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The Ignorance of Americans and the Erasure of Memory:

Japanese WWII War Atrocities and their Aftermath

Americans have an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards Japan¹. Politically, our nation’s leaders consider Japan one of our closest allies and our main bulwark of democracy in Asia. Americans see Japan as a force for good—a beacon of democracy, a true friend of America, a home to modern, educated, developed-world citizens like themselves—in a part of the world where America has few friends. Some even forget that there was once a time when America was at war with Japan. All Americans have learned about World War II, when the US and Japan were enemies on the Pacific front. But American schools teach overwhelmingly Eurocentric history, with World War II curriculum focusing nearly exclusively on the European front. Japanese involvement tends to be boiled down to the attack on Pearl Harbor, the internment of Japanese-Americans, and the dropping of the atomic bombs and their devastating consequences. Because of the emphasis on Japan’s “victimhood” in this narrative, history here tends to be highly sympathetic to Japan. But the simplistic American vision of Japan glosses over the shameful wrongs of Japan’s past, disrespects all those who suffered Japanese atrocities, and hurts Japan by encouraging a nation that would otherwise deserve its reputation as a benevolent, democratic beacon of hope to fail to be transparent and honest like a true democracy should.

While America leveraged its power in respect to Germany and reparations for Holocaust victims, it has never once used this same power to hold Japan accountable for all the war crimes it committed in WWII. In the aftermath—in part due to US interference—Japanese history has been buried and the memory of Japan’s war atrocities has faded like the scent of cherry blossoms on the breeze.

Japanese troops committed indescribably cruel war atrocities during World War II. The most famous example is the Rape of Nanking, when during the two months after their entry into the Nationalist capital on Dec. 13, 1937, Japanese troops perpetrated a massacre that has virtually no parallel in recent history. Expert witnesses at the International Military Tribunal of the Far East, held in Tokyo in 1946 to try Japanese war criminals, estimated that some 260,000 noncombatants were slaughtered in cold blood. Many experts now believe the number to be over 350,000, an extraordinary figure for a city with a population of only 650,000, several hundred thousand of whom had already fled. The carnage was the result of a secret order sent to Japanese forces in China under the seal of Prince Asaka, uncle of Emperor Hirohito: "Kill all captives." Soon competitions arose among soldiers to see who could kill most efficiently.

After being coaxed into surrendering with promises of fair treatment, prisoners were shot, blown up with hand grenades, bayoneted or decapitated. During the same period, tens of thousands of Chinese women were raped, often in schools and nunneries. Thousands more were put into sexual slavery. In fact, Japan's first wartime "facility for sexual comfort" opened in Nanking in 1938, with Chinese women forced into prostitution referred to in Japanese as "public toilets."2

The devastation and human toll was so horrific that a Nazi official, John Rabe, was horrified and sent a report to Berlin headquarters condemning the invading Japanese troops' violence. He used the Nazi flag to construct makeshift shelters for hundreds of civilian Chinese refugees.3 But despite efforts like Rabe's, the Japanese massacre was an unstoppable wave of cruelty and devastation, leaving in its wake a flood of blood and appalling human toll.

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However, while horrific, the Rape of Nanking was not an isolated incident. Although exceptionally horrific due to its scope and extent, it was only one example of inhumane war crimes committed by Japanese troops during World War II. The invading troops treated opposition soldiers and civilians with utter disregard for life and humanity, including everything from sadistic torture of American prisoners of war to cannibalism and live target practice of Indian soldiers. Japanese military scientists used foreign civilians as test subjects for “experiments” like hanging them upside down until they choked, burying them alive, injecting air into their veins, placing them in high-pressure or poison gas chambers, freezing them until they died of frostbite, and drilling or sawing their skulls. Even infants and children were experimented on.

The extent of Japanese war atrocities is appalling and barbaric. However, Japan is not the only nation to engage in shameful and inhumane behavior, particularly in times of warfare. During World War II, both Germany and Japan committed horrible atrocities. The big difference between the two is how the Allied nations, especially the US, responded to them. Ultimately, what makes Japan stand out is its failure to come clean about its shameful past, and America’s contribution to its negligence.

Germany’s postwar narrative is completely different from Japan’s. After Germany’s defeat, the Allies occupied Germany and took complete control of the devastated nation. Along with rebuilding the destroyed infrastructure and supporting the impoverished civilian population

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with provisions, the Allies' main priority was denazification through demilitarization, dissolving the National Socialist Party, and punishing war criminals. The Allies were determined to hold German leaders, both civilian and military, accountable for the war and the mass killings that had taken place in German-occupied Europe. The Allies brought German war criminals to justice through the Nuremberg Trials under the International War Crimes Tribunal. The proceedings at Nuremberg laid bare before the world the horrors of the Third Reich, most especially the Holocaust, the death camps, the use of slave labor, and the heinous war crimes. Most of the guilty defendants received death sentences by hanging and the rest who were convicted received harsh prison sentences. Along with Nuremberg, the Allied powers held numerous other war crime trials prosecuting war criminals lower in the ranks. For example, on May 28, 1946, U.S. military authorities hanged Dr. Klaus Karl Schilling, who had been convicted at a Dachau war crimes trial of using 1,200 concentration camp prisoners as unwilling subjects for malaria experimentation, killing about 400 total. During the period of the Allies' war crime trials, "the United States was the most rigorous in prosecuting [German] war criminals." The US's response to Japanese war criminals was very different. Japan was responsible for numerous atrocities similar to Germany's, such as experimentation on human POWs during

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10 Mueller, Gene.
WWII; in fact, Japan's ghastly human experimentation was on a scale far greater than the Germans'. But unlike their aggressive prosecution of German war criminals, the US military never brought the vast majority of Japanese war criminals to justice. A particularly egregious example of the US's leniency is when the US granted immunity to Japanese war criminals responsible for human experimentation on bacterial warfare—in exchange for the data and results from their experimentation.

This top secret research project, known as Unit 731, was among Japan's most horrific atrocities.

One of the great secrets of Japan during and after World War II was a vast project to develop weapons of biological warfare, including plague, anthrax, cholera and a dozen other pathogens. Japan's biological weapons program was born in the 1930's, in part because Japanese officials were impressed that germ warfare had been banned by the Geneva Convention of 1925. If it was so awful that it had to be banned under international law, the officers reasoned, it must make a great weapon.

The Japanese Army, which then occupied a large chunk of China, evicted the residents of eight villages near Harbin, in Manchuria, to make way for the headquarters of Unit 731. One advantage of China, from the Japanese point of view, was the availability of research subjects on whom germs could be tested. The subjects were called marutas, or logs. Unit 731 of the Japanese Imperial Army conducted research by experimenting on humans and by "field testing" plague bombs by dropping them on Chinese cities to see whether they could start plague outbreaks. They could.

Japanese scientists deliberately infected Chinese prisoners of war with the plague as part of the research project. After infecting prisoners, the researchers cut them open to see what the disease did to humans' insides. "No anesthetic was used out of concern that it might have an effect on

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the results." A medical assistant in a Japanese Army unit in China in World War II reflected decades later on “what it is like to cut open a 30-year-old man who is tied naked to a bed and dissect him alive, without anesthetic”:

"The fellow knew that it was over for him, and so he didn't struggle when they led him into the room and tied him down," recalled the 72-year-old farmer, then. "But when I picked up the scalpel, that's when he began screaming. I cut him open from the chest to the stomach, and he screamed terribly, and his face was all twisted in agony. He made this unimaginable sound, he was screaming so horribly. But then finally he stopped. This was all in a day's work for the surgeons, but it really left an impression on me because it was my first time."

The horror of the war atrocities committed in Unit 731 cannot be understated, but because of Japan's destruction of the evidence in the aftermath, it is difficult to estimate the extent. Scholars and former unit members say that at the very minimum at least 3,000 people were used in the medical experiments, though many sources report that the figure is in the tens of thousands. None of the human subjects survived. No one knows how many died in the "field testing." Japanese officers leading the program had the final goal of using the biological weapons against the US, such as using kamikaze pilots to dump Black Death-infested fleas on San Diego in a biological warfare operation they called “Operation Cherry Blossoms at Night.”

The war crimes committed in Unit 731 were, without a doubt, deserving of the most aggressive prosecution and punishment by the US. But instead, America traded the prosecution of these war criminals and the upholding of justice for the germ warfare data Japanese scientists had collected through committing these war crimes. The US military refused to bring Unit 731's

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
Director Shiro Ishii and his colleagues before the military tribunal for their crimes because Washington considered the information from Unit 731 experiments "invaluable in its own biological warfare program."²⁰ From the beginning of the occupation, Soviet leaders had been opposed to the US's leniency towards Japan, and the Soviet government was able to prosecute a few Unit 731 members in 1949.²¹ But essentially all the members of Unit 731 walked away from their war crimes without facing any consequences at all.

Unit 731 scientists were not the only war criminals that the US let off the hook. General MacArthur, who governed Japan during the US's occupation, pardoned the Emperor and all members of the imperial family implicated in war crimes, including Prince Asaka, who led the Japanese invasion of Nanking and ordered the massacre known as the Rape of Nanking.²² After WWII, the vast majority of Japanese war criminals walked free with impunity, and many went on to successful careers and long, full lives—thanks to the US.

The contrast between the US's treatment of Germany and Japan can also be exemplified by the dichotomy between the US response to German concentration camps and Japan's Unit 731. After the Allied forces occupied Nazi concentration camps, they preserved the evidence of horrific war crimes committed there and used them in trials.²³ In the post-war years, the camps received sensational global media attention and became ubiquitous to Nazism. In the decades since, the sites of these horrific atrocities have been preserved as memorials and museums. For example, in the case of the most famous concentration camp, "the Auschwitz complex has been preserved and serves today as a grim reminder of the Nazi attempt at destroying the Jewish

²¹ Ibid.
people." Immortalizing sites of war atrocities is the most fitting response to them, because doing so protects evidence of history and ensures that the memory of the unspeakable wrongs committed by Germany can never be forgotten. While Germany's crimes are irreparable, memorializing the sites of their execution demonstrates that Germany acknowledges the truth about its shameful past.

Meanwhile, after the US captured Unit 731, their response was the polar opposite. In the wake of the war, Unit 731 held damning evidence, with mutilated skulls and bodies and other evidence of inhumane experimentation. But instead of holding Japan accountable for its actions to other Asian nations, the US helped Japan cover up its actions. "The U.S. military ordered Occupation authorities to censor the mail of former members of Unit 731, the Imperial Japanese Army section that conducted bacterial warfare experiments on people." The US was also complacent with Japan's postwar cover-up of Unit 731 when it blew up the unit's facilities "to destroy evidence of its weapons and experiments." America deliberately chose to handle the post-WWII occupation of Japan very differently from Germany's.

The research was kept secret after the end of the war in part because the United States Army granted immunity from war crimes prosecution to the doctors in exchange for their data. Japanese and American documents show that the United States helped cover up the human experimentation. Instead of putting the ringleaders on trial, it gave them stipends.

Japan and America knew how shameful the Unit 731 atrocities were, and were aware of their existence. But because of postwar Cold War concerns, the US took the route of prioritizing its own geopolitical goals instead of its principles of justice and reparation when dealing with Japan.

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26 Ibid.
27 Kristof, Nicholas D.
Why did America deal with war crimes so differently in Germany and Japan? The
difference is largely about communism. When the US occupied Japan, its biggest fear was the
spread of communism, which soon emerged victorious in China and appeared poised to take over
much of Asia.

With the Cold War intensifying, the government of President Harry S. Truman
felt that Japan needed to be moulded into an American ally and a bulwark against
the spread of communism. Truman believed that these aims would be difficult to
achieve if the Japanese people were alienated by continuing prosecutions of their
war criminals. For this reason, the United States called a halt to further war crimes
prosecutions when twenty-five "Class A" war criminals had been sentenced to
death or imprisonment at the end of 1948. The decision to halt the prosecutions
was entirely based on political expediency. It had nothing to do with issues of
legality, morality, or humanity.\(^28\)

While the Allies treated Germany harshly, and rightly so, the US failed to hold the vast majority
of Japanese war criminals accountable and never required Japan to make adequate reparations
intended to address its barbaric wartime actions. China, one of the main victims of Japanese
atrocities, was already an enemy of the US, and other victims of Japanese atrocities were not far
behind. The sociopolitical factors of Communism and the Cold War caused the US to
deliberately and strategically treat post-WWII Japan with absolute and undeserved leniency. The
Allied powers, in particular the US, failed to uphold international law when it came to Japan
even though they did so with regards to other World War II nations responsible for war
atrocities. To advance its anti-Communist agenda, the US was willing to set aside justice and
morality, brushing Japan’s war crimes under the rug in favor of aiding it economically.\(^29\)

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\(^{29}\) "Milestones: Occupation and Reconstruction of Japan, 1945–52." *U.S. Department of State: Office of the
The US’s Cold War concerns after World War II also lead to its fixation on bolstering Japan’s new image as an ideal capitalist democracy. To attain this vision, during its occupation the US immediately set to work helping Japan recover from WWII, enacting major reforms democratizing Japan and developing its capitalistic economy. As a direct result of the US’s aid, in the decades after WWII Japan’s economy took off in a “postwar economic miracle” and the nation enjoyed an era of prosperity and booming growth while Communist countries struggled. While the rest of Asia was battered by the chaos and destruction of Cold War warfare and the human suffering caused by Communist dictatorships, Japan cemented its position as the exception to the Asian rule. Japan became by far and away the most developed, wealthy, thriving Asian nation.

Additionally, fears of Communism shaped the way the US viewed Japan after WWII.

Japan’s wartime enemy status was quickly forgotten as the Cold War caused the West to create a confining and oversimplified view of Japan. That view took shape following the communist invasion of South Korea in 1950, when a group of U.S. academics created a sanitized picture of the nation. They portrayed Japan as a land of harmony (wa) and the wholesome values of hard work and long-term vision, and in doing so, they turned the United States’ recent enemies into allies who would lend their efforts to the anticommunist crusade.

Japan’s image was transformed from a former enemy into a benevolent, democratic, and loyal friend of the US, a view that has persisted until today. The US saw Japan not only as an exceptional democracy in Communist Asia, but as a nation that shared many of the same values as America. Because of their shared values of democracy and capitalism, the US saw potential in Japan as a powerful Cold War ally that could help advance the US’s Cold War ambitions.

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31 Ibid.
32 "U.S. Relations with Japan."
America’s concerns about communism shaped its postwar diplomacy towards Japan. The US used public treaties and agreements to cement a friendship between America and its Asian protégé, the sole successful thriving capitalistic economy in a sea of Communist red. In 1960, a mere fifteen years after WWII ended, Japan and the US signed the “Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security”33, the first official recognition of Japan’s and America’s newly forged friendship. It was the first in a long line of diplomatic agreements consistently recognizing Japan’s friendship with America.34 By aggressively promoting close diplomatic ties between the two nations, the US created a strategic alliance it could use as a Pacific buffer against Communism. During the Cold War, the US used Japan as a base for its anti-Communist efforts in Asia. While the Cold War has ended, the rise of new global threats, particularly the development of China, has led to the US’s tightening of ties with Japan.35 Due to these multiple factors, since World War II until today, the US has never changed its compliance with Japan’s postwar erasure of its shameful history from memory.

Since World War II, Japanese war atrocities have been largely, deliberately forgotten. As early as after the 1945 surrender, “the Japanese government and military moved swiftly to destroy evidence that might assist in the prosecution of any Japanese for war responsibility or war crimes,”36 including Emperor Hirohito, the Imperial Army, Navy, and almost all government ministries. POW and internment camps destroyed all their incriminating camp records. “The systematic destruction of war-related records would prove useful when successive Japanese LDP

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34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
governments refused to acknowledge Japan's war guilt and war crimes. The US also helped Japan cover up war crimes during its occupation. After the evidence had been destroyed, it only took time for the atrocities to evaporate from Japan's consciousness. Additionally, in the decades after WWII, while other nations were busy struggling with Communism, they were too weak and preoccupied to demand Japan to apologize for its wartime actions while the memory of them was still fresh. Additionally, because many of Japan's war atrocities' victims were communist nations, Japan and the US had a premise to ignore them. For example, during the post-war period, accounts of Japanese atrocities, especially related to Unit 731, "were largely ignored or dismissed in the West as Communist propaganda." By the time Communism was no longer shaping essentially all of US foreign policy, nearly half a century had passed—and there is no more effective eraser than time.

In recent decades, Japan has demonstrated the extent of the loss of its World War II memory. Even the Rape of Nanking is doubted, with many Japanese officials and historians denying that its scale and atrocity even though it is well-documented by foreign journalists who were present. Governmental officials such as Former Justice Minister Shigeto Nagano have even "denied that the massacre had occurred, claiming that it was a Chinese fabrication." Japan has consistently demonstrated a pattern of denial and suppression of the truth. International outrage sparked in 2007 when Japan's conservative nationalist Prime Minister Abe denied the

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40 Ibid.
World War II rapes and forced prostitution of Korean, Chinese, Filipino, and other Asian women. The existence of “comfort women” during World War II, when Japanese soldiers used captured civilians as sex slaves, is well-documented. Yet Prime Minister Abe “denied women were forced into military brothels across Asia, boosting renewed efforts by right-wing politicians to push for an official revision of the apology.” This is only one example of the Japanese conservative right’s efforts, which have coalesced and intensified in recent decades, to erase Japan’s shameful past with impunity and without even a proper apology to the victims.

Japan’s behavior contrasts sharply with that of Germany, which is today also a strong democracy and a close US ally. When dealing with Germany, the US never glossed over its atrocities. America participated in efforts to force Germany to confront its history and make reparations, leverage its own power and moral authority to do so. Outside pressures like America shaped Germany’s response to its WWII history. One important way Germany has addressed its World War II history is by insuring that future generations of Germans will always know what happened. The Holocaust is a standard topic in Germany’s education system and textbooks. “Teaching the subject of the Holocaust and the Nazi era is mandatory in German schools. In addition to the classroom curriculum, almost all students have either visited a concentration camp or a Holocaust memorial or museum.”

Germany has made every effort to educate its youth so that the memory of the crimes of the Holocaust is not lost with time but stays interwoven in the fabric of Germany’s identity, a reminder of how far democratic Germany has come and a warning of what can happen when Germany goes terribly astray. Germany’s

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42 Ibid.
government also takes the Holocaust seriously. Germany's legal code expressly outlaws denying the Holocaust, and Germany has prosecuted and convicted citizens to prison sentences under its Holocaust denial laws.\textsuperscript{45} It also has laws banning Nazi symbols like swastikas.\textsuperscript{46} This all shows the success of the US's post-war policies forcing Germany to face its crimes. The ramifications of the US's decision to treat Japan differently from Germany still resonate today. For example, Auschwitz is now a memorial and a museum, which is rightfully should be. However, the Unit 731 complex, another physical location of appalling atrocities, was burned and covered up after WWII by the US. Since then, Unit 731 has been completely glossed in history to the point where right wingers in Japan can deny that it even happened. Today, at the site of the Unit 731 complex, all that remains is a black obelisk standing where the remains are buried, describing them merely as human "specimens".\textsuperscript{47} Japan has also rejected Chinese requests for DNA samples to establish the identity of the remains.\textsuperscript{48} These are all examples of ways Japan refuses to confront its wartime history. Japan has also used its education and media to minimize and undermine other nations' efforts to make it admit to and pay for its WWII atrocities.

Germany's mandatory Holocaust education contrasts completely with Japan, where a notable issue today is that its education system contributes to Japan's rewriting of its WWII history. Japanese history is taught in a way that leaves very little time in the curriculum for the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, and Japanese textbooks completely gloss over WWII atrocities.\textsuperscript{49} Within Japan, there is still a right-wing movement to further erase any trace of its WWII wrongdoings. For example, a textbook created by the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform was approved


\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.

by the Japanese government in 2001 and became a big commercial success. It whitewashed Japan's war record, referring to the Nanking massacre as an "incident."\(^{50}\) Unit 731 and comfort women are almost never mentioned. The outcome is that today, many Japanese grow up not knowing what neighboring nations harbor grudges over. Other nations like South Korea still feel the pain of suffering from Japanese WWII atrocities, and learn about them in great detail in their modern-history-focused history classes. However, Japanese children themselves grow up ignorant of their own nation’s shameful past.

The Japanese media is also biased when handling this topic. It has always hushed up coverage of its war crimes. In past decades, historical investigation into wartime atrocities has been conducted by Japanese researchers, but the Japanese media almost never covers their discoveries. In 1989 mutilated skulls and bones were discovered in the excavation site of Unit 731, but the discovery was not covered in mainstream Japanese news sources.\(^{51}\) After the discovery, the Japanese government continued maintained its official position of denying Unit 731 atrocities.

The extreme right wing in Japan refuses to accept that the unit was anything more than a sanitation team that operated behind the front-line troops while virtually nothing on its activities is mentioned in school history books. Many of the scientists involved in Unit 731 went on to have careers in politics, academia, business, and medicine.

"Most people do not believe it even happened; the rest just want to cover it up and forget about what Japan did during the war," said Tsuyoshi Amemiya, a retired military historian. "Young people don't know and they don't want to know."\(^{52}\)

\(^{50}\) Ibid.

\(^{51}\) "Deafening Silence."

Japan’s government position can be seen on the Ministry of Japan’s website itself, which only has a very limited acknowledgement of World War II wrongdoing. Notably, the government claims that “we must not let the future generations, who have nothing to do with that war, be predestined to apologize” and that “issues of claims concerning the War have been legally settled” and that, with regards to the Rape of Nanking, “the Government of Japan believes it is difficult to determine which the correct number is” of victims. Japan’s government has never acknowledged Unit 731’s atrocities and claims it has no records related to Unit 731. Japan’s governmental position is blatantly unapologetic. Japan either outright denies atrocities or attempts to undercut their severity, and its government fiercely resists any reparations or owing of guilt. Japan argues that its WWII wrongs have already been settled. But in reality, Japan has done very little to make up for or even acknowledge its wartime mistakes. For example, Japan has never paid reparations China whatsoever even though China was greatest victim of its war crimes, as the site of the earliest Japanese invasion in 1937, the main source of Unit 731 experimentation subjects, and the victim of the Rape of Nanking. And because of the West’s opposition to China as a Communist regime and threat to democracy, nations like the US have never encouraged Japan to do the right thing and fully acknowledge the crimes its troops committed on Chinese soil.

Today, Japan still denies WWII atrocities committed by its troops overseas. Its leaders annually visit the Yasakuni shrine housing war criminals’ ashes and outright deny the existence of comfort women. Its textbooks gloss over its wartime history and its students are willfully

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54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 “Deafening Silence.”
57 Ibid.
58 Oi, Mariko.
ignorant of Japan’s past wrongs. And the US, as Japan’s close friend and ally, has never made a single statement advising Japan to better address its own history or condemning Japan for its failure to be accountable to its past. This is one of the biggest stains and a disgrace on Japan’s part, which is significant because Japan holds important role as the leading democracy in Asia. To fulfill its reputation as a force for good in the Asia-Pacific, Japan needs to first come clean about its own past. There is a difference between the mistakes that Japan made during World War II and the continuing and more enduring mistake under following regimes for not acknowledging its shameful history. While the first can never be corrected, the second can be fixed, and yet Japan adamantly refuses to do so and the US stays silent.

Japan today is a successful thriving democracy, and the US envisions Japan as a nation for other Asian countries to emulate. But in creating this narrative about Japan, the US has been complacent in Japan’s systematic erasure of its shameful past. And yet despite this failure on Japan’s part to fully apologize and atone, “Americans believe that Japan has atoned for its actions during WWII.” This is in part due to the sidelong and ignoring of the voices of Japan’s victims, most of whom were Communist nations. In addition, the US’s involvement with the Japanese cover-up also meant that Japanese war crimes were never supposed to enter the American consciousness.

Japan’s own unwillingness to acknowledge its unpleasant history and atrocities is one of the things threatening its democratic system. Going forward, Japan has a moral and democratic duty to acknowledge and apologize fully for its past mistakes. The positive impact of taking these steps cannot be overstated. It would prove the government to be transparent and

accountable and smooth out relations with other Asian nations. This would especially be beneficial to improving Japanese relations with China, because “imperial Japan’s bloody invasions remains a major source of tension between Asia’s two biggest economies, and Beijing commonly calls on Tokyo to ‘confront history’.” For example, China’s government and citizens still harbor serious resentment towards Japan due to the atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers on Chinese soil. Chinese citizens “hope Tokyo will confront one of World War II’s most barbaric Asian chapters.” For example, as one Chinese woman whose father was cut apart alive at Unit 731, “this debt of blood must be paid,” or Japan will never be forgiven by the other Asian nations it committed atrocities to during WWII. During 2015’s Holocaust Memorial Day, a Chinese governmental spokeswoman commented that it was “a moment for everyone to draw lessons,” commending the “attitudes demonstrated by the German leaders” in comments seen as a reference to Japan. If Japan swallowed its pride and more fully apologized and made reparations for its World War II atrocities, its fellow Asian nations would not feel so much anger and resentment towards Japan, benefitting international relationships across the Asia-Pacific.

Wartime atrocities like those committed by Japan can never be made up for or undone. However, the first step in moving forward and making amends as a nation is acknowledging wrongs. National dignity is important, but acknowledging past wrongs does not compromise it. Instead, it proves Japan to be a nation that has come to terms with its shameful past and has the courage to say it.

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61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.