

Denialism: The Historical Denialism of Japan's Crimes against Humanity

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This is how Wikipedia defines [denialism](#):

In the psychology of human behavior, denialism is a person's choice to deny reality, as a way to avoid a psychologically uncomfortable truth. Denialism is an essentially irrational action that withholds the validation of a historical experience or event, when a person refuses to accept an empirically verifiable reality. In the sciences, denialism is the rejection of basic facts and concepts that are undisputed, well-supported parts of the scientific consensus on a subject, in favor of radical and controversial ideas.

In some countries, denying the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity is a crime.

In other countries denialism is part of the official discourse.

One such country is Japan.

Mass-circulation mainstream newspapers have sections dedicated to denying Japan's crimes during World War Two and its pre-war colonial occupation of Asian nations, notably Korea and China.

One such paper is the *Sankei Shimbun*, one of Japan's largest newspapers.

History Wars

Japan — False Indictment of the Century



The [Sankei Shimbun](#) has a section called [History Wars](#) aimed at challenging the proven history of Japan's war crimes prior to and during World War Two.

The historical denialism of the *Sankei Shimbun* – and that of its English language online publication [Japan Forward](#) – is mostly focused on denying the existence of comfort women, with titles such as [200,000 South Korean Wartime Sex Slaves is 'Fake News'](#). Or denying that the [Nanjing Massacre](#) ever happened.

But there is another object of denialism that connects Japanese war crimes to ‘alleged’ American war crimes in Korea. It is the issue of bacteriological warfare and the notorious [Unit 731](#) of Japan’s Kwantung Army, in occupied Manchuria. On this topic, the *Sankei Shinbun* and *Japan Forward* are very discreet.

The crimes committed by Unit 731, led by Surgeon General Shiro Ishii, surpass in sadistic cruelty anything committed by Nazi Germany. Ishii and his men conducted “scientific” and “medical” experiments on prisoners – mostly Chinese “communists”, Soviet POWs and the occasional civilians caught at the wrong place when more human material was needed for the unit’s “experiments.”

Unit 731 had a contract with the local branch of the *Kenpeitai*, Japan’s Military Police, to supply human guinea-pigs for its experimental work. The people – men, women, children – delivered to the Unit 731 compound in Pingpang, on the outskirts of Harbin, were called *maruta*, Japanese for log. When the unit’s “scientists” were done with vivisection, freezing to death, infecting with bacteria such as plague, cholera, typhus, syphilis and other deadly diseases, gassing, mummifying, detonating bombs and conducting other sadistic experiments, the *maruta* were disposed of as ‘logs’: their remains were burned in a furnace operating 24/7. Thousands of people died in the hands of Unit 731 “experimenters” – the exact number will probably never be known.

But what has been established beyond doubt is that some of the worst war crimes in the history of humankind were committed in occupied Manchuria against Chinese, Korean, Soviet, Mongolian men, women and children – and probably people of other nationalities too, including possibly US and Allied POWs.

Yet these crimes were never punished. In fact, until the 1990s, when stories started to appear in the Japanese media about the infamous unit and its crimes, very few had ever heard of Unit 731.

And with good reason. In 1945, Surgeon General Shiro Ishii’s right-hand man, Lieutenant Colonel Ryoichi Naito negotiated a deal with the American occupying forces. Members of Unit 731 would reveal the results of their research in bacteriological weapons and other experiments on humans in exchange for immunity against prosecution for war crimes. The deal was approved at the highest level, by the White House. The knowledge acquired by Unit 731 through criminal experiments on humans was transferred to the US bacteriological warfare research facility at Fort Detrick, Maryland.

Japan’s evil science became the property of the US military and intelligence services, adding to evil science acquired from Nazi war criminals in [Operation Paperclip](#) and other secret deals.

In January 1949, the Soviet Union put 12 members of Unit 731 on trial in Khabarovsk, found them guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity and gave them rather lenient sentences. The result of the trial were published in Russian and English under the title [Materials on the Trial of Former Servicemen of the Japanese Army: Charged with](#)

[Manufacturing and Employing Bacteriological Weapons](#). It is available online. Its 540 pages document in great detail the criminal activities of Unit 731 of Japan's Kwantung Army. The Americans dismissed the findings as "communist propaganda". Today it is generally agreed that the findings are factual and conclusive.

Most senior members of Unit 731, including its commander, Surgeon General Shiro Ishii, escaped to Japan. But not one of them appeared before the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, also known as the Tokyo Trials or the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal, convened by the US and Allies (excluding the USSR) on April 29, 1946.

In fact, one of the main purposes of the trial was not to bring Japanese war criminals to trial, but to shield the Emperor of Japan from being charged with war crimes – including those of Unit 731, the formation of which he personally approved with his Imperial seal.

Former members of Unit 731 went on to occupy prominent positions in post-war Japan's medical institutions, hospitals, faculties of medicine and various affiliated corporations.

In 1951, Shiro Ishii's right-hand man and top negotiator with the Americans, Lieutenant Colonel Ryoichi Naito opened Japan's first blood bank, together with former colleagues from Unit 731. His American "friends" gave him technical advice and support. The company, called Green Cross made a killing supplying blood to the US and Allies during the Korean war. It became one of the great successes of Japan's post-war economic miracle, until in the 1980s it was charged with supplying blood contaminated with the AIDS virus. Ryoichi Naito's specialty at Unit 731 was experimenting with blood, including pumping horse blood into live people and watching them slowly die. (See: [Green Cross founder tied to Unit 731 preservation](#), *The Japan Times*, Aug 14, 1998).

On 22 February 1952, the North Korean Foreign Ministry made a formal allegation that American planes had been dropping infected insects onto North Korea. This was immediately denied by the US government. The accusation was supported by eye-witness accounts by the Australian reporter Wilfred Burchett and others. ([Wikipedia](#)).

During the Sino-Japanese war and during World War Two, Unit 731 caused plague epidemics in several regions of China, spreading plague infested fleas. It also triggered outbreaks of cholera, typhoid and other highly contagious and deadly diseases. [These are irrefutable and established facts.](#)

In 1945, the USA gave immunity to all members of Unit 731 in exchange for their expertise in bacteriological warfare. That expertise was used by US scientists at Fort Detrick, Maryland, to develop and experiment with bacteriological weapons. [These are also irrefutable and established facts.](#)

'Japan bombed China with plague-fleas'



Japan's wartime military "bombed" a Chinese city with bubonic plague carrying fleas, triggering a serious outbreak of the disease, a doctor has told a Tokyo court.

What is still being debated is whether the United States did or did not conduct bacteriological warfare in Korea and China.

Image below: A still from Wormwood



The issue had been mostly dormant until Errol Morris' docu-drama *Wormwood* recently reignited the debate. (See: [Wormwood and a Shocking Secret of War](#), CounterPunch, January 12, 2018.) *Wormwood* alleges that [Frank Olson](#), a leading Fort Detrick scientist and CIA operative was murdered by the CIA because he was about to reveal that the US was conducting germ warfare in Korea. The case for BW in Korea is convincingly argued by Frank Olson's son, [Eric](#), who dedicated his life to solving his father's death by defenestration.

The allegations that the US has conducted bacteriological warfare in Korea are backed by an overwhelming body of evidence, including the 650-page-long [Report by the International Scientific Commission For The Investigation of The Facts Concerning Bacteriological Warfare In Korea and China](#). The Commission was led by one of Great Britain's most prestigious scientists, [Joseph Needham](#).

The US dismissed the report as "communist propaganda" and a "hoax", just as it had dismissed the evidence collected during the Khabarovsk Trial. All those reporting, investigating and supporting allegation of US BW in Korea were branded "communist propagandists", "agents of Moscow, Peking and Pyongyang", "communists", "dupes", "useful idiots" and similar dismissive and insulting epithets. (See, [Truth or Treason? Dirty](#)

If one believes in America's exceptionalism and God-given moral superiority, this arguments may hold. But after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the monstrous war crimes committed against the people of Korea before and during the Korean War, in which the northern part of the country was reduced to rubble, after the war in Viet Nam, Agent Orange, the My Lai massacre and countless other war crimes and atrocities, the moral superiority argument is hard to sustain without a huge leap of faith.

In November 1998, Stephen Endicott and Edward Hagerman published [The United States and Biological Warfare Secrets from the Early Cold War and Korea](#). It is a meticulously researched book.

"The United States and Biological Warfare is a major contribution to our understanding of the past involvement by the US and Japanese governments with BW, with important, crucial implications for the future.... Pieces of this story, including the Korean War allegations, have been told before, but never so authoritatively, and with such a convincing foundation in historical research.... This is a brave and significant scholarly contribution on a matter of great importance to the future of humanity." – Richard Falk, Albert G. Milbank Professor of International Law and Practice, Princeton University

"The United States and Biological Warfare argues persuasively that the United States experimented with and deployed biological weapons during the Korean War. Endicott and Hagerman explore the political and moral dimensions of this issue, asking what restraints were applied or forgotten in those years of ideological and political passion and military crisis."

With impeccable timing, "in January 1998 the Japanese newspaper *Sankei Shimbun* published excerpts from a collection of documents purportedly obtained from the Russian Presidential Archive (known formally as the Archive of the President, Russian Federation, or APRF) by its Moscow-based reporter, Yasuo Naito. These remarkable documents provide the first Soviet evidence yet to emerge regarding the longstanding allegations that the United States employed bacteriological weapons during the Korean War. *Sankei Shimbun* subsequently agreed to make the documents available to scholars; a translation of the complete texts is presented below.

"The circumstances under which these documents were obtained are unusual. Because the Presidential Archive does not allow researchers to make photocopies, the texts were copied by hand and subsequently re-typed. We therefore do not have such tell-tale signs of authenticity as seals, stamps or signatures that a photocopy can provide. Furthermore, since the documents have not been formally released, we do not have their archival citations. Nor do we know the selection criteria of the person who collected them." Kathryn Weathersby, *Deceiving the Deceivers: Moscow, Beijing, Pyongyang, and the Allegations of Bacteriological Weapons Use in Korea*.

The twelve 'documents' miraculously produced by Mr. Yasuo Naito, the Moscow correspondent of the denialist newspaper *Sankei Shinbun*, to coincide with the publication of the Endicott and Hagerman book, were used by [Milton Leitenberg](#), then with the [Wilson Centre](#), to triumphantly declare that the accusations that the US had conducted BW in Korea were an elaborate "hoax" concocted by Stalin, Mao and Kim Il Sung. (See: Milton Leitenberg,

[New Russian Evidence on the Korean War Biological Warfare Allegations: Background and Analysis](#), December 1998).

I've read and re-read the "copied" Russian documents translated into English by [Kathryn Weathersby](#). They perfectly fit the denialist script. Here's an extract from Document No. 2 (my comments in brackets):

"The Koreans stated that the Americans had supposedly repeatedly exposed several areas of their country to plague and cholera. To prove these facts, the North Koreans, with the assistance of our advisers, created false areas of exposure. (Really?) In June-July 1952 a delegation of specialists in bacteriology from the World Peace Council arrived in North Korea. Two false areas of exposure were prepared. (Really??) In connection with this, the Koreans insisted on obtaining cholera bacteria from corpses which they would get from China. During the period of the work of the delegation, which included academician N. Zhukov, who was an agent of the MGB [Ministry of State Security], (How convenient!) an unworkable situation was created for them, with the help of our advisers, in order to frighten them and force them to leave. (Why?) In this connection, under the leadership of Lt. Petrov, adviser to the Engineering Department of the KPA [Korean People's Army], (as if they needed advisors!) explosions were set off near the place where the delegation was staying, and while they were in Pyongyang false air raid alarms were sounded." (Why??)

And so it goes. This sounds to me like utter nonsense. I would like Milton Leitenberg, Kathryn Weathersby and others to please explain why after inviting the International Scientific Commission to investigate allegations of germ warfare, the Soviets and Koreans would go out of their way to scare it off by detonating bombs and sounding false air raid alarms?

The documents are so obviously self-incriminating that they are embarrassing to read. I wonder why their authenticity hasn't been more seriously scrutinized and challenged. Why are they taken at face value when their authenticity is so obviously dubious?

To further complicate matters, according to Russian historian [Yuri Vasylyevich Vanin](#) (1930-2017), the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation where Yasuo Naito "discovered" the 12 Soviet 'documents' in 1998, was donated to the Republic of Korea in 1994 by Boris Yeltsin. Which makes them even more suspect.

And yet, I am informed by highly authoritative sources that Milton Leitenberg's Stalin, Mao, Kim Il Sung "hoax" theory is the accepted one in "polite circles". Leitenberg re-iterated it forcefully recently in response to a review of *Wormwood* by Michael Ignatieff in *The New York Review of Books*. ([No, They Didn't Milton Leitenberg, reply by Michael Ignatieff](#), March 22, 2018). Ignatieff swiftly fell into line with Leitenberg on BW. The man seems to hold great powers of persuasion. Or are "polite circles" easily intimidated and swayed?

But I'm not. For as long as Mr. Yasuo Naito, of the denialist *Sankei Shimbun* and *Japan Forward*, and Milton Leitenberg, now of the [Center for International and Security Studies](#) in Maryland, and their associates are unable to produce the original Soviet 'documents', I shall consider them to be rather crude forgeries.

And I consider this statement by Professor Joseph Needham in a letter to my father, Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett, dated 23 February 1969 to be the truth of the matter.

Needham writes:

"I agree entirely with your formulation of 'large scale experimentation in delivery systems', basically insect vectors, and I have in no way changed my opinion since the report was issued. Nor, so far as I know, has any other member of the International Scientific Commission expressed any doubts about the findings."



Visitors view the "The Flower That Doesn't Wilt: I'm the Evidence" exhibition of work on comfort women by Korean comic artists at the Angoulême International Comics Festival in France, Jan. 31. (Yonhap News)

In January 2014, Yasuo Naito was spotted at the [Angoulême International Comics Festival](#) in France. Twenty South Korean comics artists were invited by the Festival to present their work on the theme of comfort women. The exhibition was called ["The Flower That Doesn't Wilt: I'm the Evidence"](#). The Japanese Foreign Ministry Protested. A Japanese publisher, Nextdoor set up a stand at the Festival with banners proclaiming: *The Comfort Women Controversy: Sex Slaves Or Prostitutes? And Fabricated Comfort Women Story* (in French and English). It had one single *manga* (comic book) on display titled *Facts*, 'debunking' the 'myth' of comfort women. The Japanese stand was run by four people affiliated with the extreme-right wing denialist movement [Kofoku no Kagaku](#).

Allow me to quote from [an article](#) in French on the matter (my English translation):

"Alerted to this annoying presence, [Nicolas Finet](#), organizer of [9th Art +](#) and in charge of the festival's [Little Asia](#) section arrives in the afternoon. He observes that the Nextdoor team openly spreads denialist messages that contravene the [Gayssot Act](#) by denying crimes against humanity. "These people are denying war crimes. It is serious, in particular for the Japanese authorities, which they pretended to represent," explains Nicolas Finet.

"Their stand is immediately closed by the organizer and the material is seized. The incident makes a big noise on the web. Nicolas Finet becomes the bête

noire of many Japanese Internet users.”

Here’s more from the same article:

“After some research on the Internet, the Japanese journalist Kolin Kobayashi, correspondent in France for the magazine Days Japan informs us that he ([Fujiki Shun-ichi](#)) is a collaborator of the extremist-racist [Shuhei Nishimura](#), leader of a Japanese right-wing group and known for his violent methods.

“Who finances this team capable of publishing in a few weeks a 100 pages manga, of hiring a stand at the Festival by concealing its intentions, of attracting over 10,000 Internet followers and rallying the Japanese media? Kolin Kobayashi finds out that the Sankei Shimbun – Japan’s fifth largest daily – have been keeping its readers informed about the misadventures of Nextdoor Publishing.

“Sankei Shimbun is also a revisionist right-wing newspaper,” says the journalist. “They are probably accomplices in this case. They would have coordinated their action in Angoulême. They were probably funded by the religious sect [Kofoku no Kagaku](#) which is also a denialist movement, or by other far-right organizations.”

“And as if to confirm Kolin Kobayashi’s suspicions, [Yasuo Naito](#), head of the Sankei Shimbun office in London, is present in Angoulême for the duration of the festival. This courteous English-speaking journalist kept questioning festival-goers about this mini-scandal, operating as a discreet but tenacious advocate of Nextdoor Publishing.”

So here we have it. Japanese ultra-denialists, supported by the denialist paper *Sankei Shimbun*, can produce a 100 page denialist *manga* and try to infiltrate and disrupt an International Comics Festival in France with denialist propaganda. What stops them from producing 12 ‘documents’ proving that Chinese, Korean and Soviet allegations that the US (with Japan’s direct or indirect complicity) conducted germ warfare in Korea were a “hoax” concocted by Stalin, Mao and Kim Il Sung?

And while I’m in denialist fantasy land or *manga* fiction, I’ll even suggest a Russian author for the 12 Soviet ‘documents’ published by *Sankei Shimbun* in January 1998. I have no proof, but the denialists have no proof either.

In 1991, a group of former Japanese POWs, kept in prison camps in Siberia after World War Two, invited an obscure Russian-Jewish writer to visit Japan. He was treated like royalty. His name in Russian is [Вениамин Залманович Додин](#) (1924-2014). In English it would be Veniamin Zalmanovich Dodin. Google has nothing on him in English. But a search in Russian reveals a prolific writer of unpublished books, essays etc. One such publication in two parts is *Towards The Sun*. ([Навстречу солнцу](#), 2013). It tells of his visit to Japan in 1991.

Dodin was the son of Russian Jews of German origin. His father was an engineer and his mother an army nurse who served in the Japan-Russia war of 1905. Both parents suffered under Stalin and the young Dodin grew up in orphanages and labour camps. His books tell about his horrendous childhood and Stalinist repression. After World War Two he was again in a labour camp in Siberia where he says he befriended some Japanese war prisoners and, according to him, saved their lives, by sharing food and warmth. In 1991, his former Japanese prison camp mates traced him and invited him to Japan. His visit was organized

and sponsored by *Senkei Shinbum* and others, including the founder of Sony Corporation, Masaru Ibuka.

He was treated like a hero. His official escort throughout the trip was Yasuo Naito, of the *Senkei Shinbum*. Yasuo Naito, then 27, speaks fluent Russian – his father was Japan's Press attaché in Moscow in the 1970s and young Yasuo attended Russian school there.

Dodin's hatred of Stalin and the USSR, his literary talents and conspiratorial themes make him an excellent candidate for writing the 12 Soviet 'documents' that Yasuo Naito so conveniently 'discovered'. I can't prove it. But neither can they prove that their 12 documents are authentic and not clever forgeries.

As far as I'm concerned, my "conspiracy theory" is as good as theirs.

But mine is backed by a huge amount of evidence, including undeniable and unpunished Japanese war crimes. Unpunished because the US traded evil Japanese science for impunity for the perpetrators of the crimes, namely senior members of Unit 731.

Korean, Chinese, Soviet, Russian and other people – men, women, children – have suffered horribly from Japanese war crimes and crimes perpetrated by US led forces in Korea. Including bacteriological warfare conducted by the Japanese and, with little doubt, by the Americans. No *maruta* or logs survived their captivity at Unit 731. All died as a result of "experiments" or were killed to make sure no witnesses lived to recount the sadistic nightmarish horrors of Japan's evil science.

The Japanese can no longer deny the crimes of Unit 731. But they can obviously still shield some of the criminals, deeply embedded in Japanese society, and their American benefactors and beneficiaries of their "science".

No opportunity should be missed to expose them.

Especially today, when accusations of "chemical warfare" allegedly carried by the Russians on British soil and alleged "chemical attacks" in Syria by Assad's "regime" may very well lead to a war to end all wars and all life on earth.

We must be vigilant and not fooled by dodgy "dossiers" and "documents".

And denialists should not be allowed to cover the tracks of war criminals and evidence of war crimes, past, current and future.

*

George Burchett is an artist who lives in Ha Noi. He has co-edited [Rebel Journalist](#), [The Autobiography of Wilfred Burchett](#), University of New South Wales Press, 2005 and [Rebel Journalism, The Writings of Wilfred Burchett](#), Cambridge University Press, 2007. He has written for CounterPunch, Japan Focus, Z-Net, The Australian, Viet Nam News and other publications.

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