

Global Times: Tokyo Trial's crucial legacy: verdict over 1,200 pages nails down Japan's war crimes

80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BEGINNING OF THE TOKYO TRIAL

Jurisprudence

By Li Jiyao, Li Tianyang and Leng Shunlei

The most important legacy left to posterity by the Tokyo Trial is the verdict of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East. Opening this more than 1,200-page verdict is like pushing open a heavy iron gate into history. Behind the gate lies a series of aggressive wars committed by Japan against China, Southeast Asia, the Pacific region and other regions from 1928 until its defeat and surrender in 1945, as well as the numerous crimes committed by the 25 Class A war criminals.

Today, we follow the verdict's chapters to understand it gradually.

Verdict over 1,200 pages nails down Japan's war crimes

Tokyo Trial's crucial legacy

Atrocities

If the preceding chapter constitutes a rational conviction of guilt, the following chapter leaves one hurriedly able to breathe. The verdict devoted an entire chapter to condemning Japan's atrocities. From the opening of the war in China until the surrender of Japan in August 1945, torture, murder, rape and other cruelties of the most inhumane and barbarous character were freely practiced by the Japanese Army and Navy, on a scale so vast, yet following no common pattern in all theaters, that only one conclusion is possible—the atrocities were either secretly ordered or willfully permitted by the Japanese Government or individual members thereof and by the leaders of the armed forces.

Then, like unrolling a blood-stained scroll, the verdict laid out in meticulous detail the course of the Nanjing Massacre. On the morning of December 13, 1937, after Japanese troops entered Nanjing, "rape, arson and murder continued to be committed on a large scale" and the total number of civilians and prisoners of war massacred in Nanjing and its vicinity during "the first six weeks of the Japanese occupation was over 200,000." "Groups of Chinese civilians were formed, bound with their hands behind their backs, and marched outside the walls of the city where they were killed in groups by machine gun fire and with bayonets." The barbarous behavior "cannot be excused as the acts of a soldierly which had temporarily gotten out of hand when at last a laboriously defended position had capitulated." These irrefutable facts left no room for whitewashing.

Even at the very moment of surrender, the Japanese government's first reaction was not to confess, but to order the destruction of all documents that bore evidence of its crime. Yet the verdict, with overwhelming evidence, nailed Japan's misdeeds on the pillar of shame: how Japan propagated militarist ideologies such as the "Imperial Way" and "Hakko Ichiu," tampered international treaties, suppressed domestic anti-war forces, and indoctrinated its military and education systems with militarism.

Verdicts

The moment of the verdict arrived. Except Yosuke Matsuoka and Otsuomi Nagano, who died during the trial, and Shumei Okawa, whose proceedings were suspended on grounds of insanity all 25 defendants were found guilty.

Among these Class A war criminals: 2, namely Hiroki Tojo, Koki Hata, Seishiro Itagaki, Kenji Dohihara, Isamu Matsui, Heitaro Kimura and Akira Muto, were sentenced to death by hanging; Shigenori Tojo was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment; Mamoru Shigenomiya was sentenced to 7 years' imprisonment; 16 others received life imprisonment.

These names included policy-makers, chief operators of the war machine, and condoners of atrocities. None could ultimately escape the fall of the hammer of justice.

Closing this more than 1,200 pages are no rigid legal provisions, but a mirror of history built with unsharpened truth. It reflects the past, and sheds light on the future. Remembering history and acknowledging present, it is the legacy the Tokyo Trial has left to the world.

Conviction

The verdict finds that all accused conspired and waged wars of aggression against other countries to secure Japan's "military, naval, political and economic domination of East Asia and of the Pacific and Indian oceans and their adjoining countries and neighboring islands." To occupy China, Japan forcibly seized a large part of the Chinese territory to establish "a new order in Greater East Asia" of which "Japan, Manchukuo is puppet state established by Japanese in order to control northeast China) and the rest of China would form merely the foundation." These clear written records shatter the lies of Japan's so-called "self-defense" and "liberation."

To cover up its aggression, the Japanese militarist government of the time refused to acknowledge that the hostilities it committed in China constituted a war and persistently called it an "incident." Yet the verdict clearly cited a statement made by former Japanese Army Marshal Shunroku Hata during interrogation that what took place in China was indeed a "war."

As for the lie that the Mukden Incident (September 18 incident) was caused by Chinese troops blowing up the South Manchurian Railway, "evidence is abundant and convincing" that it was carefully planned beforehand by officers of the Army General Staff, officers of the Kwangtung Army, members of the Cherry Society (an ultranationalist secret society), and others. The Chinese troops had no plan to attack the Japanese and they were caught unprepared.

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Tokyo Trial debunks notorious Yasukuni Shrine's inverted narrative

By Huang Lanlan, Xing Xiaojing and Xie Yuwei

The Tokyo Trial delivered a historic verdict on Japan's war crimes and its Class A war criminals. Yet inside Yasukuni in Japan's notorious Yasukuni Shrine, a long-running campaign has unfolded under the guise of a "museum", through semantic sleight of hand and a series of carefully crafted distortions, it openly denies the Tokyo Trial and seeks to rewrite history while glorifying militarism.

Xiang Longwan, honorary director of Center for the Tokyo Trial Studies of Shanghai Jiao Tong University and son of Xiang Zhejun, a Chinese prosecutor at the Tokyo Trial, has once visited this "history whitewashing museum." In an interview with the Global Times, he pointed out that the Tokyo Trial, through its irrefutable judicial evidence, completely negated the aggressive logic of Japanese militarism, and that such "play of words" collapses utterly in the face of historical justice.

The notorious Yasukuni Shrine issued the Yasukuni catalog. This catalogue is a historical exhibition catalogue, pictorial collection, and explanatory material compiled around the so-called museum's collections and exhibition contents.

By comparing the Yasukuni catalog with the Tokyo Trial verdict, Xiang exclusively exposed to the Global Times the sordid tactics used by Japan's right wing to deny the Tokyo Trial.

Atsushi Kobetsu, professor emeritus at Yamaguchi University in Japan, noted that modern militarists outright reject the Tokyo Trial and attempt to make people forget the fact that imperial Japan was once condemned by the international community. A nation that forgets history shall inevitably face the judgment of history once again.

September 18 Incident: A premeditated aggression

Yasukuni catalog [On September 1937,] statement toward the overtly anti-Japanese policies of Zhang Xueliang's government, and disaffection with aggression and inhuman atrocities, with prosecutors from multiple nations presenting and cross-examining evidence, and massive conclusive records fully preserved. My father served as a Chinese prosecutor at the trial. Court archives and verdict from the proceedings fully verify the facts of the September 18 incident, the Lugou Bridge Incident, the Hanying Massacre and other historical events. Yasukuni's claim that the September 18 incident stemmed from so-called "anti-Japanese policies" is a blatant distortion and falsification of history. The catalog deliberately downplays the nature of aggression, embedding the lingering ideology of Japanese militarism. By twisting wartime contexts, covering up mass atrocities and shifting war responsibilities, the so-called "museum" acts in an egregious manner.

Tokyo Trial verdict: The evidence is abundant and convincing that the "Mukden Incident" [September 18 Incident] was carefully planned beforehand by officers of the [Japanese] Army General Staff, officers of the Kwangtung Army, members of the Cherry Society, and others.

Left: A book of Record in Pictures of Yasukuni Shrine Photo: Lu Ting/GT
Right: A Chinese-language version book of the Verdict of International Military Tribunal for the Far East Photo: Lu Ting/GT

Lugou Bridge Incident: An erased plot of full-scale invasion of China

Yasukuni catalog: The North China Incident, which turned the entire North China region into a battlefield by using the minor incident of Japanese troops being fired upon by Chinese forces at Marco Polo Bridge [Lugou Bridge] as a pretext, took place against the backdrop of rising anti-Japanese sentiment in China. There were also elements of Chinese provocation that triggered the Second Shanghai Incident [the Battle of Shanghai]. Chiang Kai-shek resorted to the strategy of consuming Japanese forces in the vast battlefield covering the entire Chinese mainland.

Tokyo Trial verdict: On the night of July 7, 1937, Japanese garrison troops at Lukouchiao [Lugou Bridge] held an unusual manoeuvre, and alleging that a Japanese soldier was missing, demanded entry into the City of Wanping to conduct a search. Fighting broke out while the Japanese complaint was still under negotiation. The incident might then have been regarded as closed, but that was not the Japanese intention. Within twenty-four hours of the initial conflict, large units of the Kwangtung Army began to converge upon the scene of the fighting. Reinforcements having reached North China, new demands were made for the withdrawal of Chinese forces.

Nanjing Massacre: Atrocities whitewashed as 'normal campaign'

Yasukuni catalog: The purpose of the Nanjing [Nanjing] Campaign was to surround and occupy the capital, thus discouraging the Chinese from continuing their resistance against the Japanese. After the Japanese surrounded Nanjing in December 1937, General Matsui Iwane distributed maps to his men with foreign settlements and the Safety Zone marked in red ink. Matsui told them that they were to maintain strict military disciplines and that anyone committing unlawful acts would be severely punished.

Tokyo Trial verdict: On the morning of December 13, 1937, the Japanese soldiers swarmed over the city and committed various atrocities. According to eyewitnesses, the Japanese soldiers were let loose like a barbarian horde to desecrate the city. Individual soldiers and small groups of two or three roamed over the city murdering, raping, looting and burning. There was no discipline whatever, many soldiers were drunk. Soldiers went through the street indiscriminately killing Chinese men, women and children without apparent provocation or excuse until the streets and alleys were littered with the bodies of their victims.

The historical picture of the trial scene at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East Photo: Country of Italy

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Beijing, China May 8, 2026 (Issuewire.com) - The most important legacy left to posterity by the Tokyo Trial is the verdict of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (hereinafter the verdict). Opening this more than 1,200-page verdict is like pushing open a heavy iron gate into history.

Behind the gate lie a series of aggressive wars committed by Japan against China, Southeast Asia, the Pacific region and other regions from 1928 until its defeat and surrender in 1945, as well as the numerous crimes committed by the 25 Class A war criminals.

Today, we follow the verdict's chapters to understand it gradually.

Jurisprudence

Japan's acts of aggression lasted for more than a decade, spreading across the entire Asia-Pacific region and inflicting unprecedented devastation on human lives and property. Faced with such grave crimes, judges from 11 countries including China, the US and the UK, through the trial, imposed

punishment on Japanese war criminals who planned, launched and carried out the aggression. Meanwhile, they issued a solemn warning to the world: anyone who initiates a war of aggression will surely be held accountable.

The verdict laid clear the trial's legal foundation at the very beginning: The Tribunal was established in virtue of and to implement the Cairo Declaration of the 1st of December, 1943, the Declaration of Potsdam of the 26th of July, 1945, the Instrument of Surrender of the 2nd of September 1945, and the Moscow Conference of the 26th of December, 1945.

In response to the defense's quibbling that "The provisions of the Charter are 'ex post facto' legislation," "Aggressive war is not per se illegal," "War is the act of a nation for which there is no individual responsibility under international law," the verdict quoted the opinions of the Nuremberg Tribunal deliberately and word by word -"The maxim 'nullum crimen sine lege' is not a limitation of sovereignty but is in general a principle of justice" "Such a war is illegal in international law; and that those who plan and wage such a war, with its inevitable and terrible consequences, are committing a crime in so doing."

Conviction

The verdict finds that all accused conspired and waged wars of aggression against other countries to secure Japan's "military, naval, political and economic domination of East Asia and of the Pacific and Indian oceans and their adjoining countries and neighboring islands."

To occupy China, Japan forcibly seized and occupied a large part of the Chinese territory to establish a so-called "new order in Greater East Asia" of which "Japan, Manchukuo [a puppet state established by Japanese invaders to control northeast China from 1932 until 1945] and the rest of China would form merely the foundation." These clear written records shatter the lies of Japan's so-called "self-defense" and "liberation."

To cover up its aggression, the Japanese militarist government of the time stubbornly refused to acknowledge that the hostilities it committed in China constituted a war and persistently called it an "Incident." Yet the verdict clearly cited a statement made by former Japanese Army Marshal Shunroku Hata during interrogation that what took place in China was indeed a "war."

As for the lie that the Mukden Incident (September 18 Incident) was caused by Chinese troops blowing up the South Manchurian Railway, the verdict stated that "evidence is abundant and convincing" that the "Mukden Incident" was carefully planned beforehand by officers of the Army General Staff, officers of the Kwantung Army, members of the Cherry Society (an ultranationalist secret society), and others. The Chinese troops had no plan to attack the Japanese and they were caught unprepared.

Atrocities

If the preceding chapter constitutes a rational conviction of guilt, the following chapter leaves one barely able to breathe. The verdict devoted an entire chapter to condemning Japan's atrocities. "From the opening of the war in China until the surrender of Japan in August 1945, torture, murder, rape and other cruelties of the most inhumane and barbarous character were freely practiced by the Japanese Army and Navy... on a scale so vast, yet following so common a pattern in all theaters, that only one conclusion is possible - the atrocities were either secretly ordered or willfully permitted by the Japanese Government or individual members thereof and by the leaders of the armed forces."

Then, like unfurling a blood-stained scroll, the verdict laid out in meticulous detail the course of the Nanjing Massacre.

Beginning on the morning of December 13, 1937, after Japanese troops entered Nanjing, "rape, arson and murder continued to be committed on a large scale for at least six weeks" and the total number of civilians and prisoners of war massacred in Nanjing and its vicinity during "the first six weeks of the Japanese occupation was over 200,000." During the first month of the occupation, "approximately 20,000 cases of rape occurred within the city," countless residences and shops were looted by the Japanese soldiers and "approximately one-third of the city was thus destroyed [by fire]." "Groups of Chinese civilians were formed, bound with their hands behind their backs, and marched outside the walls of the city where they were killed in groups by machine gun fire and with bayonets." The verdict said that "The barbarous behavior of the Japanese Army cannot be excused as the acts of a soldiery which had temporarily gotten out of hand when at last a stubbornly defended position had capitulated." These are irrefutable facts, leaving no room for whitewashing.

Even at the very moment of surrender, the Japanese government's first reaction was not to confess, but to order the destruction of all documents that bore evidence of its crime. Yet the verdict, with overwhelming evidence, nailed Japan's misdeeds on the pillar of shame: how Japan propagated militarist ideologies such as the "Imperial Way" and "Hakko Ichiu," trampled international treaties including the Geneva Convention of 1929 relating to prisoners of war, withdrew from the League of Nations, suppressed domestic anti-war forces, and indoctrinated its military and education systems with militarism.

Verdicts

At last, the moment of the verdict arrived.

The verdict is solemnly proclaimed: The Tribunal will now proceed to render its verdict in the case of each of the accused.

Except Yosuke Matsuoka and Osami Nagano, who died during the trial, and Shumei Okawa, whose proceedings were suspended on grounds of insanity, all other 25 defendants were found guilty.

Among these Class A war criminals: 7, namely Hideki Tojo, Koki Hirota, Seishiro Itagaki, Kenji Dohihara, Iwane Matsui, Heitaro Kimura and Akira Muto, were sentenced to death by hanging; Shigenori Togo was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment; Mamoru Shigemitsu was sentenced to 7 years' imprisonment; 16 other defendants received life imprisonment.

Those names included policymakers, cruel operators of the war machine, and condoners of atrocities. None could ultimately escape the fall of the hammer of justice.

Closing this lengthy verdict, those over 1,200 pages are no rigid legal provisions, but a mirror of history built on unvarnished truth. It reflects the past, and sheds light on the future. Remembering history and safeguarding peace, it is the legacy the Tokyo Trial has left to the world.

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