainly the loss of status, from being the undisputed "top dogs" before the war to a level even below a Korean comfort woman. But other than that, Thomas himself remarks that he his captivity was spent in relative comfort and as he points out, the only physical punishment he suffered was being slapped in the face once, in all 3 years in captivity. He attributes this to luck (things would have been much rougher in a prisoner of war camp) and his own careful observation of the Japanese and their mental "set-up" and acting accordingly, and essentially he is right. This is not the place to discuss in general the Japanese policy or lack of it towards prisoners of war, but Thomas's book confirms what can be found in many other places; that is, that more depended on individual relations than on general policy. As Thomas observes on many occasions, Japanese soldiers tended to observe rules a lot less than Australian ones, and avoiding irritating them was the main secret of getting reasonable treatment. Another of Thomas's observations was that it was much easier to achieve with the better educated ones, especially higher ranking officers.

Nelson's mention of the "cruelty inflicted on others" that Thomas had seen and was "reacting to" in making "disparaging comments" about the two unattractive comfort women seems like manipulation unworthy of a historian for it suggests to a reader, that is unlikely to have access to the original source, that Thomas had witnessed cruelty inflicted by Japanese soldiers on comfort women. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In fact, not only did Thomas never any cruelty inflicted on comfort women, he did not witnesses any of the kind of cruelty that has become the staple of YouTube in our times. He does indeed mention rumours of such things and he even suspects, not without reason, that that they might have been manufactured by the Kempeitai (military policy) in order to scare the prisoners and ensure their obedience.

He also mentions executions of natives for violating Japanese military rules, rumours of executions of allied pilots, and punishments of varying degrees of severity inflicted on Japanese soldiers, but none of it is related to the comfort women.

In spite of his generally negative view of the Japanese, Thomas records a surprisingly large number of acts of friendliness and even kindness by individual Japanese. However, in the entire book there is only one place where he is almost effusive in praise of something related to the Japanese army and that is in his final comments on the comfort women and the comfort women system. Probably Nelson found these remarks embarrassing for he quotes nothing of them save the brief remark: ‘to my mind, [they were] one of the outstanding reasons why the local Asiatic women were not molested by the invaders’. Nelson attempts to dispute this by arguing that Japanese troops stationed in other parts of New Guinea where there were no comfort women did not commit “outrageous sexual crimes”. but he does not quote Thomas’ argument, which goes a lot further and is worth quoting.

5. War crime or unfortunate necessity? 5. War crime or unfortunate necessity?

Early in the book, before Thomas gets the job in the Freezer and before any comfort woman arrive in Rabaul, he is a witness to an attempted rape by Japanese soldiers of a young Chinese woman, which he reports with characteristic irony:

Back stage were several small sleeping rooms, and into one of these several young (and good looking) Chinese girls had been put for safety. The door was locked on the inside. But Jap cavalymen laugh at lock-smiths, and the butt of a carbine is a suitable weapon with which to break down a barrier behind which a lies a desirable female. So thought a couple of the guards, anyway; and about midnight they put their idea into execution. The brother of one of the girls had been selected as interpreter, and he no sooner heard what was going on than he rushed for an officer. Meanwhile the guards were attempting to break down the barrier, at the same time endeavouring to induce the lass to unlock the door. But the girl, having a fairly comprehensive idea of their intentions, and not being a party to Japan’s vaunted Co-Prosperity Scheme, set up a series of blood curdling yells and screams which acted somewhat as a deterrent to the guards enthusiasm. The officer, accompanied by the brother, arrived at the scene, the guards were duly slapped down - literally and once again Virtue was its own reward and three hundred bomb-happy prisoners were allowed to snuggle into the cement once again.

Thomas adds that later the Japanese High Command issued an order “prohibiting the troops from interfering with the local women under a penalty of death” and as a result there were comparatively few assaults on women. The passage does not refer to comfort women and is also likely to be the explanation for the point made by Nelson about the lack of “outrageous sexual crimes” in places outside Rabaul where comparatively small numbers of Japanese troops were stationed.

However in his final remarks on the comfort women Thomas has this to say:

As an organisation for the welfare of the troops it was most essential and if our troops were similarly catered for in the Islands it would save us a ton of trouble.

Moralists like to close their eyes in these matters, and try to make themselves and everyone else - believe that ten thousand hefty he-men have no sex-appetites, or if they go hungry can easily control themselves. But such ideas are fantastic. These he -men manage to assuage their hunger in their own way, as it has been done from the beginning and someone has to suffer if there is no proper organisation: somebody's wives and daughters be they white, yellow or black. A sex-starved soldier has no conscience, in fact he often has the idea that the country in which he finds himself owes him the food to stem his hunger.

...

As a man I appreciate the good points of the Japanese system of brothels for the services. It made the men content, saved the local females from being molested and cut down unnatural sex relations. The woman's point of view is naturally different, and certainly the position is not an enviable one: living in cramped quarters and receiving from thirty to forty clients a day. In Rabaul - for the most part- where Cho-sen (Korean) women who were supposed to have been tricked into the profession; but it is more than likely if they had not been living in Rabaul they would have been toiling somewhere else in their own country, where the conditions would not have been as good.

There are three points to be considered here. The first one is whether Thomas is right in asserting that a large army stationed for a long time away from its home base needs something like the Japanese Comfort Women System. Certainly, this view was accepted by most other armies in similar situations, including both the US in Vietnam and Korea. Those who think otherwise should read this and give some a different explanation from the one given by Thomas.

In the town of Bunslau there are over 100 women and girls in the headquarters. They live in a separate building not far from the komandantur, but there is no security there and because of this there are many offences and even rape of women who live in this dormitory by different soldiers who enter the dormitory at night and terrorise the women. On 5th March late at night, sixty officers and soldiers entered, mainly from the third Guards Tank Army. Most of them were drunk and they attacked and offended against women and girls. Even though they were ordered by the commandant to leave the dormitory, the group of tankists threatened him with their guns and caused a scuffle...This is not the only incident. It happens every night and because of this, those who stay in Bunslau are frightened and demoralised, and there is much dissatisfaction among them. One of them, Maria Shapoval, said, "I waited for the Red Army for days and nights. I waited for my liberation, and now our soldiers treat us worse than the

Germans did. I am not happy to be alive.” “It was very hard to stay with Germans,” Klavdia Malashenko said, but now it is very unhappy. This is not liberation. They treat us terribly. They do terrible things to us.

There are also many offences by officers against the women. Three officers on 26 February entered the dormitory in the bread depot, and when Major Soloviev (the commandant) tried to stop them, one of them, a major, said, “I have just come from the front and I need a woman.” After that he debauched himself in the dormitory. [AB]

The atrocities described were committed by Soviet troops against Soviet women they had “liberated”. Let’s restate it again, neither the Wehrmacht nor the Japanese Army (except, possibly, in Nanking in 1937) have been accused of anything doing anything comparable to enemy women, not to mention their own. Why? Left wing historians such as Nelson or Yoshimi give no answer. The Japanese Army should never have set up the comfort women stations, argues Yoshimi. When the likely consequences are pointed out, the liberal left answers that the solution is to have no armies and wars. Ukraine has now discovered how well this approach works and one can only hope Japan wakes up before it also discovers it herself. Our enlightened age has seen the return of open sexual slavery of women including public auctions, on a scale unheard of in modern times even in the Islamic world. This happened as the direct and predictable result of the premature withdrawal of American troops from Iraq, an action the Left demanded and supported and has since washed away their hands from the consequences. Do not the Yazidi women, whose fate has more relation to the United States, deserve statues there than the comfort women of the Japanese Army? Will a place be found for them in American school textbooks?

But there is also another point to be considered. For the supporters of the “party line” on the “comfort women” issue, Gordon Thomas represents an embarrassment that they deal with either by ignoring it altogether or by the suggestion that Nelson makes about Thomas being affected by “the suffering he had seen”. For here is a educated and humane man, a journalist and an editor, who by no stretch of the imagination can be considered a “Japanese nationalist”, who saw comfort women and the way they were treated at a closer range than any other independent witness and who, writing after the end of the war, not only does not consider what he had witnessed a “crime” but went as far as recommend something similar to his own country. It is hard to imagine that any other man with the same experience at that time would have held a different view.

Thomas was, clearly bothered by the fact that he believed the women to have been deceived (although Nelson himself admits, on the basis of other evidence, that it was probably true only of some of them and that some of the women were “hardened prostitutes”), but that was the only thing that bothered him. He observed no crimes against the women, no cruelty. He even justified the deception by arguing that most of the women would have ended up in brothels in Korea in worse conditions. He could not possibly have said that if he had believed the what he had witnessed was “Hell on earth”, which is what Witold Pilecki saw. These words

of Thomas are, in my opinion, the strongest possible evidence that claims of atrocities and murders made by Bentley and Ziegler and the supporters of the “party line” should be regarded as an appalling form of blood libel, for which there should be no room in any school textbook in a free country.

Nelson spends a lot of time on “proving” that the Japanese army run the brothels itself rather than through third parties but he is fighting knocking down straw men for this has never been in dispute. What has been in dispute was whether the Japanese army was involved in kidnapping or even in deceiving the women or whether it was done by Korean brokers. Even the new York Times now admits that there is no proof whatever of any involvement by the Japanese army in any kidnappings in Korea, and while the issue of deception remains unresolved (Thomas has no information on this) it is unlikely to have been done by the Japanese who almost never could speak the Korean language. Of course it does not remove from the army the ultimate responsibility for the deception but it is certainly far removed from “forcibly recruited, conscripted, and dragooned”.

Japan vs. Korea?

Finally, there is one more important point. Nelson claims that the reason why the Australians did not attempt to prosecute any Japanese for “war crimes” in connection with the military brothels was that they were not interested in crimes committed by the Japanese against other Japanese or against people from the “recognised” Japanese colonies: Taiwan and Korea. This is actually disingenuous, since it is clear to anyone who reads Thomas’ book that it never even occurred to him to consider anything related to the brothels a war crime, and the same would have been true of anyone else at that time. However, even if we decide, on present day standards, to consider the deception that apparently took place, a crime, it is in no sense a crime for which Japan bears a responsibility to Korea.

Korea was annexed by Japan in 1910 having been during the previous 5 years a Japanese protectorate, which was originally established to prevent Korea falling into the hands of China (which historically exercised overlordship over Korea) and Russia, with which Japan had fought a war in 1904-05, largely to prevent its take over of Korea. The annexation was carried out with full support and even help from Great Britain, then allied with Japan, and with acquiescence of the United States.

The pretext for the annexation was the assassination in 1909 by a Korean nationalist of the Japanese resident general Hirobumi Ito, a figure whose standing in Japanese history is comparable to that of the Founding Fathers in US history. Ironically, Ito was the strongest opponent of the idea of annexation and during his residency “aimed at a modernising, benevolent administration capable of gaining Korean cooperation while strengthening Japanese control ” ([MP], p. 227) Korea preserved it’s cultural autonomy under a civilian administration. After the annexation Japanese policy aimed at modernising the country and assimilating the Korean population under a rigorous military rule. In 1919 this lead to a large

scale rebellion by Korean nationalists inspired by Wilsonian ideals following the end of WWI. The brutal crushing of the rebellion, caused protest around the world and this allowed the liberal Japanese Prime Minister Takashi Hara to embark on a series of reforms which granted Korea almost complete cultural autonomy. Korean language and history were taught in schools and for some time the Korean population enjoyed greater political liberties than at any time in the history of the country. Hara's assassination first slowed down and then completely derailed the process of liberalisation and by the 1930s Japan returned to the policy of assimilation and eradication of the Korean national identity.

Japan's policy in Korea and in Japan's other colony Taiwan was in many ways similar to the English policies in Ireland (to which it was sometimes compared by Japanese liberals, e.g. Kiyosawa Kiyoshi in [KK] or even more so to the Russian policies in Poland especially after the abolition of the last vestiges of autonomy after the failure of the January uprising in 1863. Repression of the native language and culture went in hand with allowing the native population to participate in the administration of their country at lower levels. Koreans willing to conform to the Japanese demands and believed to be loyal could advance to mid-level and sometimes higher ranks in the police and the administration. Similar policies were conducted in Japan's other colony Taiwan, except that facing much less resistance, the Japanese did not need to resort to repression in a degree comparable to that in Korea.

The assimilationist policies of the Japanese in Korea and Taiwan were undoubtedly much more successful than the Russian policies in Poland or even British in Ireland, in spite of their much shorter duration. This was partly due to the efficiency of the Japanese police and administrative system and partly to the fact that both Korea and Taiwan were very backward at the beginning of the Japanese rule, which brought about great advances in education, health, technology and a general standard of living. As a result there was a much greater degree of acceptance of and collaboration with the Japanese rule, more so in Taiwan than in Korea but in both much more than in Poland under the Russian rule or in the Catholic parts of Ireland under the British (the religious difference between the occupying power and the native population also played a role). As long as the relations between Japan and the Western powers, including the United States, remained good, the Western perception of the Japanese rule in its colonies was overwhelmingly favourable:

For this reason, and because Japanese efficiency gave success to these efforts, Western commentary on Japanese colonialism in this stage was overwhelmingly favourable. British and American visitors to Taiwan and Korea spoke glowingly of the "amazing progress" of Taiwan under Japanese administration, of the "courage, devotion, and insight" of the Japanese administration in Korea after centuries of "racial and political decay."

Only a few foreign observers amended this lavish praise by noting that Japanese colonialism was harshly authoritarian and quite exploitive, that the Taiwanese had little affection for their colonial rulers, and that Korean attitudes toward Japanese rule were those of outrage and despair.

Undoubtedly, this benign view from abroad was in large part shaped by the fact that, outwardly at least, Japanese colonialism at this stage closely resembled that of the European nations themselves.

[MP]

During the Pacific War both Koreans and Taiwanese served in the Imperial Japanese Army.

In the early states they were conscripted only into labour battalions but could volunteer into combat units. About 200,000 chose to do so. Among them was Park Chung-hee, who later became president and dictator of South Korea and the father of the current president Park Geun-hye (Park was educated in an elite Japanese military academy, but served as an officer in the army of Manchukouo, the Manchurian puppet empire set up by the Japanese) Over 27,000 Taiwanese and 21,000 Korean volunteer were killed in combat and enshrined in Yasukuni shrine. Many Koreans and Taiwanese served as auxiliaries in the feared secret military police Kempeitai. A large number served as guards in prisoner of war camps, where they acquired a reputation for exceptional brutality. 23 Koreans (including one general Hong Sa-ik) and 26 Taiwanese were executed by the allies after the war as B/C class war criminals [BP].

The Koreans and Taiwanese that Thomas knew were originally in non-military, labor units. Thomas mentions that there were about 1000 Korean workers about Rabaul, one of whom told him that the Korean comfort women had been deceived. Thomas also got to know very well a number of Taiwanese (whom he calls Formosans). They were originally civilians and occupied such positions as clerks, mess orderlies, runners etc, but in June 1994 were formed into combat units, about which according to Thomas, they had mixed feelings.

A change in the attitude and behaviour of the Taiwanese is mentioned by Thomas as one of the signs that the tide of war had turned against Japan. The Taiwanese start speaking their own language, which was strictly forbidden, even in the presence of Japanese officers who take no notice. One of them tells Thomas "Japan no good now". According to Nelson there were 283 Taiwanese "comfort women" in Rabaul (although Thomas does not mention them).

Gordon Thomas saw the Pacific war primarily in racial terms, as a "war of the colours". When he refused to serve "ice water" to the Korean comfort woman "Titzey" and she complained to the Japanese guard, he had no doubt that the guard would side with her. He also clearly thought that the majority of those of the "yellow race" sided with the Japanese, at least as long as they seemed to be winning. This applied also to the Koreans, including the comfort women.

Japan's official ideology during the Pacific War included racial equality. It is because of this that rejected repeated German requests to take actions against Jews who found themselves under Japanese rule. The Kwantung Army in Manchuria issued a very sharp reply rejecting a German request to expel Jewish refugees from Manchuria. In spite of German protests Jews possessing German passports continued to be treated as German citizens. One of them, Joseph Rosenstock, was appointed a conductor of the Nippon Philharmonic Orchestra and gave concerts, mostly of German music, throughout the Pacific war ([BAS]).

Of course in practice the treatment of different groups and individuals varied. In countries that came under their control the Japanese as a rule treated better those whom they trusted more. For that reason, the treatment of the Burmese or Indonesians, who generally sided with

the Japanese was less harsh than that of the Philippines, who mostly remained loyal to the Americans. Naturally individual Japanese, like any other people, had their own likings and prejudices.

Thus, contrary the very unfair claim by Nelson that the 0.5 yen difference in the price of half an hour spent with a Japanese and a Korean comfort woman constituted “racial discrimination” there is no evidence at all that the “comfort women issue” should be viewed as one involving the Japanese, Korean, Chinese and other nations or governments. There is no evidence at all that nationality or race was involved in this issue in anyway on either side.

In spite of the fact that Japan has already apologised many times for its conduct of the war and for its colonisation of Korea, there are constant calls coming from various circles, particularly in Korea but not only, demanding more apologies and even compensation to the former comfort women (and by implication to Korea and China). This, in spite of the fact, that a 1965 treaty, signed between Japan and the Korean government lead by the father of the current president of South Korea, settled all claims between the two countries concerning these events for ever (in return for a large amount of Japanese aid, loans and compensation). On the other hand in Japan there are calls for the government to withdraw the apology made in 1993 by Yohei Kono, since it was largely based on believing in Yoshida’s discredited false claims. There are in fact very good reasons why Japan should refuse any further apologies [ABR]. However, after studying carefully Thomas’s book I am inclined to think that the Kono apology should be amended rather than withdrawn. It should changes into a “conditional” apology issued only to those women, no matter of what nationality (and that means including Japanese) who were deceived or tricked into prostitution and who were not permitted to return home, although that was what they wished. As there is no way of knowing how many of such women there were, who they were, there should be no other government action beyond this. Of course there can be no possibility of any official compensation due to the 1965 treaty, but private funds donated by those who wish to do so, should be used. In fact, this has been the approach of the German government, which considers all claims arising from the Second World War as settled, but allows discretionary and legally binding compensation to be paid. In fact, for all of Chancellor Merkel’s preaching to the Japanese about the proper way to atone for their wartime behaviour, Germany has paid to Poland, which suffered colossal destruction at the German hands (including the loss of almost one fifth of its population) a much smaller compensation than Japan paid to Korea. Besides, as I mentioned earlier, Germany has never even apologised to never mind compensated any of its own former “comfort women”. This is also something that Messrs Bentley and Ziegler seem to have forgotten about.

Conclusion

The majority of American conservatives understand the threat that Japan faces from increasingly aggressive communist China, not just over the dispute over the Senkaku Islands, but over communist China’s determination to restore China’s “traditional” domination over

East Asia. It is difficult not to notice the many striking analogies that exist between Russian aggression against Ukraine and China's increasing threats to Japan. Both Ukraine and Japan have relied on international treaties rather than their own defence capabilities. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine inherited the third most powerful military in the world, considerably more powerful than China's. Three years later Ukraine traded her enormous nuclear arsenal for international security "guarantees", signed by the United States, Great Britain and Russia (with France and China offering separate ones) and a monetary compensation (which soon found its way into the pockets of corrupt officials). Ukraine then proceeded to scupper its own powerful military. Hardly anyone uttered even one word of warning. Japan after the second world war was saddled with a constitution which deprived her, alone among the nations of the world, of the right of self-defence. For years for the Japanese pacifists the constitution was a source of pride: it made Japan the only true "peace loving" country in the world. Under Mao and Deng Zhao Ping China made no territorial claims against Japan and was not interested in arguing about the past or even apologies. When Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka visited Chairman Mao to establish diplomatic relations (following Nixon doing the same thing between China and the U.S.) and attempted to apologise for Japan's wartime actions, Mao answered with typical cynicism: "Without you we could never have come to power so you see, there is absolutely no need to apologise". This attitude continued as long as China's communist rulers felt they needed Japan, and particularly Japanese investment and good will more than Japan needed them and as long as they felt too weak to confront Japan backed by the United States militarily in Asia. As her economic and military power grew and particularly after Obama policy of abandoning tradition allies began to bite, China's attitude began to change. Uninhabited Senkaku islands have become "sacred ancient Chinese land", Japanese wartime atrocities, in which the communists never used to show any interest have not only become a regular feature on Chinese media but have been growing exponentially in size and scope, a massive military built up has started and threats and provocations have become common.

As Russia has demonstrated in its aggression against Ukraine, history can be used as an effective propaganda weapon. Ukraine's history is complex and little understood in the West and so is Japan's history. Just as Russia has used invented and distorted Ukrainian history to try to brand the democratic pro-Western government of Ukraine as "fascist", so in exactly the same way China is trying to demonise the moderately conservative and democratic government of Shinzo Abe by trying to attach a "ultra-nationalist" label to it. The reasons for doing so are obvious: the Ukrainian government that came to power following the Maidan revolution is just as much a threat to Russia's ambitions of rebuilding the former Tsarist and Soviet empires as the Abe government, with its clearly stated intention of making Japan into a "normal country" that can defend itself by means of its own military as well as alliances with other countries that share similar security concerns, stands in the way of China's ambition to restore what it sees as its historical role of hegemonic power in East Asia.

Of course there are many differences as well as similarities between the situation of Ukraine and Japan. All countries that have relied on their security on the support of the United States

have found themselves victims of Obama's policy of deliberately reducing the US role in the world and abandoning traditional allies while trying to reach out to enemies. Four countries have been affected more directly than any other: Iraq, Ukraine, Israel, and Japan. Compared with Ukraine, Japan has the advantage of having a much stronger and healthier economy and a formal military treaty with the United States (though the value of the latter is increasingly under question). However, in one respect Japan's situation is worse than Ukraine's, and the reason for this is the strange case of South Korea. Every rational consideration leads to the conclusion that South Korea should be the fifth on the above list and in fact shares more common interests with Japan than with any other country. Yet the relations between South Korea and Japan are worse than they have been at any time since the war and have, in fact, reached grotesque levels. An striking example of that took place in 2013 in South Sudan where both South Korea and Japan had peace keeping troops. At one point the South Korean troops were facing imminent threat and found themselves short of ammunition. The only ammunition of the right caliber was possessed by the Japanese who promptly offered it to the South Koreans. But this caused such an uproar in South Korea that the bullets had to be returned. The irony of this is that the relations have taken for the worse after the election as president of Park Geun-hye, the daughter of the former president Park Chung-hee, who normalised relations with Japan and signed the compensation treaty.

The sense of victimhood has become the center of Korean nationalism and Japan place the central role as the perpetrator and the national enemy. In the words of the Korean scholar Lee Chong-sik [\[MP\]](#)

Japan, through her conquest and rule of Korea, awakened and sustained Korean nationalism. Japan provided the negative and yet the most powerful symbol of Korean nationalism, a national enemy.

When victimhood is such a central component of national identity but martyrs are lacking and collaborators plentiful, the easiest solution is to convert the former into the latter. This can take grotesque forms, as happened in 2006 when a Korean government commission quietly converted a number of Korean guards in Japanese prisoner of war camps who after the war were convicted of war crimes and "crimes against humanity" (23 were executed) into "victims of Japanese imperialism". Not surprisingly, there have been voices in Korea demanding compensation from Japan for these "victims" also. The comfort women issue has provided South Korean with yet another way to feed its sense of victimhood. Of course, one cannot deny that, unlike the sadistic Korean guards, many of the "comfort women" were genuine victims, but whatever the extent and nature of their victimhood, the attempt to make it part of the Korean martyrdom myth is not more convincing than in the case of the camp guards.

China, has been able to cynically exploit this . It's world wide campaign of demonisation and spreading of hatred against Japan has the same purpose and uses analogous methods as the ones that Putin s using against Ukraine (including among other things paying to money to "Internet trolls" for posting anti-Japanese comments on blogs and Social Media on the

Internet). One example of this is mentioned by [Michel Auslin](#) in the Wall Street Journal [\[MA\]](#). In 2014 dedicated a memorial to the Korean assassin of the liberal Japanese politician Ito Hirobumi, the father of the Meiji constitution which for the first time in history gave the Japanese genuine civil rights [\[HI\]](#). Most importantly, the constitution established genuinely independent legal system and a Supreme Court, whose judges were appointed for life and could not be removed for political reasons. This system functioned throughout the war, in a way that is unimaginable in present day China or Putin's Russia. For example, in 1942 a general election was held in Japan, in which 85 candidates "unrecommended" by the government were elected. Japan's most famous liberal politician Yukio Ozaki was arrested during the election campaign and charged with lèse-majesté. During his trial he accused Prime Minister Tojo of violating the constitution and depraving the nation of freedom. He found guilty but released due to poor health. He appealed to the Supreme Court which acquitted him and he was reelected. Another liberal Takao Saito was expelled from the diet for criticising the war in China, but was allowed to run in the election and was also elected. Ashida Hitoshi, was arrested for praising the United States for its humane treatment of prisoners of war, but was released without going to trial and elected to the Diet. [\[BAS\]](#)

War-time Japan was far from a democracy but it was far from a totalitarian state or even a semi-totalitarian like today's China. Unlike both China and Russia, its laws were applied rigorously and efficiently. It is the independence of the Japanese courts, the bureaucracy and the police that makes the claims of kidnappings, dragooning of Korean or Japanese women by the Japanese military very unlikely, to start with. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the document found by Yoshimi states that the police prevented attempted kidnappings and arrested the culprits.

There is a natural tendency to assume that this amount of hatred has to be in some sense proportional to amount of harm suffered by the hater from the object of hatred. However, people are not as rational as we tend to assume and particularly when nationalism is concerned perceived humiliation counts for more than physical action. That emotions of this kind need not be related to any actual harm suffered but can derive from national complexes is well illustrated by a seemingly unrelated fact. South Korea, a country without Jews, and one that actually enjoys good relations with Israel, is also one of the most [anti-semitic countries in Asia](#) [\[ADL\]](#) and, in fact, anywhere outside the Middle East. When the results of this poll first came out, they caused a general consternation and amazement. Did the Koreans, as the only ones among the people who were polled misunderstand the questions? It is hardly possible to misunderstand a question like: "Jews are responsible for most of the world's wars", which 38% of South Koreans answer in the affirmative (compared to just 11% of Japanese) cannot be misunderstood. Perhaps even more significant it the fact that 40% of Koreans answer "yes" to the question "Jews still talk to much about what happened to them in the Holocaust" (18% of Japanese answer "yes").

It is hard to escape the irony of this kind of views being so common in South Korea : the country which, along with its electronics and cars is probably most famous for its attempts to

export abroad the perception of its own victimhood, whether in the form of monuments in California or [articles](#) in the Wall Street Journal [[CML](#)] (which for some strange reason has become one of the main importers of this product from both China and Korea).

South Korean anti-semitism, which has arisen without practically any contact with Jews and entirely on the basis of myths, is an intriguing phenomenon which so far has not been much discussed, probably because there are too many parties for whom this topic is inconvenient or embarrassing. It may seem to be very far removed from the reasons for Korean open hatred of Japan, but the two actually have a lot in common. For one, they are both legacies of the era of the dictatorship of Park Chung-hee, when both Japan and Israel were set before the Koreans as examples to emulate and thus, for a nation suffering from a combination of inferiority complex, extreme national ambition and a sense of victimhood provided a basis for envy and demonisation.

In fact, the attitude of many South Koreans to Japan today, combining admiration, envy and hatred closely parallels the attitude of many wartime Japanese to the West. In both cases anti-semitism was a curious side-effect (in the Japanese case mentioned in many passages of the “Diary of Darkness” of Kiyoshi Kyosawa [[KK](#)].)

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