

## Ad-hoc Committee on Japanese War Crimes, 1937

### Welcome

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to BUSUN and to 1937 Historical Committee! It would be vastly understated, but nevertheless, I'm very excited to be chairing for this conference; I put forth a great deal of time planning it, so I hope this conference will be a worthwhile one.

A little bit of disclaimer before I begin. In case the title has yet to catch your attention, this committee will be analyzing and evaluating the war crimes committed by the Japanese prior to the onset of the Second World War. Though the general public is well acquainted with the holocaust of the West, only a minority know about the atrocities of the East. As you research, you will duly come across disturbing information of wartime cruelties that defile the idea of humanity. As leaders, we must face the brutality of human rights violations to protect the victims--so if mass murder, rape, and human experimentation sound foreign to you, this probably is not the best committee for you.

Also, I'd like you to understand the focus and intent of this committee. Every day I walk past the John Carter Brown Library, onto the wall of which is engraved a quote by Gertrude Stein, "Speak to the past, and it shall teach thee". Indeed, this committee was not made just to comment on the war crimes themselves, nor to imply the character/genetic makeup of Japanese who committed those crimes. This committee aims to revisit the ugly splotch of history in order to better the future. You will read later about the Japanese government's denial to its war crimes. As Iris Chang puts it, Germany is a better place today because the

Jews have not allowed that country to forget what it did nearly sixty years ago. By "speaking to the past", perhaps we will prevent such err from tainting the future pages of history to be written.

For this committee, we will speak to the Japanese occupations of 1937 by means of a UN simulation: had the United Nations existed during that time, would things have turned out differently? How?

In order for this committee to proceed as smoothly and realistically, comprehensive and thorough research is strongly recommended. Given the hypothetical nature of this committee, I understand it will be challenging to come up with resolutions, as you will find anachronistic instituting the UN before its actual birth in 1945. Should any questions arise, please do not hesitate to contact me at [japanese.war.crimes@busun.net](mailto:japanese.war.crimes@busun.net).

I sincerely look forward to meeting you in November! Again, feel free to shoot me an e-mail should you have any questions.

Best,  
Hyun Woo Choo  
[japanese.war.crimes@busun.net](mailto:japanese.war.crimes@busun.net)



From the invasion of China in 1937, it is estimated that Japanese have murdered no less than 6,000,000 civilians in China, Korea, the Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia. This mass murder of Asian civilians merited the word “democide” by many historians, as 50 million people lost their lives as a consequence of Japanese aggression, with most victims subjected to “savage cruelty” before their death.

This committee will be set in December of 1937, the onset of Japanese aggression, and will simulate international collaboration to protect human rights.

### **Background: Understanding the History behind Japanese Aggression**

Understanding Japan’s history facilitates understanding the motive of the Japanese.

Stemming from the historical bushido conduct of the samurais, the loyalty of a Japanese soldier to his army has been one of honorary obligation. For the samurais, to die in the service of one’s feudal lord was the greatest honor he could achieve. This thousand year old ethic was preserved throughout Japanese society, and manifested itself in the modern age to its extremes. The infamous kamikaze suicide missions of World War II trained the pilots to fly their planes directly into American aircraft, sacrificing their lives for honor.

Cultural dispositions aside, Japan’s influences from West began its want for imperialist rule. The 250 years of self-imposed isolation ended with the arrival of Commander Matthew Perry in July 1853. President Millard Fillmore, agitated with Japan’s isolationism, sent Perry to force trade relations among Japan, U.S., and other European nations. Perry’s invasion humiliated the proud people of Japan, and in 1868, initiated Meiji Restoration which united the islands under one divine emperor (Meiji), one religion (Shinto), and one

moral code (bushido). The restoration was also an effort to modernize scientifically, economically, and militarily. Japan sent the brightest students to study science and technology at Western universities, and increased the number of factories for arms production. Western technology had shattered the country’s old confidence in Japanese military superiority.

In 1876, Japan tested its military might by dispatching a naval force of two gunboats and three transports to Korea, who also practiced a similar type of isolationism as had Japan. Using the technology as a threat, Japan forced the government to sign a treaty of commerce, known as the Treaty of Kanghwa.

In 1885, Japan clashed with China over Korea, as both nations had established Korea as a protectorate. The Sino-Japanese War broke out, and Japan’s advance military paved the way for its victory, ultimately forcing the Chinese to sign the humiliating Treaty of Shimonoseki, where China ceded many precious territories to Japan. The following victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 gave Japan the pride to believe in Japan’s Manifest Destiny in the Asia, and so began Japan’s imperialist rule.

### **The Japanese Annexation of Korea: “Culturicide” (1910-1945)**

In 1910, the Japanese annexed Korea as a colony. The annexation lasted to the end of World War II, with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. During their rule, the Japanese were convinced of their superiority, so every attempt was made to assimilate Koreans to the Japanese culture. Bearing roots in their historically feudal society, Japanese treatment of those they considered inferior was brutal. The first governor-general, Terauchi Masatake, set the harsh tone of Japanese rule, patterned after the policies of the Russian empire in Poland. He dissolved all pre-existing organizations; prohibited all meetings and speeches; abolished Korean newspapers; and

confiscated all types of arms, including swords and knives.

Except for a brief period in the 1920s, Japanese rule was entrusted to army generals who ruled Korea with an iron fist. Around 1930s, Japan attempted to obliterate not only the Korean identity, but also the Korean language and culture, and the Japanese used Koreans as virtual slave laborers in their struggle to win the war.

Japan also imposed Shintoism as the national religion on Koreans, and had to recite daily the “Oath of Imperial Subjects”, and bow toward the imperial palace, showing loyalty to the Japanese emperor. However, the requirement of worship at Shinto shrines was met with bitter opposition from the country’s 450,000 Christians. Opposition led to imprisonment, torture and martyrdom of many Christian leaders.

Furthermore, Japanese also sought to erase the Korean language. They eliminated Japanese in primary schools; Korea’s leading scholars and intellectuals who threatened this conversion were subjected to gruesome tortures. Speaking in Korean was prohibited, and was regulated with watchful eyes of military.

In 1939, the colonial command demanded the change from monosyllabic Korean names to Japanese names. To the Koreans however, “to lose their language was to lose their soul”, and they had clung to it in spite of numerous foreign invasions and occupations in the past. Losing their surname meant denial of their ancestors; in respect, the Japanese asked Koreans to deprive their souls and commit the most unfilial crime.

Young Korean males were also drafted to fight for Japan’s expansionist cause. By the end of the Second World War, 186,680 Koreans were in the Japanese army and 22,299 in the navy. Over 500,000 Koreans entered Japan to work for mines and factories and naval construction.

Korean females were kidnapped from their homes to be put in “comfort houses”, where they comprised majority of the 80,000 to 200,000 women serving the sexual comfort of the Japanese military. The conditions of the brothels were sordid beyond imagination, and most women—raised with female purity values from Korean Confucianism—took their own lives once they learned their destiny. Japan denies to this day, the existence of such brothel.

Any Koreans that did not follow the oppressive rule were subjected to public torture, imprisonment, or death. In March 1919, the unabashed reign of terror intensified the longing for Korean independence, and led to a nationwide independence movement, but its efforts were thwarted by the merciless response from the Japanese military.

For thirty-six years, Japan imposed rules that suffocated the lives of most Koreans. However, some historians argue that Japan helped Korea modernize by building industrial complexes. Other historians argue that the overall effect on Korean economy was negative, leaving postwar Korea in poverty.

\*\*This history between Japan and Korea becomes important to understand, as it will influence later international policies and relations.

The Nanjing Massacre: “The Rape of Nanjing” (December-January 1937)

The summer of 1937 began a second full-scale war between Japan and China. After obtaining control of Tientsin-Peking region, Japan invaded Shanghai in August. Although the Chinese marine alone outnumbered the Japanese ten to one, the militarily advanced Imperial Army was able to capture Shanghai by November 1937. With the fall of Shanghai, the next target was Nanjing, the nation’s capital at the time.

On the predawn hours of December 13, 1937, the Japanese entered Nanjing, initiating

the six weeks of terror. Outnumbered, Japanese relied heavily on deception to kill the prisoners of war. The soldiers would corral the Chinese by promising fair treatment in return for an end to resistance; they would divide the men into groups of hundred, then luring them to different areas to be killed. An estimated 57,000 surrendered prisoners of wars were executed near the Mufu Mountain.

After the mass surrender of soldiers, the civilians remained unprotected. Using machine guns, revolvers, and rifles, the Japanese fired at wounded soldiers, women, and children, indiscriminately, and the “ditches of the fallen capital ran rivers of blood”.

The Japanese treatment of Nanjing civilians demonstrated some of the most brutal of human rights violations. As they conducted house-to-house searches, they would conduct killing contests and tortures on civilians that surpass the limits of human comprehension. Some examples include: live burials, mutilation, death by fire, death by ice, etc., but details will be spared here, and further research into specific tortures will not be necessary as long as it’s understood that human rights have been breached.

The greatest infamy of the invasion is the treatment of the Nanjing women. History records it as the single worst instance of wartime rape inflicted on a civilian population (second to the treatment of Bengali women by Pakistani soldiers in 1971, which has yet to take place). Statistics are inconsistent in determining the number of afflicted victims, which claims to be near 20,000 to 80,000 women. Just as was torture methods, the scale and nature of the rapes are similarly horrifying. The Safety Zones of John Rabe offered a safe haven to many Chinese victims. Similarly, Minnie Vautrin, “the Living Goddess of Nanjing”, courageously protected thousands of women from Japanese soldiers. Their diaries were able to bear witness to the crime.

The six-week massacre took 300,000

innocent lives of Chinese.

Unit 731: Human Experimentation (1936-1945)

Four decades following the war, evidences began to unearth the existence of Imperial Japanese Army’s Unit 731, where research experiments for biological warfare took place. Estimations of 3,000 prisoners of wars died in experimentation, yet the Unit was kept in secret, never receiving the deserved attention or the proper trial.

In an effort to obtain the most accurate results, live human became the subjects of Japanese research. To test biological weapons, the weapon would be injected into a human subject, and the weapon’s effects would be studied, including symptoms, potency, and fatality. To understand the workings of a live human body, countless subjects were dissected alive without anesthesia.

Experiments were not limited to biological weapon testing; anything the Japanese felt the need to experiment— frostbites, grenades, torture tolerance—they were conducted.

Shiro Ishii, commander of Unit 731, was able to keep quiet all of the Unit’s activities, even through the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal (equivalent to the Nuremberg Trials). No prisoner who entered the 150 building of Unit 731 survived; all those involved in the experiments were given incentives to take the secret to their graves. The Japanese researchers were spared, and received acclaim by scientific community for their medical contributions. Ishii alone patented over two hundred discoveries.

It is told that the United States gave amnesty to Japan in exchange for the valuable research data. On one side, it countributed immensely to the advancement of medical science; the question, though, is a matter of ethics. It remains as the “best kept secret of World War II.”

## The Pacific War: Expanding Occupation (1942-45)

During the 1940s, in synchrony with Pearl Harbor, Japan expanded its occupations to other countries in Asia, mainly the Pacific Islands (see map). Though the treatment of Japanese on the natives varied, forms of oppression, rape, torture, property confiscation, mass murder still took place.

For example, the Japanese forcibly made the residents of Hong Kong exchange their native dollars, gold, silver, and other forms of wealth for Japanese currency, or “Military Yen”. Similar confiscation occurred in Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei for “banana money”.

The confiscated amounts were never returned, and the persistent denial of Japanese government exacerbates any hope of reimbursement. The grievances are not forgotten, and organizations like Hong Kong Reparation Association still seek compensation to this day.

### Japanese Response: “Political Amnesia”

Unlike its European counterpart, the Japanese government has yet to provide justice for its perpetration. Thousands of volumes have been written, numerous museums have been mounted, and documentaries have been made about the Holocaust in Germany, while the Japanese atrocities remained in silence for fifty years.

Moreover, the Japanese government denies the occurrence of many wartime atrocities, including the Nanjing Massacre, “comfort women”, human experimentation, and property confiscations. Japanese textbooks refuse to recognize the extent of their actions, leaving the new generations ignorant to the realities of war. 50 million people died as a result of Japanese aggression, and many survivors grieve the injustice of the Tokyo Trial, and can only hope that Japan will one day

admit to its past and restore justice to its victims.

## Committee Format/Structure

This committee will take place on the last week of December 1937, in the midst of Nanjing massacre and colonization of Korea. News of Japanese atrocities reaches the world through Western missionaries and businessmen in China. Information is scarce, and activities of Unit 731 are no more than rumors. It is under discretion of UN to perform more investigations to obtain more information.

Although the UN did not exist then, we will create a hypothetical simulation, and see whether UN could have protected the human rights of the civilians and stopped the “democide” from occurring.

This committee will be a simulation of an incomplete UN; meaning, not all components of modern UN will be included. With the exception of peacekeeping troops, no international law or organization made after 1937 can be mentioned, (e.g. International Criminal Court, the Geneva Conventions, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, etc.) as they have yet to be formed. However, it is highly recommended to read the human rights laws, as resolutions can be inspired from these sources.

In a sense, this committee is a primitive UN Human Rights Council. National policies should reflect that of 1937.

### Position Papers

The synopsis is only a limited fraction of vast information. To confirm your understanding of the issue, please write a position paper including the following: a brief background of the issue; your country’s involvement with the Japanese (can include information up to the later stages of Pacific War); your nation’s policies in regards to human rights and genocide; and resolutions for each

topic presented here. (Korean colonization, Nanjing Massacre, Unit 731)

Though this committee takes place in 1937, researching events after 1937 (Pacific War, Tokyo Trials, Japanese reparation efforts) become imperative in preparation for optimal resolutions. Especially for the nations involved in the Pacific War, research Japan's impact on your country. Any additional issue not mentioned in synopsis (Nanjing Safety Zones, Japanese propaganda, etc) is welcome in debate.

To offer an example, a possible resolution can call for drafting of an international human rights law or immediate trial to protect and restore justice. Safety zones, inspections, peacekeeping troops, and relief services are some possible short-term solutions. Protecting the individual human rights is the primary goal of this committee. Be creative but realistic in coming up with possible solutions.

Questions are welcome:

[japanese.war.crimes@busun.net](mailto:japanese.war.crimes@busun.net)

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