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Linda R. Zhang, University of Washington, undergraduate student, “The Blood Logs: Factors in the U.S. Decision to Classify the Japanese Biological and Chemical Warfare Program”

Abstract: The Japanese Imperial Army maintained chemical and biological testing facilities during the Asian Pacific War where unwilling civilians and prisoners of war were subjected to human experiments regarding frostbite, germ warfare, syphilis, weapons testing, and human anatomy. As American forces began occupying Japan and restructuring the country, the Allied Powers established an international tribunal to prosecute Japanese leaders deemed responsible for the war. During this time period, American policymakers would classify the Japanese bio warfare program, essentially protecting Japanese participants in the warfare program from facing trial. My research analyzes why American policymakers would classify Japan’s Biochemical Warfare Program and subsequently limit public awareness of Japanese wartime atrocities. I argue humanitarian influences were a minor influence in U.S. foreign policy. Through incentivizing Japanese participants in the BW program, the United States was able to gain and limit access to new information. The paper integrates past American research and the 2014 archive of newly declassified government documents regarding U.S.-Japan relations during the 1930s-1950s. Further research with Japanese, Chinese, and Russian primary documents will contribute to assessing postwar society and the legacy of wartime atrocities.

THE BLOOD LOGS:
FACTORS IN THE U.S. DECISION TO CLASSIFY THE JAPANESE BIOLOGICAL AND
CHEMICAL WARFARE PROGRAM

Linda R. Zhang

Introduction

Both the 2000 and 2000 winners of Pulitzer prizes awarded to nonfiction books on Japan, an indicator that the history of the Japanese Empire remains a great deal of interest in the 21st century. While a thriving and active field, it is also a field that has become fierce, indignant, and politically charged. The legacy of Japanese wartime atrocities has always been a steady weight on East Asian consciousness, but it has most recently garnered greater attention in Western scholarship. Interest in the United States became more prominent through the work of Asian immigrants and Asian-Americans. In 1997, Iris Chang captured Western audiences with her groundbreaking work on the brutality of the Imperial Japanese Army in *The Rape of Nanking*. In 2017, San Francisco unveiled the “Comfort Women Memorial” in Chinatown, a sculpture of three Asian girls linking arms to remember the girls and women sexually enslaved the Japanese Imperial Army. Historical events dating back seventy-eighty years have begun to capture attention, and one of the unfortunate aspects of why this area has been largely downplayed in the United States is because the state had benefited from Japanese wartime atrocities.

The Japanese Imperial Army maintained testing facilities in China during the Asian-Pacific War where unwilling civilians and prisoners of war were subjected to human experiments regarding frostbite, germ warfare, syphilis, weapons testing, and human anatomy.¹ As American forces began occupying Japan and restructuring the country, the Allied Powers would establish an international tribunal to prosecute Japanese leaders deemed responsible for the war. During this time period, American policymakers would classify the Japanese biowarfare (BW) program, essentially protecting Japanese participants in the warfare program from facing trial. Through

incentivizing Japanese participants in the BW program, the United States was able to gain and limit access to new information.

This paper will argue why American policymakers felt justified to prevent Japanese participants in Japan's biological warfare program to face trial. The most important reason was because it was in American national interest and security to gain new knowledge on weapons, and technology. Ethical concerns regarding civilian casualties were not relevant from the 1930s-1950s. Efficient technology to kill as many people as possible became an important goal during the Second World War. As the United States was also developing their own weapons program, the United States was strongly aware and interested in Japan's biological warfare program. The Japanese BW program was known to be better than the United States since Japan used live human subjects.² So there were discussions as to what weapons Japan developed, and how could the U.S. have defended themselves from such weapons. When the war ended and the United States occupied Japan, this came the opportunity for American actors to resolve these questions. Despite extensive control over Japan, the United States was unable to learn the full scope and content of the program. American policymakers felt through classifying the program, participants were more likely to share information. Postwar trials were a large role in incentivizing participants to disclose results and share information. The unconditional surrender policy ensured exclusive American control over the fate of BW experts. This is significant as American policymakers viewed it their right to dictate the outcome of trials, similar to other domestic trials conducted by other Allied Powers.

Historical research regarding the program has been limited due to the classification, destruction, and fabrication of sources. Initial research was written to prove the existence of the Japanese BW

program. John W. Powell wrote the pioneering work in 1980 on the subject matter, demonstrating American and Japanese suppression of Japanese biological warfare against China and the Soviet Union.³ However, it was not until Sheldon Harris's extensive study on research facilities was the field officially acknowledged in Western scholarship. He explains how allied intelligence and scientists were keen to learn about the nature and extent of Japanese BW activities, leading Colonel Murray Sanders and Arvo Thompson to conduct investigations, and also the American decision to offer scientists immunity in exchange for intelligence.⁴

Civilian Lives and Technology

For both the Ally and Axis Powers, foreign civilian lives were targets. Moral and ethical concerns were overridden in the war effort. Yuasa Kim, an army doctor for the Japanese Imperial Army remembered how he learned procedures for the first time:

[The men] suddenly shot the Chinese, right in the stomachs, four or five times each. We then had to remove the bullets. That was our challenge. Could we remove them while they were still alive?⁵

When he discusses the past, Yuasa states it was part of the wartime mentality, of a willingness to do anything because his country was at war.⁶ The American mentality was the same, "we never got the point saying this is awful, you know, let's quit. We were directed to do these missions and we did," and so these wartime rationalizations became more prominent than moral arguments.⁷ Those that suffered the most were more often than not civilians and noncombatants. On March 9, 1945, the B-29 bombers of the U.S. Air Force would use incendiary bombs to kill 100,000 people and destroy fifteen square miles of urban Tokyo.⁸ And the Truman decision to drop the Atomic bomb was to save American lives, not foreign ones. Truman's decision brought worldwide prominence to nuclear weapons, and awareness of these weapons sheer power came with determined drive to possess such weapons and obtain military superiority. For

the United States, the government would also continue investing in their own nuclear program as well as exploring other areas of weapon development. Technology was crucial. The devastation of the First World War ended progressivism, the support for advocacy of social reform for countries.⁹ The new war turned to the skies, introducing the might of air power and terrible new weapons for the sole purpose of being able to kill as many people as possible in the shortest time feasible.¹⁰ Despite the horror of biological and chemical warfare, they programs were desirable to develop. Compared to experimenting with heavy artillery, formulating germ warfare such as gas was promising area of research since it was cheaper and efficient.¹¹

Despite arguments over whether a biological warfare program was worthwhile, on August 20, 1941, it was determined the development of a biological warfare program was fundamental to U.S. interests.¹² Major Leon A. Dox was the chief of the Medical Section in the U.S. Chemical Warfare Service previously argued that the decision was based on “their practicability rather than on the sentimental reactions of pacifists,” and so once the decision was made, by 1943 there were four BW research centers in the United States to explore offensive and defensive aspects of BW weapons.¹³ By this time, Japan’s Unit 731 was ten years ahead with research backed on human testing, so established was there program that Adolf Hitler sent medical officers to Japan to study bacteriological warfare research.¹⁴

While the United States began to create their own BW program, American policymakers were also extremely conscious of the developing Japanese Biowarfare program. There are numerous reports detailing American awareness of such programs, from Japanese actors stealing yellow fever virus from New York research labs to the CIA reports of Japanese purposefully inducing

cholera among Chinese civilians.¹⁵ At the forefront of American attention were Japanese biological and chemical attacks on the American home front.

Japanese biowarfare became a pressing concern for the United States near the end of the war through the appearance of large Japanese balloons. Known as “Jellyfish in the Sky,” these balloons were 33 feet in diameter rigged with a 33-pound bomb.¹⁶ Bombs floated and descended from the sky all across the U.S. mainland, confusing the heck out of American civilians. Between 1944 and 1945, there were hundreds of these balloons found and catalogued in American military records.¹⁷ These balloons were shipped off for research, and while there was no evidence of these balloons becoming biological weapons, it brought concerns to various branches of the American government of the ruminating on all the possibilities that such attacks could occur. When the Pacific War came to an end, the American interest in the Japanese biological warfare program did not.

The Truman administration knew it was necessary to study Japanese biowarfare centers to evaluate and utilize Japanese power. Truman believed co-opting Japanese powers was the next step in developing American power, and thus, it became necessary to study the biological warfare centers to evaluate the extent of Japanese power.¹⁸ Although the United States was the only country occupying Japan and possessing extensive control over the country, it was difficult to obtain information regarding the program. Part of this was because the Imperial Army would order military members to purposefully destroy wartime documents including those regarding the BW program.¹⁹ After the bombing of Hiroshima, Unit 731 seemed to “vanish off the face of the earth,” as the Imperial Army had destroyed facilities, killed witnesses, and sworn staff to silence.²⁰ It became difficult for Americans to learn the extent and parameters of their research.

Compton, the President of the MIT recall when discussing research with other Japanese scientists, Compton reports they were “cooperative,” but would deny any preparation for offensive bacteriological warfare, stating “we aren’t supposed to talk about that.”²¹ More subtle investigation revealed that primary data at facilities were destroyed, directly contradicting statements of Japanese scientific community.²²

There are many possibilities as to why participants did not want to discuss their experiences. There was loyalty to each other, to their “vows of silence,” but also fearful of retribution. To discuss terrible things done was to open oneself for attacks. Additionally, one had to confront what they had done. The Tokyo Trials were pivotal part in encouraging naming those involved in the program. The International Military Tribunal for the Far East was largely a product of the Allies’ victory to punish Japanese leaders for war crimes. New classes of crime, such as Class C Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity were defined as “inhuman acts committed against any civilian population,” and outlined clearly in the Japanese newspapers.²³ By then, a flood of informants began writing to the Tokyo headquarters. Thousands of Japanese participants were named, and it threatened to overwhelm investigators how to validate the legitimacy of these accusations.

The American investigation determined the legitimacy of correspondence by evaluating the specificity of information such as names, locations, and activities.²⁴ Some were deemed as “fantasy” while others like Takeshi Nishimura’s report were taken seriously. His report listing members of those who dissected war prisoners in Hainking, China were researched.²⁵ The turning point came when Americans identified the leader of the Japanese BW program. Hiroshi Ueki naming Ishii Shiro as the commander of the military unit experimenting on people.²⁶ He states:

[He] executed brutal experiments on many Allied PsW. At the time of the end of the war, it was no secret to the people that he destroyed the experiment station and the evidences. The placing of his name on war crimes suspect list was inevitable, but lately, he is using bribes to escape the consequences.²⁷

It is difficult to discuss what was Hiroshi Ueki's role was during the war. The legal/investigative of SCAP division opened an investigation on Ueki and reports indicate investigators were unable to locate him.²⁸ Regardless, this became a turning point for the entire case. On Nov 1948, the SCAP Intelligence Division would classify the entire case and prevent the SCAP legal section, the section spearheading the Military Tribunal from investigating the Japanese bio warfare unit and effectively conceal from Allied countries.²⁹ Ishii Shiro's file was classified as "secret".³⁰ When Ishii Shiro and other BW experts were not prosecuted during the Tokyo Trials, it is clear that American actors ensured that he did not face trial. It is deeply ironic that these informants were singled out to face trial, not be granted immunity. However, based on the documents and reports, it is clear investigators had several problems understanding the details of Japan's BW program. Physical evidence was destroyed. People were unwilling to talk about the program. For investigators the only viable solution at the time to gain information was to incentivize participants to share and discuss their experience. As such, the path to immunity was paved.

Conclusions

There has been significant research done on the Second World War. Numerous books, movies, documentaries, and social platforms contribute to public memory and understanding. Yet, despite all this information, there are still controversial opinions as to what happened in the war. As a developing body of work, Japanese wartime atrocities have increasingly become prevalent for the public and international politics. These historical problems are not limited to East Asia as they have become a part of American legacy. The Unit 731 Museum in Harbin, China blatantly accuses that Japanese participants "all escaped trial for war crimes" because of Americans. There

are many issues with this statement such as China's own persecution of Japanese during the domestic postwar trials, and so forth, but the provoking statement emphasizes the need to analyze why the American policymakers made such a decision.

Firstly, seeking justice for Chinese civilian was not a priority for the United States. The Second World War was distinctively cruel toward civilians. Moral and ethical concerns over the treatment of foreign civilians were overridden for the war effort. This was a universal truth for both Allied and Axis countries. The United States was particularly cruel during the war toward civilians. As a result, Chinese civilian suffering was not a concern or factor in U.S. decision making. At the time, countries including the United States would place national interests above humanitarian concerns.

Developing weapons became a national interest for the United States. The First and Second World War emphasize the necessity of effective weapons, most notably weapons capable of killing large groups of people at a time. The country began developing nuclear and biological weapons. Ideas at the time were based on "practicability," and not pacifism. However, the discrepancy between the United States BW program and Japanese BW program became apparent. As Japanese Ballons became a problem on the U.S. Homefront, it became increasingly important for the United States to understand their counterpart's program. Truman believed Japanese power needed to be co-opt for American use during the Cold War. As a result, actors investigated Japan's BW program after the war. Contrary to expectation, American investigations on Japan's BW program were rife with problems. It became apparent that the best method to learn about the program was through incentivizing participants to share their knowledge willingly. This decision has garnered resentment among Chinese citizens. However,

there were hundreds of domestic postwar trials where bio warfare experts were persecuted. American policymakers viewed it their right to dictate the outcome of trials, similar to other domestic trials conducted by other Allied Powers.

¹ Sheldon Harris, *Factories of Death: Japanese Biological Warfare, 1932-1945, and the American Cover Up*. (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 100-140.

² Walter E. Grunden. *Secret Weapons and World War II: Japan in the Shadow of Big Science*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 164.

³ John W. Powell. "Japan's Germ Warfare: The U.S. Cover-up of a War Crime," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 12.2 (1980); 2

⁴ Sheldon Harris, *Factories of Death: Japanese Biological Warfare, 1932-1945, and the American Cover Up*. (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 239-259.

⁵ Yuasa Ken, "Army Doctor" in Haruko T. Cook, and Theodore F. Cook's. *Japan at war: an oral history*. (New York: New Press, 1922), 147.

⁶ *Ibid*, 149.

⁷ American Experience, "Victory in the Pacific," PBS Video, May 2, 2005, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/pacific/>

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ Mark Clodfelter, "Introduction," *Beneficial Bombing: The Progressive Foundations of American Air Power, 1917-1945*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 10-20.

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

¹¹ Daniel Barenblatt, *A Plague Upon Humanity: The Secret Genocide of Axis Japan's Germ Warfare Operation* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004), 33

¹² Harris, 205; Minutes of a Conference on Biological Warfare, 2101 Constitution Avenue, N.W., August 20, 1941, Record Group 112, Entry 295A, Box 6, National Archives.

¹³ L.A. Fox, "Bacterial warfare: the use of biologic agents in warfare." *Military Surgeon* 72: 189-207, 1933 (reprinted in *The Military Surgeon* 90, no. 5 (May 1942); Rosebury, Theodor, Elvin A. Kabat, and Martin H. Boldt. *Bacterial warfare: a critical analysis of the available agents, their possible military applications, and the means for protection against them*. (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1947)

¹⁴ Barenblatt, 20, Bernd, 207.

¹⁵ "Reports on Japanese Bacteriological Research: Report No. 292: "Basic Experiments on Increasing the Toxicity of the Cholera Bacilli," Foreign Documents Branch, CIA, August 1941, Record Group 038, Entry 182, Box 69, National Archives; Harris, 207.

¹⁶ Linton Weeks, "Beware of Japanese Balloons." *NPR*. 20 Jan 2018. <https://www.npr.org/sections/npr-history-dept/2015/01/20/375820191/beware-of-japanese-balloon-bombs>

¹⁷ "Reported Japanese Use of Disease Serums and Cultures." 2 Jan 1945. OSS. Select Documents on Japanese War Crimes and Japanese Biological Weapons, 1934-2006. Comp. William H. Cunliffe. Web. <http://www.archives.gov/iwg/japanese-war-crimes/select-documents.pdf> (accessed December 1, 2020), 17;

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¹⁸ Melvyn P Leffler. *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War*. Stanford, (California: Stanford University Press, 1992), 4

¹⁹ Martin, 209.

²⁰ Grunden, 196; Barenblatt, 207.

²¹ Talk by Dr. K.T. Compton on scientific work in Japan,” October 10, 1945, Record Group 112, Entry 295A, Box 11, National Archives.

²² “Preliminary Report on Japanese Biological Warfare, Transmittal from WD, G-2 to WD, NDD,” November 23, 1945, Record Group 319, Entry 47C, Box 827, National Archives.

²³ N. Boister & R. Cryier (EDS.), *Documents on the Tokyo International Military Tribunal: Charter, Indictment and Judgments* 5 (2008), 1-3.

²⁴ Harris, 241.

²⁵ “NISHIMURA, fnu,” August 08, 1946, Record Group 331, Entry 1331, Box 1772, National Archives.

²⁶ “Motoji YAMAGUCHI et al,” October 04, 1946, Record Group 331, Entry 1294, Box 1434, National Archives.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ “Case Closed,” November 26, 1948. Record Group 331, Section 1331, Box 1772, Case File #330, National Archive.

³⁰ Policy Covering the Classification of Matters Concerning Biological Warfare,” January 13, 1949. Record Group 331, Section 1755, Box Case 743, National. Archives.

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