

Die japanischen und die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in der Sowjetunion 1945-1956. Vergleich von Erlebnisberichten

[The Japanese and German Prisoners of War in the Soviet Union 1945-1956. Comparison of accounts]

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Foreword

- 1 Introduction
 - 1.1 Formulation of questions
 - 1.2 Procedure and structure of the thesis
 - 1.3 Sources, status of the research on POW, appraisal of sources
 - 1.4 Specific problems of remembering
- 2 Historic background
 - 2.1 Captivity, protection of prisoners of war and forced labour since ancient times
 - 2.1.1 Development of laws for the protection of Prisoners of War
 - 2.1.2 Japanese and Soviet attitudes to captivity and to the Geneva Convention of 1929
 - 2.2 Civic education and military training

- 2.2.1 In Japan
- 2.2.2 In Germany
- 2.3 Ideas about Communism and the Soviet Union
 - 2.3.1 In Japan
 - 2.3.2 In Germany
- 2.4 The Soviet camp system
 - 2.4.1 Japanese camps
 - 2.4.2 German camps
- 2.5 Social strata in the camp society
 - 2.5.1 Relations between rank and file
 - 2.5.1.1 Japanese
 - 2.5.1.2 Germans
- 2.6 Problems of communication
- 3 Comparison of Japanese and German Accounts**
 - 3.1 Who wrote accounts and why?
 - 3.2 Characteristics of the accounts
 - 3.3 How to deal with the defeat and adaption to captivity
 - 3.3.1 Japanese
 - 3.3.2 Germans
 - 3.4 ANTIFA Anti-fascist democratic movement
 - 3.4.1 ANTIFA and its impact on the camp life of the Japanese
 - 3.4.2 ANTIFA and its impact on the camp life of the Germans
 - 3.5 Survival
 - 3.5.1 Starvation
 - 3.5.2 Death, illness, accidents, mental illness, suicide
 - 3.5.3 Manual skills, trade, bartering, black market
 - 3.5.4 Spiritual and artistic activities, education, sports, entertainment, humour
 - 3.5.5 Religion
 - 3.5.5.1 Rituals
 - 3.5.5.2 Japanese and Religion
 - 3.5.5.2.1 Karma
 - 3.5.5.3 Germans and Religion
 - 3.5.6 Practising fraud
 - 3.5.6.1 Simulating, provoking accidents, self injury, self mutilation, escape
 - 3.5.6.2 Theft of Soviet State property
 - 3.5.6.3 Stealing from comrades
 - 3.5.6.4 Attitude to the work, wages, cheating norms
 - 3.5.7 Resistance against the camp administration, sabotage
 - 3.5.7.1 Japanese
 - 3.5.7.2 Germans
 - 3.6 Human relations
 - 3.6.1 Relationship with the Soviet population
 - 3.6.2 Relation with women, sexuality
 - 3.6.2.1 Japanese
 - 3.6.2.2 Germans
 - 3.7 Mutual assessment of Japanese and Germans
 - 3.8 Continuation of the Soviet propaganda at home
 - 3.8.1 Japanese
 - 3.8.2 Germans
- 4 Summary and conclusion**
- Bibliography**
 - Sources in Japanese

Secondary literature in Japanese
Sources other than in Japanese
Secondary literature other than in Japanese
World Wide Web

Appendix

- A Definition of terms
 - B Chronological table
 - C Rescript of the Meiji Emperor to the soldiers and sailors of Oct. 30th, 1890
 - D Rescript of the Meiji Emperor about education of Jan. 4th, 1882
 - E Decree of the Ministry of Education of 1937 about the national polity
 - F Glossary of Japanese characters
 - G Camp language
 - H List of consulted veterans
 - I Japanese, Russian and English table of contents
 - K Japanese summary and conclusion
 - L Russian summary and conclusion
 - M English summary and conclusion
 - N List of maps and illustrations
- Index, Biography

Summary and conclusion

The numbers and majuscules in brackets () in front of the sections refer to the German text in chapter (4), to the Japanese text in annex (K), and to the Russian text in annex (L).

(1) History is full of reports about the bitter lot of prisoners of war (POW). No rights protected them, whether soldier or civilian, killing and forced labour were common. Rules in their favour only developed slowly. The basis for a new attitude was laid by Ch. Montesquieu in *De l'esprit des lois* (1750) and by J. J. Rousseau in *Contrat Social* (1762). They aimed at limiting the rights of the victor to prevent prisoners from taking up arms. The first International Convention for the Protection of Prisoners of War and the Wounded, the Hague Land Warfare Convention, was established in 1907. The Soviet Union and Japan refused to ratify the Geneva Convention of 1929, which offered a better and more extended protection. The Soviet Union criticized, amongst others, racist ideas, e.g. the stipulation that, where possible, separate camps according to race and nationality should be set up. Japan invoked the traditional contempt for captivity. The non-recognition of the **Geneva Convention** by the Soviet Union and Japan does not mean that they had no rules for the protection of the POWs, but they disregarded them partly, or wholly. In addition the Soviet Union bypassed its agreement with the Potsdam Declaration of August 2nd, 1945, which stipulated that all Japanese, with the exception of those suspected of war crimes, were to be repatriated.

(2) Japan's treatment of the POWs in the Sino-Japanese, Russo-Japanese and in World War I was benevolent. As from 1911 the attitude to captivity hardened. The reason for this may be sought in a feeling of strength on one side, on the other side militarist circles were

more and more keeping a tighter rein on internal problems and interfered in the handling of the political and economic frictions with other countries. The moral superiority of the Japanese soldier should not only make up for the material superiority of potential enemies and ultimately lead to victory. To achieve this, the physical and psychical fitness for action of each and every soldier was to be increased to a maximum. One mean to this was the **ban on captivity**, making it an offence with corresponding penalties in the armed forces. The constant emphasis on the duty of soldiers and every citizen to serve and obey the Emperor and the glorification of death in battle were other key elements of the propaganda. Human rights played a minor part in Japan, the *Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan*, as laid down in the Instruction of the Ministry of Education of March 30, 1937, give testimony of this by the sentence “**An individual belongs to the State and its history**”. The non-ratification of the Geneva Convention was a signal to the international community that Japan no longer was pursuing a diplomacy aimed at obtaining international recognition, but instead it would follow a policy based on strength and the capability of victory. My view is that the Japanese contempt for captivity cannot exclusively be accounted for with tradition. This impression is underlined also by two articles in the *Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors* of 1882. Art. 2 states that superiors should show a benevolent attitude to their subordinates and treat them kindly. Art. 3 reads “Never to despise an inferior enemy or fear a superior (..). If you affect valor and act with violence, the world will in the end detest you and look upon you as wild beasts. Of this you should take heed.” It would, however, be mistaken to consider the low opinion of the captivity as typical Japanese, it was widely shared, or even the rule, until recent times. The Soviet attitude to it was equally harsh, if not even more cruel. The order of the Supreme Command of Aug. 16, 1941, faulted in a joint liability also the family of anyone who fell into captivity. The particular about Japan was that the ban on captivity was exclusively justified with tradition. This exempted its leaders from further justification and offered shelter from critics, with the added advantage that nobody had to take a personal responsibility. General Tōjō Hideki availed himself of this at the War Crime Tribunal in Tōkyō.

I believe that the treatment of the POWs by the three Powers is a consequence of the ideologization, as Katō Norihiro sees it: Enemies were the communism, the inferior Soviet citizen, capitalism, the class enemy and the colonial powers. Goals were lebensraum, liberation of the colonized peoples, equality and a durable peace, all this combined with the conviction of one's own superiority. The massive arming and mobilization of all forces was to be combined with an indoctrination instilling an attitude of mind which blindly supported the military and political leadership. Coercion, shame, shaming and fear were important elements of the indoctrination.

(3) Since the **Meiji era**, from 1868, Japan made enormous efforts to reach a status of political and economic equality with both the US and Europe. The education system and the new national army were major tools to reach this goal. The *Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors* of 1882 and the *Imperial Rescript on Education* of 1890 outlined the Tennō's thoughts about the duty of the armed forces and the education system. Political parties were not welcome; their development was hindered by the leading circles, foremost by the government. They were suspicious of socialist and communist thoughts and persecuted their exponents. As from the 1930s a widening of the sphere of influence in East Asia, by establishing a *Great East Asiatic Sphere of Prosperity*, became the main national goal whereby the Armed Forces were to play the key role. The emphasis on Japan's exceptionality and its role in East Asia was stressed by the instruction on the *Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan*, issued by the instruction of the Ministry of Education in 1937. It qualified the orientation towards the West as exaggerated and dangerous. The primordial thing to do was to reflect upon Japan's own moral concepts, patriotism and loyalty to the Tennō.

(4) The significance of the **German Emperor** was in no way comparable to that of the Tennō, there were no rescripts backing his position and calling for total submission. The civic education was not under central control. In addition to the Emperor's authority, there were the parliament, the Churches and the competences of the *länder* (states) which by far exceeded those of the Japanese centrally ruled and powerless prefectures. The Armed Forces insisted on a strict discipline, but self-sacrifice to the Emperor was not designated as the supreme duty. Political parties played a major role; socialism and communism were not oppressed.

(5) Clashes of interest in Sakhalin and Manchuria already before the revolution and the defeat of Russia in 1905 influenced **Japan's attitude towards Russia and the Soviet Union**. This defeat led to a strong feeling of superiority in Japan's armed forces. Subsequent to the Russian Revolution, Japan supported the opponents of the new communist government and despatched an expeditionary corps to Siberia. The relationship with the young Soviet Union suffered not only from pre-revolutionary antagonism; it was burdened from the beginning with the experience of a new conflict. The occupation of the whole of Manchuria and the proclamation of the State of Manchukuo intensified the tensions, leading to continuous border clashes. In spite of this, a neutrality pact was established on April 13, 1941. It prevented a further intensification of the incidents and allowed both states to concentrate on other plans, but the mutual distrust continued. The propaganda was restrained, whilst military circles continued to work out plans against the Soviet Union.

(6) The **attitude of Germany towards the Soviet Union** alternated considerably in the time of the Weimar Republic, between 1919 and 1933. There was enthusiasm on the left,

fear in the national camp. However, this did not hinder brisk trade relations; there was even a secret military cooperation. Hitler brought up his claim on land in the east and presented the Soviet Union as a danger to Germany and the world. After the accession to power on Jan. 30, 1933, the propaganda was massively intensified, portraying the Soviet Union as a country inferior to Germany in every respect. The unexpected pact between Germany and the Soviet Union of Aug. 23rd, 1939, left Germans largely puzzled, how was it possible to conclude an alliance with the devilish Soviet Union? With the attack on June 22nd, 1941, Germany put into action the dream of lebensraum in the East and the annihilation of a dangerous regime. Favoured by the initial success, the propaganda came into full swing. The soldiers were constantly reminded that they were dealing with an enemy knowing no mercy and the lot they would face, if captured.

(7) The German soldiers saw that something like a **defeat** was approaching, for the Japanese it was a fact within one week. In their accounts it is described by preference in terms of surprise about the might of the Soviet attack and Japan's own weakness. Defeat was not a matter of personal disgrace, the surrender a decision by the Tennō, beyond any discussion. A sense of relief spread, everything was over and repatriation would soon begin. The matter was different for the Germans after four years of fighting with heavy losses and casualties. The goal to fight the Soviet Union until defeat ended in a material and spiritual heap of rubble.

(8) **Being taken prisoner** meant a sudden change from an active to a passive role and uncertain rights. The Japanese, convinced that their return home was imminent and confirmed in that opinion by the Soviets, were boarding the trains, allegedly heading for Soviet ports, but instead found themselves dumped somewhere in the Soviet Union, mainly in Siberia, after agonizing weeks of travel. This and the first months in captivity were literally etched into the memories and constitute key elements of all accounts. Indescribable feelings of having been cheated depressed everybody, even more, when, years later, it became known that the Soviet Union had endorsed the decision of the Potsdam Conference of Aug. 2nd, 1945, that all Japanese were to be repatriated, except those suspected of having committed war crimes. The Germans were preparing themselves for a captivity, the duration of which nobody could foretell.

(9) An estimated **600 000 Japanese were taken prisoners**, 540 000 returned home. As from 1941, **about 3 155 000 Germans fell into captivity**, of whom 1 950 000 came home. The German mortality rate was about 35 %, the Japanese about 10 %. The Japanese mainly got captured after the capitulation, their physical condition was better than that of the Germans, who were mostly taken prisoners after exhaustive fighting.

One of the first experiences was the condition of the quarters. In many places there were only tents, even with temperatures well below freezing point. Almost all accounts men-

tion the ghastly quarters hardly offering any shelter and lacking sanitary installations. The Japanese were destined for employment under the harsh climatic conditions of Siberia and Eastern Soviet Union, only few were brought beyond the Ural. The German camps were mainly west of the Ural. The prisoners were allocated to a number of ministries. The places of work were at varying distances from the camps, marching one hour, one way, was anything but seldom.

(10) The **new situation** called for adaptability, perseverance, esprit de corps and steadfastness. Captivity was, at first sight, something one had to endure and the end of which one simply had to wait out; it was no challenge like fighting. The essential was to be alive the next morning. Surviving as a task only took conscious forms at a later stage. It required an adequate mental attitude, decisive behaviour, taking care of one's resources and getting together with like-minded people, in order to support one another. How to cope with a situation where, in the beginning, comrades were dying off on a massive scale, when nobody could foretell the future and no liaison with the home country was possible? Surviving is often quoted as a duty towards the family, in particular in the cases of married POWs with children.

All accounts reveal how many succumbed to the strain of famine, illness, cold, uncertainty about repatriation and the political indoctrination, whilst others grew mentally stronger. People of all social standings and education showed failures of character. But is it correct to speak of failure, if difficulties exceed the capacity of enduring? Some reports show considerations about this aspect, with varying comprehension for those overpowered by pressure and affliction.

(11) **Communication** between the Germans, the Soviet authorities and the population was somehow eased by Germans speaking Russian and vice versa. The matter was different with the Japanese. The sea as a natural border and Japan's policy of isolation, from the beginning of the 17th century through to the middle of the 19th century, made impossible any contact between Japan and Russia; there was no knowledge of each other's language. The Soviets were not interested in Germans and Japanese learning Russian, there was no teaching material. A **camp language** served as the basis of communication between the POWs of different languages, Soviet authorities and the population. It consisted mainly of Russian words, adapted more or less to one's own language, enabling a communication that met the basic requirements at the workplace and in the camp. It is no surprise that the vocabulary consisted mainly of words and sentences referring to work and food.

(12) The purpose of the anti-fascist democratic movement **ANTIFA** was to reeducate the POWs. They should be enabled to understand what enormous damage had been caused to the Soviet Union and the duty to compensate for it. Recognizing the superiority of the Soviet

system meant becoming supporter of a state that could safeguard peace in the whole world. Returnees should be enabled to contribute to the establishment of a society as per Soviet pattern. Since Japan had not attacked the Soviet Union, their slave labour could not be justified with the duty to make up for the damage caused, instead it was argued that the Soviet Union had to make large and costly efforts to liberate the countries usurped by Japan.

German communists exiled to the Soviet Union before the war played a major role in the indoctrination of the POWs, during and after the war. The situation was quite different with the Japanese; the Soviets could not take advantage of Japanese communist exiles. Those who were to carry the task were mainly recruited amongst the young and poorly educated rank and file. The Japanese military training had been based on unconditional obedience; the same stands for the ANTIFA education. The common denominator for the Japanese Army and the Soviet ANTIFA was a rigid dogmatism.

(13) The upper strata of the camps were determined by the military hierarchy and by POWs vested with functions by the camp authorities. Not the officers, but the **activists** were in the top position, but they too had to court the Soviet hierarchy and to cooperate in getting their orders carried out, in particular in reaching the daily production norms. The activists held positions of power, enjoying better living conditions with the additional prospect of being repatriated earlier. The privileges attached to being activist were quickly noticed by those not really inclined towards communism, whom physical and psychical weakness caused to become candidates for activists. There are bitter comments about activists harassing their comrades, sowing distrust, denouncing and turning camp life into a hell. The peak of humiliations and torments were the kangaroo courts, where the accused were at the mercy of the craziest charges, without being allowed to defend themselves. The Japanese activists seem to have been more eager than the Germans to intimidate their comrades. The frontal **attack against the Tennō-system** and the officers exposed the camp society to a crucial test. The officers' resistance against this was gradually oppressed. Maintaining harmony is a key element of the Japanese society. By purposely ignoring its rules, attacking the Tennō and the military hierarchy, the cohesion was wrecked. The activists managed to largely keep their power until the end of captivity. All this contributed to the belief by the Japanese, that they had been more obsequious than the Germans, who supposedly had given proof of having more backbone. The Japanese sensitivity to shame and ignominy accentuated this feeling. However, it is to be borne in mind that the defeat had a more devastating effect on many Japanese than on the Germans. The victories and conquests since 1895 convinced people of the sagacity of the Tennō and the rightness of the empire's goals. Contrary to Germany, Japanese political parties, trade unions, socialist and communist movements had been constantly repressed; consequent-

ly their impact on political thinking and acting was weak. After 1950 the German activists lost their influence and power, whilst the Japanese were able to keep it up to the end of the captivity.

(14) To preserve their identity, both Japanese and Germans endeavoured to stick to their culture. Together with the unavoidable adaptation to the circumstances, this led to a **camp culture**. The Japanese were largely amongst themselves, in their own units. In spite of the undermining activities of the activists they stuck, as far as possible, to the traditional values, which determine a fitting station for everybody. In the difficult – at the beginning chaotic – conditions of captivity it was important to maintain a familiar order. This explains the strong resistance, when respected officers were relieved or punished by the Soviets. The Japanese were adamant that orders be given to them only through their own officers.

The Germans mainly did not get into captivity in intact units; their military hierarchy had suffered heavy losses. The divides between officers, NCOs and men were less marked than the Japanese and disappeared almost totally at the workplace.

The roles of the German and the Japanese **camp newspaper** also differed. The Japanese frequently refer to it, mostly with disdain, due also to the compulsory lecture. The German attitude is one of marked indifference; the accounts rarely refer to it.

(15) **Starvation** and insufficient or even totally lacking medical care were, contrary to what veterans suspect, not a means of punishing or even annihilating the enemy, but a fact under which the Soviet population too was suffering painfully. The economy had been switched to war economy; the Cold War extended this situation. Affliction had a disinhibiting effect. Theft, in particular of food; be it a piece of bread from a comrade or by fraud, fanned the distrust. Hunger pushed to total use of anything edible, there were no taboos.

(16) During the fighting the Germans faced **death** daily; many Japanese only were confronted with it in captivity. Winter 1945-1946, with a daily increasing number of casualties, as a consequence of famine, illness, accidents and shortage of medical care, left deep mental scars on all of them. Expressions of rage denounce the Soviets prohibiting or restricting the captives' own surgeons and medical orderlies to help. There are, however, also frequent appreciations of Soviet Army surgeons and medical orderlies for loving care and efforts to help, in spite of totally inadequate means. The norm system did not except those employed in the medical services either. The accent was not on cure, but on the fulfilment of the norms at the workplace, health considerations were therefore given low priority. The doctors could not dispense the captives from work at their own discretion, they too had their norms. Some Germans mention with a certain surprise Jewish doctors and orderlies who had treated them well.

(17) Psychological illness is hardly mentioned in the accounts, even less in the Soviet statistics. However, psychological problems must have been frequent. They are not named as such, but paraphrased with expressions such as loss of will to live, apathy, despair and so on. **Suicide** mainly occurred at the beginning of captivity, it is not made a theme and appears only occasionally, e.g. in connection with the unbearable pressure exercised by the activists or the despair about the uncertainty of the repatriation. There are no statements allowing an appraisal as to whether Christian faith prevented Germans from committing suicide, whilst in the case of the Japanese there are no religious bans.

(18) **Entertainment, craft skills and cultural activities** helped to put up with the difficult situation. It was more than that, it was a quest for something to oppose to starvation, slave labour, daily degradation and humiliation, a search for something one could feel proud of. Initiative POWs not only knew how to carry along the comrades, they were also diplomatic enough to convince camp commanders to tolerate or even encourage their activity. An impressive self-discipline was required to sing after an exhaustive workday, or to rehearse for a theatre performance, the reward was satisfaction. Others manufactured plays, musical instruments and everyday household essentials, all this with crude instruments. Gifted craftsmen were called for jobs in private houses, earning some money or being compensated with food. All this not only brought some diversion, but also imparted aspects of one's own culture to POWs of other nations and to the local population and created sympathy. Japanese accounts refer less than German to trade, barter and black market activities.

(19) The atheist Soviet Union did not tolerate **religious practices**, but there were exceptions, depending on the local camp commanders. In Japan there is no religion in the western style, Japanese thinking is not compatible with dogmas, *kami* (gods) are not beyond nature, but part of it. People are not craving for salvation, but for a harmonious life. Japanese accounts contain no statements about religious feelings. I could not find any hints that the captivity and its horrors were attributed to karma. In personal encounters this was strongly denied, but nobody questioned the existence of karma.

To most Germans, religion was passed down by the parents, the Churches and the school, faith was important to many. The army chaplains endeavoured to continue their activity under the difficult situation, but they were too few to cover all camps, apart from the fact that the Soviets were not interested in facilitating this. Christmas was the main religious feast and no efforts were spared to celebrate it in a dignified way. In the middle of severe cold, long dark nights and daily horrors, Christmas spread some hope for better food, it was a time of intensified yearning for getting home, or it may just have been cherished remembrance of childhood. Although being mentioned often, it did not always have a religious significance. One

veteran, who spent 5 years in Central Asia, reports about it every year, but only in 1947 he wonders how many had grasped the real meaning of this holiday. In one instance he calls Bolshevism a tool of fate in order to shake the shallow bottom of the present time, only Christianity can overcome the situation. The need for spiritual consolation was most intensive in appalling situations. Many found it, others collapsed mentally because they were unable to match their idea of God with what they lived through. The question of whether the captivity and the suffering had been allowed by God, or even caused by him, is hardly alluded to directly, but there are statements leading to the conclusion that such questions were thought or even discussed about. One comes across references to fate once in a while. They can aim at God, without having to say so and avoiding thus blaming him, or simply reveal a belief in some superior power. In personal dialogues I was assured that captivity and the sufferings were purely the consequence of politics.

(20) **Rituals** were the common denominator for Soviet secular, German Christian and Japanese nonreligious forms of behaviour and reverence. Soviet rituals imposed on the POWs were, amongst others, the oath of allegiance by the activists to the communist cause, declarations of devotion to the great leader Stalin, formal challenges to productivity contests and dancing arm in arm whilst singing the *Internationale*. Rituals of the Germans were in connection with Christmas, the ladling out of food and the consumption of bread. The social relations and the military hierarchy of the Japanese were markedly ritualized.

(21) With captivity continuing, **work** became more and more important. It was irrelevant whether this benefited the Soviet Union, what mattered were one's own satisfaction and the possibility to obtain more food. Work was vital not only to the maintenance of self-respect, but also to gain the esteem of the population and the Soviet authorities. Intrinsicly connected to the work were the norms in which the daily work output was laid down. The measurement only covered the quantity, not the quality, which led to fraud and bungling. In spite of that a number of works erected by the POWs are of remarkable quality. The Soviet Union paid tribute to their work in a performance report submitted to Stalin on June 17th, 1950. All over the Soviet Union there are works erected, either totally or with substantial contribution from the POWs. Amongst them there are power plants, railway lines, roads, factories and living quarters. The veterans are rightly proud of this.

(22) The informer system and the **denunciations** rendered impossible any direct resistance against the camp authorities. The Soviet documents seldom mention such actions, all the more talk goes about sabotage. As such were considered causing damage, theft and anything that hindered the fulfilment of the norms, even undermining one's own health. The only form of resistance somehow recognized was hunger strike, if it was not directed against Mos-

cow and the function of the party and its leaders. The success of such actions varied. It could lead to no result, partial results but as well to disciplinary measures and penal suits.

(23) The relationship with the **Soviet population** changed gradually. Even the strong hatred of the Germans died down. The POWs too had to do some rethinking and draw a line between the Soviet system and the population. It did not take them long to realize that it too was a victim of the system. Women are mentioned equally often with gratitude by both Germans and Japanese who virtually erect a monument in their honour. Women substantially contributed to the reconciliation. Veterans and their families travel to Russia to visit the graves of POWs, meeting also Soviet veterans. They bear witness how, over decades; hostility can change into mutual understanding, may even turn into friendship.

(24) **Sexuality** is largely left out in the accounts. Up to 1947 the physical shape of the POWs was such that sexual desires hardly cropped up. This changed with improving living conditions. The Soviets endeavoured to prevent contacts with women, but were successful to a limited degree only, the workplace, in particular, offered many opportunities. Not only men were in need of affection, also women, whose husbands had been disabled due to war injuries, or had been killed. Others were longing for some diversion in the rut of a dull life, or wished to become pregnant. Homosexuality, although reported to have been widespread, is almost totally withheld. With the Germans this may be due to the severe oppression in the Army and the Christian attitude to homosexuality. Both aspects do not apply to Japan, where it is being considered as a part of human feelings and therefore no object of discussion.

(25) Although Japan and Germany had been allies, the accounts do not reflect this, there is no talk about having looked at one another as former allies. **Mutual appraisal** was determined by personal experience and the opinion about one's own side. The greater the dissatisfaction with it, the more enthusiastic one was about the others. The Japanese and the Germans both speak very positively about one another; both appreciate qualities they thought were more distinct on the other than on one's own side, e.g. self-conscious behaviour towards the Soviets and a strong sense of companionship. On account of living in separate camps, and also often working in separate work places and problems of communication, the impressions relied mainly on externals. Both could not notice how the other camp society also suffered heavily under the strain of the communist indoctrination and human failings.

(26) The **behaviour of the repatriates** is an indication that democratic re-education was more violent in the Japanese camps. The repatriates to Western Germany/FRG express their delight at being home; there were no political activities in favour of the Soviet Union. Those who elected to return to the Soviet Occupation Zone/German Democratic Republic were greeted as comrades from the socialist motherland. The situation was different in Japan.

The longer the captivity, the more many POWs became radicalized. Unlike the Germans, the Japanese could not elect where to be repatriated to. The public became aware of the stiffening attitude from approximately 1947 onwards by turmoil caused by activists on arrival at the ports. When the ships approached the shore the *Internationale* was sung. Ugly scenes worried the authorities, the US-Occupation Power and the population. Help offered by the state was refused as inadequate; the train journeys were used for propaganda. In 1950 a mass demonstration was held in front of the Parliament Building in Tōkyō. The abolition of the Tennō system and the setting up of a socialist society on the basis of the Soviet model were demanded publicly. However, the iron grip of the activists was effective only during captivity and in the time immediately after homecoming. Three months after disembarking only about 20 % had joined the Japanese Communist Party. The target to use the repatriates as a vanguard for the JCP to take over the power was not achieved.

(27) The main urge to write **accounts** was to convey to the family and to friends an impression of what one had gone through. The Japanese only provide scarce personal information, to categorize them according to rank and education is difficult, in contrast to the Germans who are more generous in this respect. Those Japanese who did not want to write and publish an account had the opportunity to write a short report of 1-2 pages in one of the many compilations. German accounts that deal with questions like war responsibility, the future of Germany or who took initiatives for the benefit of the camp society were mainly written by officers and intellectuals.

Taking notes in the camps was not permitted. The reports written over a period of about 50 years were all composed from memory. In appraising them one must bear in mind also the untold as a result of suppression and oblivion, in addition memory altered and reshaped in the course of time. Accounts drawn up in the 1950s and 1960s are more emotional than those published from the 1970s onwards. This may be attributed to the time lag and a better state of knowledge. Both Japanese and Germans depict a Soviet Union at the mercy of its leaders and of a population suffering like the POWs.

Conclusions:

Differences:

- (A) For most Japanese the Tennō continued to be of utmost significance. Unlike the German Fuhrer, he was not a figure that had left its impact on the state only during a short period, he was one link in a long row of dynasties, whose legitimation could not be put in jeopardy by a defeat. Those, however, who had turned to communism

seem to have pursued it with a zeal and a ruthlessness that excelled the German activists.

- (B) Because the Japanese fell into captivity largely in complete units, their camp society remained more compact than the German. They stuck, as far as possible, to the traditional rules of conduct and the military code, but suffered more under the result of the intensive and extended communist indoctrination and the deliberate violation of societal rules. The conjecture by Japanese, that they had been more obsequious than the Germans, is to be seen in the light of the Japanese social system and the continuing strict military discipline. Both led to an outward submissiveness, but in turn could also bring about an attitude resolved to extreme opposition.
- (C) Japanese accounts contain no mention as to religious comfort; such remarks are not frequent in German reports. No statements could be found that the fate was attributed to karma, whilst Germans hint very seldom at God having caused or allowed their sufferings. In personal conversations this was strictly denied. I suggest the lack of religious references by the Germans does not mean that there were no such thoughts, rather, being of very intimate nature, they were deliberately not gone into.

Common characteristics:

- (D) Both Japanese and Germans thought the others were more steadfast, more courageous in facing the Soviets, one's own attitude (more) disgraceful. This is largely due to ignorance about the real circumstances in the other camp society. From my viewpoint both behaved in accordance with circumstances, traditional moral concepts and what human strong points facilitated or weaknesses led to.
- (E) Slave labour and living conditions differed only so far as the Japanese were largely employed in the inhospitable areas of Siberia. They suffered particularly from the long winters and temperatures far below freezing point, because in the majority they originated from regions with a milder climate.
- (F) In both camp societies higher education, social status and military rank were no guarantees for exemplar behaviour.
- (G) Sexuality and relations with women are hardly mentioned, the same goes for homosexuality, psychosomatic illness and one's own embarrassing conduct.
- (H) In accounts and personal conversation matter-of-factness prevails. Some authors are even able to see positive aspects, e.g. the capability to get by with very little, perseverance, the quality of comradeship, insight into the Soviet system, solidarity with the population, the compassion of women, discovering hitherto unknown personal ca-

pabilities, inventiveness, imaginativeness and captivity as schooling for life. Captivity was not only a time of trial, suffering and of human failings, but also a time of cheerful and positive experiences, where people outgrew themselves, becoming lifelines for their comrades. The large majority impressed the Soviet authorities not only by their work, but also through their attitude. In the hearts of the Soviet population they left monuments which last longer than many of the buildings they constructed.

- (I) Both Japanese and Germans dedicate no or only little space to the politics of their own country, before and during the war. In personal discussions the Germans are frank, the Japanese restrained. Politics were the object of the compulsory reappraisal during the ideological re-education. In the case of the Japanese, the past and the future of the Tennō was at the centre of the arguments.

(28) This comparison of accounts enables Japanese and German veterans to see one another more objectively. It should, above all, spread knowledge about the Soviet captivity of Japanese and Germans, soldiers of the losers of WW II. Indispensable part of this is to understand the significantly differing civic education of the Japanese and the Germans. Outside Japan knowledge about Japanese POWs in Siberia is largely inexistent, comparisons of Japanese and German accounts were not published hitherto. I am pleased that this and my graduation thesis led several Japanese students to embark on similar research. I hope that it will also cover the hardening of the attitude towards captivity after 1911.

The thesis begins with a poem by Ishihara Yoshirō about hatred; I finish it with a sentence about reconciliation and a poem by Karl Hochmuth projecting his idea about life after repatriation.

The purpose of this collection is neither the wish to retaliate, nor selfpity or selfjustification, but to foster mutual forgiveness, a firm determination to prevent that such a disgrace be repeated and to resist the evil of inhuman behaviour.¹

When I will be back home²

When I will be back home, I will always eat
from full plates and from round loaves.

When I will be back home, I will quickly forget
the rusty bowls and the thin slices.

When I will be back home, I will always laugh
and sing, dance and play music.

¹ GOLLWITZER et al. (1956: 8).

² DER HEIMKEHRER (1954: 40).

When I will be back home, I will lead the plough
into the fallow fields of my intellect.

When I will be back home, I will always pray
and thank deeply and beseech for blessing.

When I will be back home, I will endeavour
to get on well with anyone of good will.

Appreciation is due to those who managed to get close to such goals; those unable to cope
deserve sympathy.

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First report on the PhD thesis of Richard Dähler

*Die japanischen und die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in der Sowjetunion 1945-1956. Ver-
gleich von Erlebnisberichten*

[The Japanese and the German Prisoners of War in the Soviet Union 1945-1956. Comparison
of Accounts]

World War II is still casting its shadows into the present day. Much information has only
been researched within the past 16 years, since 1990. The captivity of prisoners of war may
be considered as one of the aspects of World War II which either is no longer in the focus of
interest, or to which never really much attention was devoted. This in spite of the fact, that
veterans and their families all over the world have been hoping for an appropriate reappraisal
to occur in their lifetime after years of concealment or disregard.

This dissertation, therefore, is unusual, in its major part a pioneer-like undertaking, in
which scientific interest, topicality and human commitment blend into one another. In Germa-
ny there is the excellent and extensive documentation in 22 volumes, the so-called Maschke-
Report (1962-1974), but the public interest has since shifted onto other themes. Contrary to
that, the fate and the views of the POWs in the Soviet Union have been neglected for a long
time in Japan. Well-known collections of memories and results of research have been publis-
hed only since the 1980s; in Western publications this theme has hardly been examined as of
yet. An absolute novelty of this dissertation is the inclusion of pictures and the comparison of
accounts of Japanese and German POWs. The unusual combination of the fields of studies of
the author, (Japanese studies and Russian studies) made a competent treatment of the topic
possible.

The thesis is well-structured and comprises of 316 pages, consisting of a foreword,
four chapters, bibliography and an appendix with various materials such as definition of terms,
chronological timetable, glossary of Japanese characters and summaries of historical docu-
ments (e.g. Imperial rescript to the soldiers and sailors). .

Chapter 1, the foreword (pp. 3-14), touches on the formulation of research questions, procedure, source and secondary literature and problems of remembering. The formulation of the research questions includes seven points: What was the impact of civic education and military training? Do the Japanese and the German accounts differ? What was the role of religion? How do Japanese and Germans appraise one another? Was there a predominantly national camp culture? Were the Japanese more obsequious than the Germans? Were the Japanese more receptive to communist indoctrination than the Germans?

The list of questions points to the complexity of the subject. Presenting and appraising captivity is, in the end, an interdisciplinary undertaking. Since the overall view comprises of material and spiritual aspects of very different natures, methodical stringency can only be reservedly called for.

The author purposely limits himself to written (and in part pictorial) accounts. Although having established many personal contacts, he states (p. 10): "Verbal information from veterans is almost irrelevant, because I soon became aware that they are not interested in answering many questions. I kept no records of the interviews and took note only of the name, the place, the date and of the core of interesting statements".

Chapter 2, *Historical Background and Basic Conditions* (pp. 15-65), provides a series of heterogeneous yet indispensable preliminary information, which of course could be completed or deepened in some respects, but this was restricted to the essential for the sake of the main chapter 3. The information comprises of an instructive 10-page section about the Japanese, German and Soviet attitudes towards captivity and to the Geneva Convention of 1929.

Chapter 3, *Comparison of Japanese and German Accounts*, (pp. 66-232), is 167 pages long. Eight sub-chapters depict an all-comprising panorama of camp life, both in spiritual / emotional and in material respects, and bring out similarities and discrepancies between Japanese and Germans. Particularly the following various themes are investigated in detail: Coping with the defeat and adaptation to captivity; the politico-ideological education within the framework of the "antifascist-democratic movement"; the various strategies of survival in the face of hunger, cold, illness, psychical ailments and the death of comrades and human relations with the Soviet population. The description is concrete, detailed and documented with many quotations and drawings. It avoids one-sided assignments of guilt and takes pains to illustrate a dispassionate, precise comprehension of extreme human situations, thus rendering the presentation thrilling and elucidating.

Chapter 4, *Summary and Conclusion* (pp. 233-245), provides a very instructive and concise view of the main problem areas and conclusions. In particular the following points are emphasised: The importance of national traditions and the prior politico-ideological education of the captives; the pressure of the conditions of climate, malnutrition, captivity and forced labour; the ideological re-education, the denunciations and the informer system; the significance of religion, rituals and cultural activities, despite most adverse circumstances; the manifold positive relations with the ordinary Soviet population, which too were living in want; the mutual perception of Japanese and German POWs; the activities and reactions immediately after repatriation and, in all these topics, the comparison between the Japanese and German reactions.

Assessment:

1. The author has painstakingly familiarised himself with the thematic material, including forming personal ties with veterans. The main Japanese sources, the accounts of POWs, had to be sifted, analysed and selected during study visits, mainly at the Hokkaidô University Library in Sapporo. In addition, he set up a network of contacts in Germany, Russia and Japan with veterans, veterans' organisations and scientists engaged in similar research. This alone is a remarkable, independent achievement.
2. The thesis itself gives evidence of a purposeful formulation of the research

questions, scientific clarity and great capability of differentiation, all this combined with empathy and commitment.

3. In its main chapter, the thesis is cutting-edge and, in connection with the world-wide reappraisal of the consequences of World War II, of considerable topicality. It is probably seldom that a PhD candidate is asked repeatedly by interested parties when the thesis will be completed.
4. The composition, the phrasing, the presentation of the materials, the bibliography and the appendices conform to scientific standards.
5. Deviating from the custom in reports on a PhD thesis I deem it appropriate, in this case, to point out to an additional personal aspect. After 45 years in business, at the age of 63, the author began Japanese and Russian studies, carrying determinedly through to graduation. Being able now, after ten years, to culminate his studies by a successful dissertation, is an exceptional and particularly noteworthy performance.

Zurich, October 19, 2006

signed: Prof. Dr. Eduard Klopfenstein

Eulogy:

„An outstanding research, which reappraises, with great commitment and in a differentiated way, a long neglected aspect of World War II and its consequences.“

Grade: Insigni cum laude

Translation: Richard Dähler



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