

The Debated Holocaust: Japanese War Atrocities During World War II

Leah Lindstrom

Salameno School of Humanities and Global Studies, Ramapo College of New Jersey, Mahwah, NJ, 07430

Genocidal Actions of the Japanese Military

The Japanese government's obsession with being the most powerful sphere in the Pacific, or accomplishing "Japanese Pan-Asianism" led to the atrocities committed such as human experimentation, large-scale massacres, forced assimilation of other cultures into Japanese, and sexual exploitation. These occurred in various places around the Pacific, but mostly in Korea and China. The Japanese desire to make their culture the most dominant in Asia parallels the Nazi Regime's motive of making one superior Aryan race. They both used humans that they believed to be inferior in experimentation and murdered mass amounts of people in the name of their regimes. There were over 20,000,000 civilian deaths in China alone by the hands of the Japanese. Both of these cases of mass murders by the Japanese did not stop with just the killing, but also the exploitation of women and resources that each province held. During the Nanjing Massacre, Japanese soldiers murdered, raped, and looted this city for over six weeks.

Victims: European versus Pacific Theatres

While victims of the Holocaust were put at slight ease knowing that the Nazi regime was found guilty of genocide, those that were harmed at the hands of the Japanese were not. With the American government taking control of Japan and leaving most of the imperialistic Japanese in charge, the rest of Asia did not get to see those that harmed them put down from their seats of power.

Why It Matters

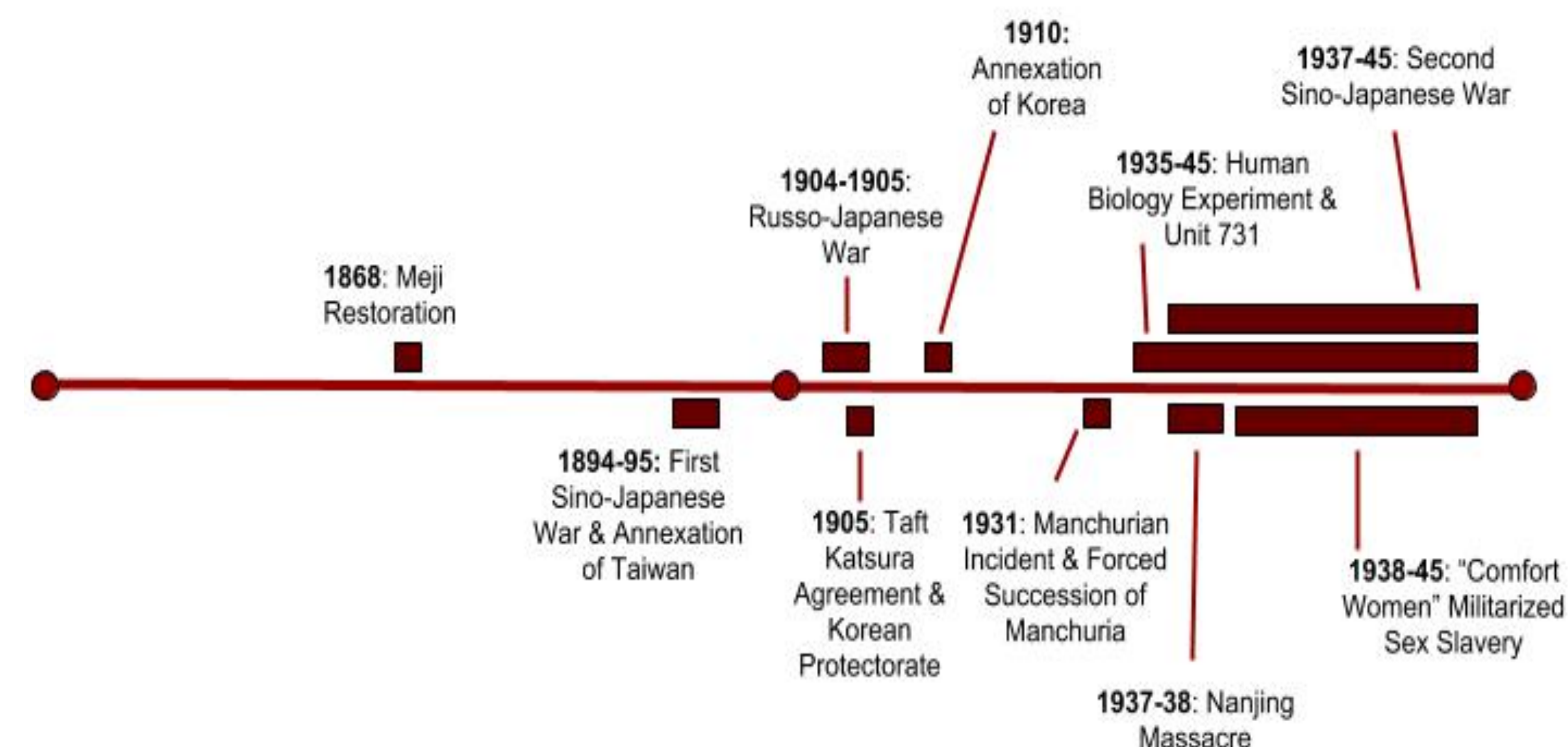
This challenges the assumption that international law is applied objectively. Hegemonic powers have the authority to make decisions that benefit them, even though other people directly effected might not have the most ideal outcome. It also highlights human rights violations in the Pacific sphere overshadowed by the Holocaust.

Thesis

The countries with the power to act prevented the Japanese from being punished as harshly as the Nazis through overlooking actions of the imperialist Japanese regime. Research shows that Cold War intentions and similarities in the imperialism of the United States and Japan were reasons the government did not acknowledge Japanese atrocities as genocidal actions.



The Meiji Restoration, beginning in the early 1800s, started a period of Westernization in Japan to become the main power in the Pacific. One of the main characteristics they adopted from the West was imperialism, which spurred the country's actions that began their involvement in World War II.



Above is a timeline of Japanese actions that highlight their genocidal actions and aggressive behavior before, during, and after World War II.

Imperialism of Hegemonic Powers' Impact

With the implementation of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE), Japanese atrocities were examined in the context of genocide. But, the IMTFE failed to include rape, sexual crimes, sexual enslavement and experimentation in their definition of genocide. Because of this, Japanese leaders and the government were shown not guilty. This tribunal was composed of hegemonic and imperialistic powers of the time. Because of the parallels these countries drew between Japanese imperialism and the imperial practices of their own governments, the IMTFE ignored the genocidal acts of the Japanese during the Rape of Nanjing and other instances and failed to punish those within the Japanese government.

The Cold War's Impact

The United States ignored Japanese war atrocities for Cold War purposes. The Japanese government, specifically Lieutenant General Shiro Ishii, experimented on humans in Manchuria, which was also known as the "Asian Auschwitz." Despite human experimentation being labelled as genocidal during the Holocaust, the United States chose to dismiss 3,600 Japanese leaders involved. Because of the United States government's extreme desire to compete with the Soviet Union during World War II, it kept the information that the Japanese obtained from these experiments for themselves in order to use it and to prevent the Soviet Union from obtaining it. This type of ignorance by the United States government stemmed from the fear of communism and spread of Soviet Union dominance in Asia. The United States government reinstated the Zaibatsu in Japan, kept imperialists in charge of the Japanese military, and allowed Emperor Hirohito to remain in place, even though all of these groups were responsible for the deaths of thousands around Asia. All of these actions by the United States government were to ensure that it could instill neocolonialism in Japan and ensure that communism would not spread there, or to any other country in the Pacific sphere.