Modern warfare could well be summed up in two phrases: annihilation and humanitarian concern. Never before have these two contradictory impulses been so prevalent and never before have they clashed so violently. On the one hand, fulfilling the dictum of killing in battle has become easier than ever. It was the industrial revolution that brought about the mass production of efficient means of transportation, better logistics and increasingly more effective weapons with longer range and unprecedented destructiveness. As a result, wars have grown more intense, with greater numbers of participants, and far more casualties than ever. On the other hand, and partially to offset the unprecedented carnage which wars produce, conduct in combat has become more regulated and is accompanied by a growing demand for humanity. The dead in modern wars are usually buried in well kept cemeteries and the wounded receive effective medical treatment, to the extent that their mortality rate in battle has decreased markedly.

Even more conspicuous is the transformation during the last 150 years in the attitude to defeated soldiers who have surrendered and the treatment of POWs. Their lives are usually spared; moreover, according to various conventions designed specifically to ameliorate their conditions, the POWs' captors are required to provide them with adequate food and accommodation and even pay for their labour. This attitude to POWs is without parallel in the past. Until the mid-nineteenth century no clear policy had existed as to how to deal with surrendering enemy soldiers, either in the heat of battle or soon after victory. These soldiers were often summarily executed, put to work as slaves, or imprisoned until ransom was paid for their release.1 Alas, the great hopes in regard
to the treatment of POWs stirred by the international conventions have not always come true. Certain nations have been reluctant to follow the conventions, and worse, in some conflicts they treated their enemy prisoners with exceptional cruelty, often resulting in their death.

Among those nations who defied the new gospel of humaneness to POWs in modern times, Imperial Japan seems to hold a special but not necessarily unique place. During the Second World War in particular, Japanese treatment of Allied POWs was notorious for its cruelty and inhumanity. Ever since that war, negative images of the Japanese attitude to POWs have been sustained through scholarly books, personal memoirs and, above all, countless popular films and novels. There is more than a grain of truth in these images, but it is less known that they emerged rather late and do not necessarily reflect earlier military conduct of the Japanese. Surprisingly, before the eight-year conflict that encompasses the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45) and the Pacific War (1941–5), Japanese treatment of POWs, Europeans in particular, was regarded as benevolent and even chivalrous. The transformation of these images is intriguing but so is the reality.

This chapter focuses on the actual behaviour and attitude to POWs held by Japan, rather than on its images. It is based on a systematic analysis of the treatment of POWs in six major wars fought by Imperial Japan from 1894 to 1945. With these data at hand, this chapter aims to uncover the determinants of the Japanese treatment of POWs, the motives for the above transformation, and their implications for national identity and attitude to self and others.

TREATMENT OF POWS AND ITS PREDICTORS

The quality of a belligerent's treatment of POWs it holds is a cardinal issue in assessing its compliance with international conventions and enforcing their terms. Regrettably, this is not a simple task, especially in wartime, since many of the actions against POWs are conducted out of sight of neutral observers and tend to remain unreported. Moreover, treatment of POWs includes a complex array of quantifiable and non-quantifiable aspects that together affect the prisoners' wellbeing during and after imprisonment. It begins at the moment of surrender, when the captors' responses may range from organized and careful transport of the POWs to the rear at one extreme to wilful killing immediately or soon after capture at the other. If killings do take place, their percentage is an important, albeit rarely available, indication of the attitude to POWs and their initial treatment.

During incarceration, multiple behavioural facets may provide additional indications of the quality of treatment. They may be broken down to more mundane aspects, such as medical care, quality of food and especially the daily calorie intake available to the prisoners, as well as the availability or deprivation of mail, payment for work, or any other rights prescribed by the conventions signed by the belligerents. Side by side
with basic requirements of humanitarian treatment, one may examine
the occurrence of more rare but nonetheless significant phenomena of
inhuman treatment with fatal consequences, such as collective punish-
ments, torture and executions. The best aggregated indicator of maltreat-
ment of POWs is probably the loss of human life, as measured by mortality
through hunger, disease and disciplinary actions. Thus, the most telling
figure and usually the easiest to obtain is the aggregate mortality rate,
either for the entire period or per selected length of internment.

What are the determinants of treatment? The attitude to POWs,
that is, a fixed way of thinking or feeling about them, is probably the
most important determinant. Although attitudes and behaviour are not
necessarily identical, it is reasonable to expect that what one thinks
and feels about POWs will usually give rise to a particular behaviour.
Theoretically, reliable methods exist to examine attitudes, but they are
more applicable to the laboratory than to the turmoil of war. Instead,
one may look for indirect indications of attitude, such as official policy
on enemy prisoners and on one's own soldiers in enemy hands, as
written in legal books; official and non-official attitudes to various con-
ventions, the Geneva conventions in particular; attitude to sacrifice of
lives, military service, patriotism, etc. Other indirect indications of atti-
dude can be found by studying the willingness to allocate logistic means
for transporting POWs to the rear and constructing habitable camps to
house them, the dissemination of rules of conduct in regard to POWs by
the troops at the front and the readiness to enforce them.

With no definite mechanism to assess attitude, we may resort to a
number of determinants that presumably affect attitudes to POWs and
shape their treatment. To date, no study has systematically analysed
these determinants, so it is necessary in this study to list several aspects
of the POWs' experience that presumably shape and affect their treat-
ment, based on a survey of literature on POWs. We may refer to them
as predictors of treatment and examine their post hoc validity for the
Japanese case. While precursory at best, the following section offers a
brief list of several predictors that presumably serve as determinants of
treatment of POWs in modern conflicts. These will presumably enable
us to explore the background and motives for the Japanese treatment of
POWs in modern times:

A. Predictors related to the context of the war:

1. International standards: As international standards are more humani-
tarian, the treatment of POWs is better.
2. Type of war: As the war is more limited, the treatment of POWs is better.

B. Predictors related to the reference group of the captor:

3. Reference group: As the belligerents' reference group is considered
more civilized and humane (in regard to POWs in particular), as the
belligerents' desire to emulate the values of their reference group is stronger, and as the number of observers of that group attending the war is larger, the treatment of POWs is better.

C. Predictors related to the enemy:

4. Enemy: As the enemy is less despised and considered less inferior, and as the belligerents expect postbellum cooperation more, its treatment of POWs is better.

5. Enemy attitude to POWs (reciprocity): As the treatment of POWs by one belligerent is better, the treatment of POWs by the other belligerent is also better.

6. Number of enemy POWs: When the number of POWs is within the economic and logistic capacities of the captor, and is sufficiently large enough to be recognized, the treatment of POWs is better.

D. Predictors related to the captor:

7. Perceived threat: As the war is perceived as less threatening, the treatment of POWs is better.

8. Form of government: As the captor’s regime is less authoritarian, dictatorial, militant, and more democratic, its treatment of POWs is better.

9. Local customs and adherence to international standards: As the captor’s local customs in regard to POWs are more humane, and as adherence to international standards is stricter, the treatment of POWs is better.

10. Attitude to own POWs: As the captor’s attitude to its own soldiers falling prisoner is more tolerant and humane, its treatment of enemy POWs is better.

11. Involvement of civilians: As fewer civilians of the captor are involved and hurt in the conflict, the treatment of POWs is better.

12. Gross national product: As the captor’s gross national product (in absolute and per capita terms) is greater, the treatment of POWs is better.

JAPANESE TREATMENT OF POWS IN SIX CONFLICTS

Throughout their classical, medieval and pre-modern history, the Japanese scarcely fought a major war outside their archipelago or against an external foe. The only exceptions to this are a certain (controversial) level of military involvement in the Korean peninsula during Korea’s ‘Three Kingdoms’ period, the two Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century, and two invasions into Korea in the late sixteenth century. This does not mean that Japan did not experience many wars. The opposite is true, but they were local wars, between Japanese forces, and often involved relatively small armies of professional warriors. The status of POWs in those internal wars was not established firmly. Often soldiers of the vanquished party were summarily killed, but in certain cases, especially regarding the rank and file in the turbulent times of the Warring
States period (Sengoku jidai) in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, they were enslaved or forced to join the victor. On the few medieval occasions that Japanese forces battled foreign foes, their attitude was harsher than in their domestic conflicts: vanquished foreign soldiers were doomed to either death or enslavement.\(^3\)

In the late nineteenth century Japan began its modernization while increasingly looking to the Western powers as a model. After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the local militias were united into a single national army and navy under the tutelage of foreign advisers – French, German and British in particular – and Western military thought and techniques were adopted. The reorganization of the Japanese military went hand in hand with the acceptance of existing conventions with regard to POWs, including the first Geneva Convention of 1864 ("The Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field"), to which Japan became a signatory in 1886. Due to this new and unprecedented cultural re-orientation, it is difficult to deduce, at least prima facie, Japanese attitudes towards POWs from the Edo era (1600-1868) until modernity. Evidently, the most prominent difference between the two periods was the establishment of a single national army and navy on the Western model and the turn to frequent armed conflicts overseas, which so rarely occurred earlier. Soon after, the Meiji Restoration Japan began to look at Korea as a potential sphere of influence, and consequently conducted its first two major wars for control of this territory.

All in all, during the fifty-one-year period from the first war against China in 1894 until its surrender to the Allies in 1945, Japan engaged in numerous military conflicts throughout East Asia and the Pacific Ocean (see Figure 1). Although the entire gamut of wars Japan fought in this period was essentially colonial in character – for territorial gain, resources and prestige, the stakes grew considerably with time. Less consistent was Japanese treatment of POWs, which varied greatly from conflict to conflict. The similar background of Japan’s wars notwithstanding, many additional determinants shaped its treatment of POWs. The following overview seeks to present the background and determinants of treatment of POWs in each of the six major wars that Japan fought from 1894 to 1945.\(^4\)

1. The First Sino-Japanese War (1894–5)

The first full-scale war in the history of modern Japan broke out as part of a struggle over control of Korea. As a colonial war, it was neither a vital struggle nor a particularly long one (nine months). Although it involved full mobilization, it involved a relatively small army, incorporating only a very limited fraction of the population.\(^5\) Despite veneration for China and its culture for more than a millennium, on the eve of the war the Chinese foe had been somewhat disrespected and despised for more than a decade, due to a recent reorientation in Japan towards a new reference group – the West, Britain in particular. The importance of the West notwithstanding, only a limited number of Western observers
and reporters attended the conflict and reported on the combat behaviour. While they questioned Japan’s cultural attainments, there was a consensus regarding China. Both Westerners and Japanese considered Chinese attitudes towards POWs especially barbaric. China was not a signatory of the first Geneva Convention and did not have the means to care for POWs; furthermore, its troops would torture, mutilate and then decapitate the wretched soldiers who fell into their captivity.

During the war, the Japanese government and the military authorities wavered between benevolent and brutal treatment of surrendered Chinese troops. The tone was set, in fact, by the outbreak of the war when the Imperial Japanese Navy ignored the drowning Chinese troops, but not the stranded European crew, of the sinking British transport vessel *Kowshing*. For this breach Japan faced harsh criticism, but to little avail (Elleman 2001: 98). Provisionally, Japan did its utmost in the subsequent land campaigns to show a civilized façade. This was government policy, to which the armed forces did not necessarily subscribe; the point was reached where the Minister of War, Ōyama Iwao, had to alert the Army repeatedly to the need to fight in accordance with the ‘acknowledged rules’ and ‘principles’ of ‘civilization’.

Only then did the military transport to Tokyo several hundred prisoners and provide them with good medical care (Paine 2002: 175). During the entire conflict,
however, Japan took only 1,790 Chinese prisoners, most of whom were sent to camps in Japan. These prisoners were treated reasonably, at least so it was reported in the camps in Japan, resulting in the death of 218 of them (a mortality rate of 12.2 per cent). The remaining POWs were released four months after the conclusion of the peace treaty. The Japanese authorities repatriated with much pomp also the body of Admiral Ting, the commander of Beiyang Fleet, who had committed suicide soon after the fall of Weihaiwei and had become a venerated figure in Japan for his act.

The meagre number of POWs does not reflect the intensity of the war, as neither side took many POWs. Several thousands of surrendering Chinese were released soon after pledging to refrain from participation in further hostilities, whereas many others were killed upon surrender. Much of the Japanese conduct against surrendered Chinese would have remained unknown but for the reports in Western media of a massacre in the Chinese port town of Lushun (Port Arthur) soon after its occupation by Japanese troops in November 1894. By all likelihood, the victors did not kill up to 60,000 Chinese surrendered combatants and non-combatants, as some historians were to argue later, but nonetheless the preliminary reports were shocking. They unveiled Japan’s brutal attitude to the Chinese, but also its Janus face in the entire conflict, although how prevalent such conduct was before and after that event remained unknown.

Of the seventy Japanese reportedly captured, barely eleven survived the ordeal until repatriation. Despite some obscurity regarding their number, it is patent they represent only a tiny fraction of the mobilized troops, the approximately 13,000 dead, or the number of Chinese POWs. The small number of Japanese POWs is all the more impressive in the light of the virtual absence of an explicit ideology against surrender. At that stage no clear regulations or negative treatment implemented against returning POWs existed (Hata 1996: 256–7).

2. The First Russo-Japanese War (1904–5)
Japan fought its second war for control of the Korean Peninsula along similar lines as the First Sino-Japanese War, but this time against a Russian foe. Unlike the previous conflict, however, this was regarded as a preemptive war due to the mortal threat a Russian takeover of Korea could pose for Japan. It was not a total war, but until the Pacific War it was the conflagration closest to such a conflict, involving a full mobilization which affected large segments of the population. Lasting nineteen months and costing Japan some 88,400 fatalities and close to two billion yen in war expenditure, it was twice as long and far more costly than the previous conflict. Despite some doubts about its industrial capabilities and military effectiveness, Japan regarded Russia as a first-rate European power. Having the largest land army and the third largest fleet in the world, it was feared and respected. The West, and especially Britain, with which Japan had signed an alliance two years before the outbreak of the war,
was Japan's reference group more than ever before or after, and Western military observers and war correspondents swarmed on the Japanese side of the front. Furthermore, despite the severity of the conflict, Japan expected a settlement around the negotiation table and a renewal of relations, as indeed happened two years after the conclusion of the war.

In the decade-long interim between the First Sino-Japanese War and the war against Russia, the Japanese authorities learnt carefully the lessons of the image lost due to the massacre in Port Arthur and implemented a strict policy with regard to the treatment of POWs. The preparations were soon tested and proved appropriate. In the Russo-Japanese War the number of POWs on both sides was far greater than in the previous conflict, although once again the Japanese captured many more POWs than their foes. Surrendered Russian soldiers were usually spared, received medical care when necessary, and then shipped safely to Japan. Incarcerated in twenty-nine camps around the country, they apparently received reasonable treatment. Numbering 79,367, the prisoners were provided with adequate food, accommodation and medical treatment, and were usually free to roam around and purchase products in local shops. Benefiting from a low mortality rate (2.3 per cent), they were released soon after the peace agreement and the vast majority of them survived the war.

Japan had 2,088 POWs (among them twenty-six officers) in this conflict, of whom forty-four died in captivity (2.1 per cent) and forty-four were released before the conclusion of the war. Upon returning, the remaining 2,000 were welcomed with flowers and gifts, but were not allowed to return home until the completion of an interrogation regarding the circumstances of their surrender. Although none was sent before a court martial, the officers among them had to quit the service. In this war the outcome of a decade-long indoctrination against surrender was first apparent, both in the education system and in the military. On returning home, many of the soldiers, especially those living in rural communities, encountered hostility and even ostracism by their communities. For thousands of others, the promulgation of a modern concept of Bushido and the stress on the importance of patriotic devotion exerted heavy toll on human life. The demand for sacrifice for the sake of the nation was to be further emphasized in future events where spiritual capacity was sought to compensate for lack of resources.

3. The First World War (1914–18)
Japan joined the titanic clash in Europe by taking over Qingdao (Tsingtau), a German stronghold in the Shandong Peninsula in China. The siege of Qingdao was no more than a limited war with a limited mobilization of about 50,000 Japanese troops accompanied by some two thousand British troops under joint Japanese command. While a relatively minor episode in the military history of both Japan and Germany, it nonetheless adds to the general analysis of our theme. The German foe was respected and the garrison of 4,920 men fought well
against all odds. Despite budding Pan-Asianism, Japan's reference group remained the monolithic 'West', and the presence of British troops and observers enhanced adherence to contemporary international conventions in battle. By 7 November, following two months' resistance, the surviving force of 4,628 Germans and Austrians were taken prisoner with no massacre or noticeable abuse. It was the only conflict in which no Japanese POWs fell into enemy hands, but after the war Japan was eager to reestablish diplomatic relations with Germany, despite some resentment over its role in the tripartite intervention against Japan two decades earlier.

The German POWs were incarcerated in no less than twenty camps throughout Japan for more than five years. By and large, the treatment was humane and fair although it varied considerably, depending often on the personality of the commanders of specific camps rather than government policy. In the camp in Kurume, for example, Japanese treatment was relatively tough, involving often punitive measures and subsequent strikes and resistance on the part of the prisoners. By contrast, the camp at Bando in Shikoku was a model of cooperation and tolerance. Prisoners there engaged in cultural activity, worked outside the camp, and were granted freedom of movement in the area. On the whole, the prisoners were not used as leverage for negotiation, and were repatriated a little more than a year after the end of the war; no less than seven per cent of them chose to remain for some time in the land of their captivity.

4. The Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45)
This major war, the longest in which Japan joined in modern times, erupted as a result of a Japanese quest for greater economic and political hold in China, along with recent fears of Chinese unification and Japan's potential loss of Manchuria. The war was not a vital struggle for Japan, and at least initially involved only a limited mobilization which grew considerably as the war advanced. Although there was not much on stake for Japan, it soon turned into 'the most terrible and most brutal, the most inhumane and most destructive war in all Asian history' (Wilson 1982: 1). The Chinese had already been for already half a century, especially in military terms. Broadly, the reference group was no longer the West, the Anglo-Saxon world in particular. Since quitting the League of Nations in 1933, Japan had still not formed an alternative reference group. In this interim, Germany remained a source of inspiration, albeit distant and mistrusted. If any, it was now the Chinese, and later other fellow Asians, who became Japan's preferred audience. Only a small number of foreign observers attended the fighting. They consisted of a small number of military advisers from totalitarian nations, Anglo-Saxon missionaries, and some businessmen and reporters, whose views the Japanese authorities did not consider important.

From the start of the war until its end more than eight years later, the Japanese government designated it an 'incident' (Shina jihen).
Under this term, the conflict remained beyond the law of war, with terrible consequences for the treatment of Chinese POWs and non-combatants.\textsuperscript{35} In most cases, and despite orders against maltreatment, surrendered Chinese troops were not recognized as prisoners.\textsuperscript{36} They were denied the rights and laws relating to POWs according to contemporary conventions, to which neither of the belligerents was signatory. In many instances, the most notable of them is during the fighting over Nanjing in December 1937, large groups of surrendered Chinese soldiers were summarily executed on the spot, or soon after their surrender.\textsuperscript{37} Similarly, in later phases of the war, captured Chinese soldiers were considered 'bandits', and likewise executed on the spot. In times of respite, especially after 1940, when their labour was required and logistic impediments were minor, Chinese POWs were designated labourers (\textit{kajin rōmusha}) and were given demanding physical tasks in China, Manchuria or Japan.\textsuperscript{38} Less common but nonetheless telling was the use of thousands of prisoners as guinea pigs in medical experiments with biological weapons, which invariably killed them.\textsuperscript{39} For these reasons, the low numbers of Chinese POWs in this conflict does not reflect its intensity.\textsuperscript{40} The Chinese authorities, both the nationalist forces and especially the communists, did not necessarily reciprocate towards the Japanese with equal treatment. A few thousands of Japanese POWs, the majority of them captured during the last two years of the war, underwent 're-education' programmes (developed by the Communists as early as in 1939) and by and large were repatriated to Japan after the war.\textsuperscript{41} During the war, there was a noticeable escalation in the Japanese regulation against desertion, and in some cases retrieved Japanese POWs were advised to commit suicide. In March 1941, the Japanese army in China instructed soldiers that on being taken prisoner their orders were to escape immediately or commit suicide.\textsuperscript{42}

5. \textit{The Second Russo-Japanese War (Nomonhan Incident or Battle of Khalkhin Gol, 1939)}

Some consider this relatively unknown clash on the border between north-western Manchuria (known then as Manchukuo) and Mongolia, near the village of Nomonhan and the Khalkhin Gol River, merely an extended border skirmish. In reality it was a full-scale war, albeit undeclared, in terms of the sheer number of its combatants and fatalities, its duration, and its repercussions.\textsuperscript{43} Moreover, it adds considerably to the overall analysis since the treatment of enemy and Japanese POWs allows comparison with the first war with Russia thirty-five years earlier. This time, however, Japan did not consider the clash as having a vital importance. Indeed, in comparison with the two conflicts Imperial Japan fought in 1937 and 1941, it was a limited war with limited mobilization of exclusively regular troops. Due to the earlier Russian fiasco, the Soviet foe was not as respected as other European forces, that of Germany in particular.\textsuperscript{44} The reference group was no longer Western, although due to the secretive nature of this conflict and the fact that virtually
no foreign observers were present at the battles, we may consider it as lacking a reference group altogether.

The fact that this clash turned progressively into a Japanese fiasco is evident in the number of POWs. Despite a policy of no surrender, and its frequent implementation in battle, the number of Japanese POWs was unprecedented in both absolute and relative terms, possibly surpassing 3,000.\textsuperscript{45} Adhering to the terms of the local ceasefire, the two belligerents seemed eager to exchange their prisoners, but to Japanese disappointment the Soviets were willing to release captives only on a one-to-one basis. On two occasions the Japanese returned all the eighty-nine Soviet POWs in their captivity and received in turn a slightly larger number of prisoners.\textsuperscript{46} While the quality of Japanese treatment of Russian POWs in this conflict remains obscure, it is reasonable to assume that due to the meagre number of prisoners and the relatively short engagement and incarceration period, they were held not far from the front and were interrogated intensively to obtain tactical intelligence. As for the Japanese POWs, Coox concluded that they were marked with 'inerasable stigma' and that officers were forced to commit suicide (Coox 1985, II: 934–40).

6. The Second World War / The Pacific War (1941–5)
This last conflict in which Imperial Japan took part broke out as part of a Japanese endeavour to take over South-east Asia and establish an autarkic empire in the entire region of East Asia (the ‘Great Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere’). As a result of American embargoes on key strategical materials imposed earlier, the war was perceived from the outset as vital, and indeed it turned gradually into a struggle for national survival with a ferocity that modern Japan had never previously experienced. It was the first total war Japan fought, and in less than two years it incorporated full mobilization of the entire male population. The enemy was Western (American, British, Dutch), respected for the last seventy years, but increasingly loathed, albeit with certain ambivalence, for its long racial derogation of Japan, attempts to block its 'natural growth', and since late 1944 also for its indiscriminate bombing of urban areas in the home islands. The reference group was definitely Asian, but the attitude to this group was nonetheless arrogant and patronizing.\textsuperscript{47} With this reference group in mind, Japan’s humiliation of the enemy throughout the ‘liberated’ region of colonial South-east Asia, as well as in Japan itself, was supposed to indicate the identity of the new masters of Asia.\textsuperscript{48}

The number of POWs held by both sides does not reflect the severity of the war for two reasons: in the first phase of the war the vast majority of the POWs were Allied soldiers whereas in the final phase the vast majority were Japanese.\textsuperscript{49} Apart from the outset and conclusion of the war, both belligerents generally refrained from taking many prisoners, and fighting was governed by slogans such as ‘kill or be killed’ and ‘no quarter, no surrender’ (Dower 1986: 60).\textsuperscript{50} In total, until its surrender in August 1945, Japan held some 132,134 Allied POWs (excluding soldiers
of indigenous origin) (Hata 1996: 263) – certainly a modest number compared with any other major power during that war. Although their treatment varied considerably, it tended to be worse than in any previous war in which Japan had engaged Western forces. The prisoners were frequently treated inhumanely, in absolute terms and relative to previous conflicts. In certain cases, recently captured POWs ‘were forced to march long distances without sufficient food and water and without rest. Sick and wounded were forced to march in the same manner as the able. Prisoners who fell behind on such marches were beaten, tortured and murdered’ (Judgment of the International Military Tribunal 1948: 1043–4). Despite their important contribution to Japan’s war efforts in laying railroads (the most notorious is the Burma-Thailand Railway) and mining, the POWs incarcerated in prisoner camps throughout East Asia often met the same fate as the one quoted above. Many others died of malnutrition, disease, overwork, accidents or drowned in ships (‘hellships’) en route to Japan which were sunk by the Allies.

In this war of ‘Liberation of Asia’ the Japanese maintained their earlier differential treatment of Western and Asian soldiers. Still, the treatment of indigenous prisoners fluctuated greatly, reflecting the wavering Japanese attitude to race and the unresolved dilemma of Japan’s place in Asia. In certain theatres they were liberated, but more often they were used for forced labour and suffered a higher mortality rate than that of Allied POWs. These tragic consequences were not only due to work conditions. Even when held in prison camps, for instance, in the Philippines, the mortality rate of indigenous soldiers was greater than that of American or European POWs due to harsher treatment and less inhibited abuse. Concomitantly, and in contrast to earlier conflicts Japan had fought with Western foes, the Pacific War involved the presence and involvement of a large number of civilians. Their misfortune may slightly account for the greater severity of the fighting. While the Japanese imprisoned several thousand Allied civilians residing in the colonies of Southeast Asia, the USA interned no fewer than 112,000 Americans of Japanese origin, without taking similar action against citizens with origins in two other Axis nations. Of even greater impact was the persistent Allied bombing of urban centres in Japan, starting in late 1944 and resulting in the death of more than 180,000 people, mostly non-combatants. This death toll does not include at least an additional 210,000 people who lost their lives in Hiroshima and Nagasaki with the dropping of atomic bombs in the final days of the war.

As for Japan’s attitude to its own POWs, suffice it to say that the indoctrination against surrender reached an all-time zenith at this point in time. It drove soldiers to fight until the last bullet even in hopeless situations, to take their own lives rather than becoming POWs, and to evade capture even after the official surrender. True, the fierce fighting in the Pacific and the prevalence of mutual local atrocities did not encourage surrender, but even when the Allies did attempt to implement a pro-surrender policy in the last stages of the war, very few Japanese
gave in. Whereas in the first phase of the Burma campaign 142 Japanese soldiers were captured (and 17,166 killed), mostly wounded and even unconscious, during the Battle of Okinawa in March-June 1945, 7,455 were captured (and about ten times more were killed). As a result, the percentage of Japanese POWs remained extremely low, in both absolute and relative terms. During the entire war some 42,000 Japanese soldiers were held by the Allies, the majority of them in the final stages of the conflict.

Among Japanese POWs, this indoctrination led in many cases to extremism uncommon among prisoners of other nations: either incessant opposition to the captors in the form of revolts and suicides, or full cooperation with them, beyond what was necessary. By and large, they were treated well, to exclude any pretext for negative reciprocity by the Japanese authorities. However, when the war was over and great numbers of surrendered personnel were incarcerated, the reasonable treatment deteriorated quickly for various reasons, notably of Japanese POWs in Soviet hands. During the war, the Japanese were less inclined to reciprocate. True, there were some external factors that exacerbated their treatment. And yet, when only examined for what they were accountable, the Japanese government and military authorities were responsible for dreadful treatment with catastrophic outcomes for Allied POWs, regardless of their nationality. This is especially evident in comparison with German treatment of POWs of the same nations. The death rate of Anglo-American POWs in Japanese captivity, most of them imprisoned for more than three years, reached some 27 per cent, whereas the death rate of their compatriots in German captivity was 4 per cent. The disparity for American POWs was even greater: whereas 41.6 per cent died in the captivity of the former only 1.2 per cent died in the captivity of the latter.

**JAPANESE TREATMENT OF POWS: ACCOUNTING FOR MAJOR TRENDS AND TRANSFORMATION**

*The Relevance of Predictors of Treatment to Japanese Experience*

The above brief overview of six major conflicts in which Japan engaged over a fifty-one-year period reveals broad variance in the quality of treatment of POWs and humanitarian concern, ranging from relative benevolence in the First World War to extreme inhumanity in the Second Sino-Japanese War (for a summary see Figure 2). Yet from an international perspective this great variance is not unique, and despite Japanese notoriety none of the modes of treatment of POWs at the hands of Imperial Japan is exceptional. For instance, the difference in German treatment of Russian soldiers in the two World Wars was even greater; furthermore, during the Second World War the death toll and mortality rate of Soviet POWs in German captivity was greater than any parallel figure in Japan. In the same vein, none of the factors that determined the Japanese behaviour was extraordinary or unknown, although their
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<tr>
<td>SJ War I (1894–95)</td>
<td>China (Asia)</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Colonial; Limited mobilization; No vital threat</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>240,000(^1)</td>
<td>Few</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>c. 70</td>
<td>&lt; 0.1%</td>
<td>1790; Several ten thousands summarily killed upon or soon after capture</td>
<td>1/26</td>
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<td>RJ War I (1904–05)</td>
<td>Russia (West)</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Colonial; Full mobilization; Imminent vital threat</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>c. 1,110,000(^\ast)</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2,088</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>79,367</td>
<td>1/38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWI (1914–18)</td>
<td>Germany (West)</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Colonial; Limited mobilization; No vital threat</td>
<td>52–55</td>
<td>c. 60,000</td>
<td>A few Britons</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>4,628</td>
<td>1/50+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJ War II (1937–45)</td>
<td>China (Asia)</td>
<td>Asia?</td>
<td>Imperial expansion; Large mobilization; No vital threat</td>
<td>70–72</td>
<td>c. 3,000,000</td>
<td>Limited number</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>8,000+</td>
<td>&lt; 0.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ War II (1939)</td>
<td>Russia (West)</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Border conflict; Minor mobilization; No vital threat</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>75,738</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>c. 3,000</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWII (1941–45)</td>
<td>USA; Great Asia</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Total war; Full mobilization; Immediate vital threat</td>
<td>74–72</td>
<td>c. 9,100,000(^2)</td>
<td>A few German; Growing involvement as the war advances to the home islands</td>
<td>c. 50,000(^\ast)</td>
<td>0.5%(^4)</td>
<td>132,134</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2** Comparative features of Japan's six major conflicts in modern times.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Japanese Dead</th>
<th>Japanese Dead as Percentage of Troops Mobilized</th>
<th>Ratio of Japanese POWs to Dead</th>
<th>Attitude to Japanese POWs</th>
<th>Attitude to Enemy</th>
<th>Attitude to POWs</th>
<th>Treatment of POWs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SJ War I</td>
<td>c. 13,000</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>1/186</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Frequent killings and a few major massacres in front; reasonable treatment at POW camps; substantial mortality rate (12.2%) within less than 1-year internment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1894–95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Despise and emphasis on cultural distance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ War I</td>
<td>c. 88,400</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>1/42</td>
<td>Ambivalent; interrogation upon return, court martial to officers</td>
<td>Ambivalence</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Limited killings and a few minor atrocities in front; reasonable treatment in POW camps; low mortality rates (2.4%) during 0.5–2 year internment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1904–05)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Respect, fear</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWI</td>
<td>c. 415</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1/7</td>
<td>Ambivalent</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>No killings in front; reasonable treatment in POW camps; low mortality rates during more than 5-year internment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1914–18)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Respect for military &amp; cultural attainment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Arrogance &amp; despise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJ War II</td>
<td>c. 389,0006</td>
<td>c. 12%</td>
<td>&gt; 1/100</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Highly negative</td>
<td>Very Negative</td>
<td>Frequent killings and major massacres in front; Brutal exploitation of POWs as forced labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1937–45)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Arrogance &amp; despise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ War II</td>
<td>c. 3000</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>1/2.7</td>
<td>Highly negative; Induction into suicide</td>
<td>Ambivalence</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Limited killings in front; reasonable treatment in POW camps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1939)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Respect, hostility &gt; despise &amp; arrogance &gt; respect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWII</td>
<td>c. 1,557,0007</td>
<td>17.1%8</td>
<td>1/319</td>
<td>Highly negative; Abandonment, ostracism</td>
<td>Ambivalence</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Apart from the opening phase, frequent killings and atrocities in front; brutal treatment in POW camp; high mortality rates of POWs (25–42%) during 3–3.5-year internment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1941–45)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Respect, hostility &gt; despise &amp; arrogance &gt; respect, fear</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2 (continued).**
Unless written otherwise, references for the figures in this table are provided in the main text of this chapter.

1 This figure does not include non-combatant coolies.

2 This figure includes the troops stationed and fighting in China.

3 This figure is based on the number of Japanese POWs in all fronts, including in China (about 8,000) as to August 15, 1945.

4 Excluding the China campaign, The figures for the Imperial Army (26,304 POWs and 1,140,000 dead out of 6.4 million) and Imperial Navy (12,362 POWs and 410,000 dead out of 1.86 million), were 0.41% and 0.66%, respectively. In Nakamura 1982: 35.

5 This figure is based on the ratio of Japanese POWs (excluding those in China) to Western (non-indigenous) POWs.

6 This figure includes the dead until the end of the war in 1945. The number of dead in China until the outbreak of the Pacific War was 185,647.

7 This figure includes the dead in China since December 1941. Apart from that front, the total death toll of combatants in the war was about 1,354,000.

8 This figure is based on the death toll of Japanese troops in all fronts, including China since December 1941.

9 During the war this ratio diminished gradually. In the Philippine Campaign, for example, it began with ratio of 1:100 during October-November 1944, went down to 1:65 during March 1945, and ended in 1:7 in June-July 1945. In Gilmore 1998: 154.

**Figure 2** (continued)
exact blend over time was probably idiosyncratic to Japan, as happens with any aggregated national behaviour.

From an academic viewpoint, however, Japan’s participation in multiple conflicts and the variance in treatment of POWs has an obvious advantage. The highly divergent treatment meted out to soldiers of different nationalities, in various forms of conflicts and a changing context, may enable us to identify some of its major determinants. When examined throughout the entire period, Japan’s enemy appears to be the most significant predictor of treatment even when not moderated by other determinants. Aiko Utsumi has recently argued that in the course of the war with China starting in 1931, and later during the Pacific War, ‘Japan developed a two-tier policy concerning classification and treatment of prisoners’ (italics are mine), with unequivocal distinction between Western and Asian foe (Utsumi 2004: 119). Indeed, Japan consolidated this policy in the 1930s, but its roots go back much earlier. Since its first modern war some forty years earlier, Japan’s military authorities made an unmistakable distinction between Asian foes, such as Chinese, Taiwanese, and Koreans, and Western foes, among whom they included any ‘white’ peoples (hakujin), including Russians, but not the indigenous soldiers fighting in their service. Throughout this fifty-one-year period, and regardless of any other determinant, Asians foes invariably received worse treatment than Westerners. In most cases they were not even recognized as POWs and did not receive institutional protection, to the extent that there are no official figures regarding their treatment. More often than not, Chinese soldiers were executed soon after their surrender, although occasionally they were used as labour forces and in certain circumstances even released unconditionally.

Of almost similar importance is Japan’s reference group before and during each conflict. By and large, Japan had two reference groups during this period. For much of the time it was the West – a demanding and relentless monolith containing a group of technologically developed and culturally civilized nations, at least in Japanese eyes. From the mid-1930s, however, Japan turned half-heartedly to Asia as its audience, harbouring a stinging sense of disappointment with the seemingly arrogant and hostile West. As long as Japan referred to the West as its reference group and adhered to its humanitarian conventions, its treatment of POWs, regardless of their identity, was far better than when its reference group became Asia, whatever this meant.

These two determinants, enemy and reference group, interact with each other and enhance their respective impact. Their interaction yields a 2x2 matrix, in which five of the six case studies can be arranged (see Figure 3). This matrix alone seems to offer a highly reliable explanation for the treatment of POWs by Imperial Japan. It suggests that when the reference group was the West, captives from the Asian (Chinese) enemy were treated worse than those from the Western enemy, and when the reference group was Asia treatment of POWs was worse for both groups.
Accordingly, Western enemy POWs received the most benevolent treatment when the reference group was the West, whereas Asian enemy POWs suffered the most brutal and inhumane treatment when the reference group was Asia (see Figure 4).

In this respect, the Nanjing Massacre, as the mass execution of tens of thousand surrendered Chinese soldiers soon after the fall of republican capital in December 1937 is widely known, was not an accident or a whim pursued and perpetuated by low rank Japanese soldiers. It was rather the inevitable outcome of a long-term and semi-official policy set by the Japanese state and adhered to by its military authorities since the early years of the Meiji era. And yet, the fact that a massacre of such a scale occurred only in Nanjing (and to some extent also in Port Arthur in 1895) suggests it cannot be accounted for by two determinants (enemy and reference group) alone. That is, being an Asian POW without relevant Western onlookers was an incentive for abuse and harsh treatment but not a sufficient motive for grand massacre.

Indeed, apart from these two crucial determinants, several additional determinants seem to enhance our understanding of the Japanese treatment of POWs. The local customs in regard to POWs became gradually

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4** Treatment of POWs in Japan's imperial wars, ranging from positive and benevolent (+) to very negative and extremely brutal (- -).
stricter, and from the late 1920s adherence to international conventions became steadily weaker, thereby enfeebling the moral pressure of the Geneva Convention. Similarly, throughout this period the Japanese attitude to its own POWs became harsher. This attitude is evident in the extremely low number of Imperial Japan's POWs in most of its conflicts, in both absolute and relative numbers. During the major conflicts of the first half of the twentieth century, no other power could boast such a low percentage of POWs (0–0.5 per cent of the mobilized troops), or such a low ratio of POWs to dead (at least 1 to 27). The sparsity of Japanese POWs was not a coincidence. The military authorities strove hard to instil in their soldiers the knowledge that surrender was shameful to the individual, his family and the nation. There is an unmistakable correlation between the reinforcement of the regulation against surrender in Japan and the deterioration of treatment of POWs it held. Obviously, a nation cannot provide benevolent and humane treatment to enemy POWs while making the very act of surrender among its own soldiers despicable.

In contrast to expectations, the perceived threat seems to display very limited validity. In highly threatening conflicts, such as the first Russo-Japanese War, treatment of POWs was relatively benevolent, whereas in a less threatening conflict, such as the Second Sino-Japanese War, treatment of POWs was abysmal. Although there are examples to the contrary, this determinant seems relatively marginal in the Japanese case. In the case of type of war, however, it is patent that the last two major conflicts Japan took part in (the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War) were not only the largest, when measured by their length, the number of troops mobilized, and the number of casualties, but also among the worst in treatment of POWs. The importance of this determinant is even more evident when it is correlated by enemy. Both the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War were greater wars than earlier conflicts against similar enemies (the Second Sino-Japanese War vs. the First Sino-Japanese War; The Pacific War vs. The Russo-Japanese War), and in both of them the treatment of POWs was far worse than before. The seeming importance of type of war notwithstanding, the first two conflicts Japan was involved in suggest that the enemy is a much more important determinant and might moderate the impact of the former. So despite the fact that the Russo-Japanese War was a much larger conflict that the war against China a decade earlier, the treatment of Russian POWs was by far better than that of Chinese POWs.

TURNING POINTS IN JAPAN'S ATTITUDE TO POWS

The treatment of POWs in Imperial Japan underwent two major transformations. The first of these, during the late nineteenth century, was related to the identity of the enemy. After the opening of Japan under American coercion in 1854 and the subsequent blow delivered to the two domains of Satsuma and Chōshū in the early 1860s, Japan began to
make a clear distinction between two fundamental types of foes. The first type was associated with the West, to which Japan accorded civility and respect in varying degrees. The second type was associated with Asia, to which traditional customs applied, namely violent and vengeful retribution familiar in the region from olden times. The treatment of a delinquent was meant to match his or her cultural development rather than his or her act alone. Effective punishment, argued jurist Ogawa Shigejirō in 1904, 'had to be adjusted to a people's overall "level of civilization" (minpo): backward people would only understand backward punishment' (italics in the original) (quoted in Botsman [2005: 213]). Similarly, the application to POWs of humanitarian conventions, to which Japan first became a signatory in 1886, resulted in a differential treatment of the enemy, with evident advantage to Western combatants. Combatants of Asian nations that did not subscribe to such conventions, such as Imperial China, were especially vulnerable to Japanese discriminatory policy, as they were entitled at the most to a thin veneer of the humanitarian treatment that their Western counterparts received.

The second transformation began to take shape in the late 1920s and culminated during the following decade. It was more momentous than the first, since it was here that Japan cast off all restraint with regard to any kind of POWs, regardless of nationality. The change of attitude to Westerners had a further detrimental effect on the treatment of Asian POWs. The roots of this transformation can be traced to the First World War and its consequences, particularly the sudden power vacuum created by the collapse of major empires such as China, Germany and Russia, and the rise of the USA as a world power. In Asia it inevitably 'enabled, indeed forced, [Japan] to engage in a kind of geopolitical and strategic thinking for which few of the old rules applied' (Jansen 1984: 122). In the early 1920s, Japan's new position in Asia was countered by American and British attempts to limit its military expansion and political influence, leading to a vicious cycle of alienation. Whether the 1930s were indeed 'a watershed in the move from liberalism and internationalism towards totalitarianism and nationalism' (Doak 2003: 30), as many historians have contended, or the process had begun slightly earlier, the early years of this decade were surely momentous for the Japanese attitude to POWs. The rising ultranationalism and militarism at home in the latter half of the 1920s prompted a move into independent lanes, reaching its pinnacle with the takeover of Manchuria in 1931 and the establishment of the puppet state of Manchukuo a year later. The great uproar and criticism sounded by a number of democratic nations in the West led to further distancing, notably the break from the League of Nations in 1933 and the renewal of a naval arms race two years later, and to renewed attraction to pan-Asian sentiments. Japan's imperialistic policy and defiance of Anglo-Saxon criticism on the one hand, and the making of pan-Asianism Japan's hegemonic (albeit not official) foreign policy on the other, had sharp repercussions. Beyond ceasing to view the West as its reference group, Japan began to consider it the archenemy.
The First World War was another milestone in Japan changing attitudes to POWs. Although Japan took only a very minor part in this war, the appalling carnage in the European theatre contributed to its reconsideration of the part POWs played in determining victory and defeat. First and foremost, Japanese military authorities were shocked at the huge number of POWs in the war.\textsuperscript{70} Eliminating this hazard by strict discipline, they concluded, would be a requisite in time of total war, especially for a nation limited in resources such as Japan. Second, they were impressed by the success of the harsh policy adopted by the admired German army against guerrillas and civilians (Towle 2000: 2–3). Moreover, strict German discipline and patriotic indoctrination in that war resulted in unswerving obedience with no necessity for strict measures of coercion.\textsuperscript{71} Starting in the late 1920s, it is possible to detect in retrospect a number of events that heralded the deterioration of Japanese treatment of POWs. In 1929, the Japanese government was reluctant to adopt the Third Geneva Convention on the Treatment of Prisoners of War, on the grounds that it contradicted Japanese law. Using the pretext of greater burden on the Japanese side, the authorities did not oppose their own grant of proper treatment to POWs but rejected such treatment of their own soldiers to avoid incentives for surrender.\textsuperscript{72}

Another landmark was the sensational suicide of Major Kuga Noboru, a commander of a battalion engaged in skirmishes against Chinese forces in Shanghai in 1932. He was captured by the Chinese, but was released a day later and soon faced Japanese interrogation for his misconduct. It was soon proved that he was knocked senseless by the explosion of a hand grenade and subsequently woke up in a Chinese hospital. Despite the eventual praise for his heroism, Kuga was determined to redeem his shame. He returned to the exact spot where he was captured and committed suicide with his revolver. He instantly became a national hero. All Japan’s seven major movie companies produced films featuring the heroic death.\textsuperscript{73} ‘The suicide of Major Kuga’, proclaimed the Japanese military spokesman in Shanghai, ‘has aroused the greatest sympathy and admiration in Japanese military and civilian circles here’ (Time 1932). The emphasis on sacrifice was not new in the short history of the Imperial Japanese army and navy.\textsuperscript{74} Now, however, it incorporated senseless suicide rather than surrender after shooting the last bullets in a model of sacrifice, and the hardening of this patriotic indoctrination relied on ever-growing brutalization of the rank and file. By the late 1930s indoctrination with regard to surrender was complete. Falling in enemy hands and becoming a POW was the most shameful fate a soldier and his family could experience.

Nevertheless, the second transformation involved an incomplete alteration of Japan’s reference group. In this phase, Japan began to abandon the West as its audience and increasingly believed that the once admired European colonial variety was dissimilar to the Japanese variety, but was also ‘an obstacle to Pan-Asian unity’ (Peattie 1988: 243).
Departing from the political and cultural sphere of the West, Japan felt itself freed of its humanitarian constraints. The abandonment of the conventions on POWs was perceived to boost Japan's capacity to challenge an enemy of superior resources, such as the Anglo-Saxon nations and the Soviet Union. Asians, however, did not receive now better treatment since Japan's new anti-colonial rhetoric involved a growing racist twist. During the war with China, treatment of by then long colonial subjects, such as the Taiwanese and Koreans, turned stricter and more demanding. This link between power and severe treatment of Asians deteriorated further with the outbreak of the Pacific War. The vacuum created by the ousting of the white colonialists was filled promptly: the Japanese were Asia's new 'master people'. Thus, the fundamental interaction between enemy and reference group seems to account for the gradual deterioration of Japanese treatment, along with the everlasting divergent treatment of Westerners and Asians. It was even further enhanced by three determinants: type of war, attitude to own POWs, and local customs and adherence to international standards, and it is no coincidence that all three determinants emerged at about the same time (see Figure 5).
CONCLUSION: ATTITUDE TO POWS AND JAPANESE IDENTITY

The fluctuating treatment provided to POWs in the above six case studies reflects the identity crisis Japan has experienced in modern times. In part it stemmed from Japan's attitude to the world, its neighbours in particular, and projected its view of its place in the international community. The treatment of POWs appears to be an excellent indicator of one's identity since it reflects self-images, the identity of one's reference group and the attitude to it, as well as the national priorities and ambitions in times of constraint. Sailing the rough seas between the Scylla of desire to be a genuine member of the civilized nations' club and the Charybdis of their racist bar, Japan ended up with furious rejection of their lofty humanitarian ideals. Adopted in the late 1930s, this new course had dire repercussions. The victims were not only Allied POWs but also Asians, with whom the Japanese could not identify.

While intriguing at first, it is understandable why the interaction between no more than two determinants, enemy and reference group, could bring about such variance in treatment. In contrast to many other presumed determinants, the type of war in particular, both tend to lean heavily on stereotypes and to be detached from reality. The same enemy can be portrayed on different occasions as friendly or hostile, benevolent or vicious. Similarly, one's reference group is an image constructed to manipulate national goals: when it is no longer useful it can be discarded. No wonder that Japan's two major reference groups in modern times and the values associated with them were often far from what the Japanese believed at certain points of time. The supposedly monolithic West was not as civilized and the Chinese were not as brutal or susceptible to violent persuasion. The distance from reality facilitated the idealization of these reference groups in certain periods, but their demonization in others. The attitudes to both, not surprisingly, became transformed in a matter of a few decades. As the identities of the enemy and of the reference group were meant to serve the nation, so was the treatment of POWs. When necessary, they were treated well to create valuable impressions of a civilized nation; when necessary they were sacrificed and abused, to display toughness and defiance before local and foreign audiences.

During the entire period under consideration, Japan's identity crisis was never fully resolved. Although the Pacific War represented a total rupture of Japan's relations with the West, it did not solve the Japanese dilemma. At this bleakest moment of relations with the West, Japanese racial identity remained 'like a coin with two contrasting sides', as Furuya Harumi has picturesquely noted. 'It was marked, on one side, by its aspiration to be the "white", the superior race, and on the other side, by its latent animosity towards the white race which had subjugated and continued to denigrate the Japanese as a "yellow" race' (Furuya 2000: 133). This ambivalence could not escape the POW arena. Even in this colossal clash for the supposed liberation of Asia, Asian POWs were treated worse than their Western brethren.
With Japan’s defeat in 1945 its identity conflict was wholly settled, despite the reorientation to the West. The post-war era witnessed the birth of a new national army, the Self-Defence Forces, following American patterns. Pacified Japan became once again a signatory to the Geneva Convention, and humanitarian concern has become its trademark. Initially, its reference group was the USA, but within three decades a new wave of self-assertion and quest for unique identity (known collectively as nihonjinron) engulfed Japan. The biggest difference from the past, however, did not concern identity. Since the Pacific War, Japan has not taken an active part in any armed conflict and has not held POWs. Should Japan ever participate in a future conflict, the treatment it provides POWs might vary, but its underlying determinants probably will not.

NOTES

1 For a brief survey of the history of the pre-modern attitude to and treatment of POWs, see Levie (1977: 2–7).

2 This lacuna notwithstanding, for a detailed description and analysis of the relevance of these determinants, see the preliminary study of Kowner (2009).


4 During this fifty-one-year period, Japan fought foreign enemies on more than these six occasions. It fought Soviet forces during the Siberian intervention of 1918–22, during the border skirmishes in Changkufeng (Battle of Lake Khasan) in 1938, and against attacking Soviet troops in Manchuria and Korea during the final days of the Pacific War in August 1945. Japan also fought Chinese forces during the Boxer Uprising of 1900–1, the landing in Shandong Peninsula in 1928, during the large-scale takeover of Manchuria in 1931, and in Shanghai in 1932 (as well as earlier during the landing in Taiwan in 1874). Japanese forces fought irregular Taiwanese forces in 1895 and Korean forces, regular or irregular, on several occasions (1884, 1894, 1904 and in 1910 onwards). I decided to exclude all the above clashes and minor wars because they were not full-scale engagements between regular armies, because insufficient data are available on the number of POWs and their treatment, or simply because they do not add much to the analysis. Furthermore, at least on superficial examination none of them seems to contradict the findings in the six cases presented. Finally, the analysis below does not aim to provide a full overview of the Japanese attitude to POWs and their treatment in modern times. For such overviews, see Hata (1998) and Utsumi (2005).

5 Estimates for the Japanese population on the eve of the war suggest a population of about 42 million, while the strength of the army and navy was about 240,000 men, of whom about 174,000 took part in the battlefield, as well as about 154,000 non-combatant coolies. For the military figures, see Lone (1994: 52, 75).
For overviews of the First Sino-Japanese War, see Lone (1994) and Paine (2002).

For such pre-war and wartime views, see Paine (2002: 172).

For general discussion of Japanese treatment of POWs in this war, see Utsumi

‘War Items’, *The Japan Weekly Mail* (Yokohama), 29 September 1894: 321–2; 3

Among the 1,790 Chinese POWs, 1,113 were sent to Japan and 677 were incar-
cerated on the continent. The figure for the 218 POWs who died in captivity
includes sixty who were shot for ‘disobedience’ in Pyongyang (excluding this
group, the Chinese mortality rate decreases to 8.8 per cent). Curiously, none
of the sixty Chinese officers captured in the war died in Japanese captivity. In

On the Japanese treatment of Chinese POWs in the First Sino-Japanese War,

For example, Fujimura (1973: 132).

For initial reports on the Japanese behaviour in Port Arthur, see Creelman
(1894), *The Japan Weekly Mail* (1894: 702), and *The Times* (1895: 6). Extended
first-hand reports were published subsequently in several books, such as
Villiers (1895), Allan (1898) and Creelman (1901). On the massacre and its
repercussions in the West, see Dorwart (1971: 106–10), Paine (2002: 210–16),

The figures for the veneration of warrior spirits at the Yasukuni Shrine do not
qualify as an accurate count of losses but appear to provide a reliable esti-
mate of them. At the two ceremonies held after the first Sino-Japanese War,
12,877 warrior spirits were enshrined. See Yasukuni jinja (1983, I: 319–27) and
Harada (1986: 212).

For overviews of the Russo-Japanese War, see Warner and Warner (1974),
Connaughton (1988) and Øe (1976).

Estimates of the Japanese population on the eve of the war suggest a figure of
about 47.5 million, whereas the strength of the army and navy, including the
reserves, was about 850,000 men.

There are minor inconsistencies regarding the number of casualties in the
Imperial Japanese Army and Navy during this conflict. According to one
source the army suffered 60,083 killed in battle (among them 1,926 offic-
ers) as well as 21,197 who succumbed to disease (among them 278 officers);
see Ono (1935: 752). At the ceremonies held at the Yasukuni Shrine after
the war a total of 88,131 spirits (85,206 of the army and 2,925 of the navy)
were enshrined; see Yasukuni jinja (1983, I: 319–27) and Harada (1986: 212).

Following the war the Imperial Japanese Army reported 88,401 dead (over
60,000 killed in battle) and 130,000 wounded; see Øe (1976: 131, 220–2).

For a comprehensive summary of the Japanese and Russian casualties in this
conflict, see Kowner (2006a: 80–1). The total figure of troops mobilized during
the war is about 1.2 million. This figure includes 1,062,899 fighting men and
154,000 non-combatant civilians in the army, and some 50-60,000 men in the
navy. In Øe (1976: 218) and (Kowner 2006: 42).

impact of Russia on Meiji Japan, see Berton, Langer and Totten (eds) (1981).
On the military observers and reporters and their role during the war, see Greenwood (1971) and Towle (1998) and (2007).

On the implementation of new policy on POWs following the Sino-Japanese War, see Valliant (1974) and Kownner (2001).

Although ethnically the majority of the soldiers of the Russian army were of Russian origin, many others were Ukrainian, Polish, Finnish, Baltic or Jewish.

For the number of Russian POWs and a detailed breakdown by their sites of capture, see Hata (1998, I: 11). Among the Russian POWs, 72,408 were shipped to camps in Japan, 5,506 were released during the war, and 1,453 before being interned in Japan. See Utsumi (2005: 78). On the Japanese treatment of Russian POWs, see Saikami (1969), Towle (1975), Checkland (1994), Kownner (2000) and Matsuyama Daigaku (2004). For praising testimonies of Japanese treatment made by Western visitors to prisoners camps in Japan, see Seaman (1905: 60-3) and (McCaul 1904: 201). On the international efforts Japan exerted before and during the war to sustain a humane public image, see Valliant (1974) and Kownner (2008).

The mortality rate of Russian POWs in Japanese captivity seems very low by contemporary standards. Throughout the entire war 1,869 Russian POWs died (2.4 per cent), of whom the majority died before internment (presumably due to injuries and complications) and only 383 died in camps in Japan (less than 0.5 per cent of those interned!). See Rikugunshō (1995, 8–9). For very similar but not identical data, see Hata (1998, I: 11) and Utsumi (2005: 78). Among the various camps, the figures from Matsuyama seem sufficiently reliable to allow us to calculate the mortality rate. The number of dead among the 4,043 Russian POWs incarcerated for almost two years was ninety-eight, yielding a mortality rate of 2.4 per cent. Admittedly, Matsuyama was the site where foreign visitors were invited to observe and thus the physical conditions and treatment there were probably more favourable than in other camps. Nonetheless, there are no testimonies of different treatment in other camps, and so we may conclude that these figures roughly represent the upper limit of mortality of Russian POWs among the various camps due to the relatively long period of incarceration (opening and closing its gates on 18 March 1904 and 20 February 1906, respectively, Matsuyama was the first and last POW camp in this war). The death toll in the camp is based on a list of tombs in Matsuyama Russian cemetery. For the list, see shiriyo 1, in Matsuyama Daigaku (2004: 217–19).

For a breakdown by rank, see Ōe (1976: 352).


On the indoctrination for sacrifice and militarism in school songs since the early 1890s, see Eppstein (2007).

For Japan's involvement in the war and the internal politics associated with its participation, see Dickinson (1999). On the siege of Qingdao and Japan's military involvement in the First World War, see Jones (1915), Lowe (1969) and (2004), and Burdick (1976).
This figure is for 31 December 1914, based on Japanese military statistics; in Utsumi (2005: 97). According to Burdick and Moessner (1984: 128), the POWs consisted of 4,306 Germans (including 186 officers) and 286 Austrians (including nine officers). There is no explanation for the missing thirty-six men in the latter source.

On the harsh treatment in several camps (in Osaka, Kurume, Matsuyama and Fukuoka), see Utsumi (2005: 103–10). On the particularly benevolent treatment at Bando, where 1,028 POWs were incarcerated from 1917 to 1920, see Tomita (1991) and Utsumi (2005: 100–103). For a favourable report on the conditions of the camps written by a Swiss physician, Fritz Paravicini, who visited the POWs in 1918, see Paravicini (2005).


For somewhat different views on the short-range motives for the outbreak of this war, see Hata (1983) and Usui (1990).

In May 1936, the China garrison comprised 5,600 men, but within two months of the outbreak of the war, there were in China sixteen Japanese divisions with more than 200,000 men. By 1940 the Army deployed twenty-seven divisions in China. The Army as a whole grew from twenty-four divisions in 1937 to thirty-four division in 1938, forty-one in 1939 and fifty in 1940, mostly due to the war in China. In Spring 1944, on the eve of the Ichigo campaign, Japan mobilized its largest force in China during the entire war, reaching some 800,000 men. Throughout the entire war, Japan mobilized to China an estimated force of about three million men. See Boyd (1988: 138, 158) and MacKinnon (2007: 348).

For additional overviews in English on the Second Sino-Japanese War, see Morley (1983), Barrett and Shyu (2001), and Mackinnon (2007).

See Utsumi (2005: 125-30). Curiously, the Chinese regime did the same and did not declare war until after United States declared war on Japan in December 1941, so it could receive the assistance of neutral nations.

For such orders, issued on 15 October 1937, see Hata (1998, I: 102).

Although there is a heated debate on the number of Chinese casualties in Nanjing and its surroundings in late 1937, there is a full consensus among scholars that the Japanese army executed many thousands of surrendered Chinese soldiers in this episode. For testimonies of Japanese soldiers regarding about such killings, see, for example, Iguchi et al. (1989: 131–41), Kaikōsha (1989: 100, 501; 1993: 435), Ono et al. (1996: 219, 326). For various views on the Chinese death toll and the difficulty of providing an accurate figure, see Chang (1997), Yamamoto (2000), Wada (2000) and Yoshida (2006).


On the use of Chinese prisoners for biological experiments by Unit 731, see Gold (1996) and Harris (2002).

On the Japanese treatment of Chinese POWs in the Second Sino-Japanese

There seems to be some incongruence between the various figures with no clear figure of the total number of Japanese POWs in this war. Nonetheless, in August 1945 and prior to Japan’s surrender there were 8,317 POWs in Chinese captivity. In Hata (1998, II: 531). For a table of Japanese POWs held by the Communist Eighth Route Army (a total of 2,407 from September 1937 to May 1944), see Hata (1998, I: 117). For a table of various sites where Japanese POWs were held by the Nationalist government (about 2,000 from 1937 to 1946), see Hata (1998, I: 122). For a table of Japanese POWs in Chinese captivity with a detailed breakdown by their sites of capture (a total of more than 2,230), see Hata (1998, I: 124).

I could not obtain reliable figures for the number of Japanese POWs in this conflict. The number of Japanese dead is about 389,000. This includes 185,647 for the four year period until the outbreak of the Pacific War and another 202,958 for the remaining four years. In Dower (1986: 297).

The standard overview of the Second Russo-Japanese War, the so-called Nomonhan Incident, is Coox (1985). During the four-month engagement the Japanese committed some 75,738 men and received at least 18,000 casualties, among them about 8,000 dead. In Coox (1985, II: 915–16).

On the Japanese image of Russia at this stage see Mikhailova (2000).

On the Japanese side’s no-surrender policy, see Coox (1985, II: 1083–4). Estimates of the number of Japanese POWs range from 1,000 to 4,000. Coox provides several attestations to the feasibility of these figures, and concludes that the most credible figure is probably above 3,000. In Coox (1985, I: 929–51). For a lower figure, based on the gap between the number of missing soldiers and repatriated POWs, see Nomohan Harugawaga Sensō Shinpojijumu Jikkōinkai (1992: 50–1).

This figure matches the number provided by Hata (1996: 263), but he highly underestimates the figure for Japanese POWs, mentioning only the 159 captives who were officially exchanged by the Soviets.

On ambivalence to the West, the lingering admiration of its people and its legacy during the Pacific War, see Shillony (1991), Dower (1986) and Furuya (2000). On the Japanese attitude to Asians during the war, see Dower (1986). On the desire to derogate and abuse specifically white POWs, see Utsumi (2004).

For an overview in English on the Pacific War, or the Asian chapter of the Second World War, see Ienaga (1978), Spector (1985) and Dower (1986). On the dispatch of prototypic ‘white’ POWs to Japan during the war for propaganda purposes, see Utsumi (2004).

By the end of 1942 Japanese POWs in Allied hands numbered slightly over a thousand; not until the onset of the campaign in Luzon as late as in October 1944 did the number of Japanese POWs in Allied hands first exceed 5,000. The number of Japanese soldiers captured in the South-west Pacific area exemplifies this trend: 1,167 soldiers were captured in 1942; 1,064 in 1943; 5,122
in 1944; and 12,194 in 1945. The figures were compiled by Gilmore (1995: 196); see also in Krammer (1983: 70). In the end of the war the majority of the Japanese soldiers in the hands of the Allies were ‘Surrendered Enemy Personnel’, who voluntarily placed themselves in Allied custody soon after Japan’s surrender on 15 August 1945.


For an overview of the highly divergent treatment in various camps, in terms of food, medical treatment, forced labour, corporal punishment and mortality rate, see Waterford (1994).

There is a vast primary and secondary literature on the Japanese treatment of Allied POWs in the Pacific War. For overviews see Daws (1994), Kerr (1985), and La Forte, Marcello and Himmel (1994).

As many of the deaths of South-east Asian forced labourers were not documented, their estimated mortality rate varies from 20 per cent to 76.6 per cent. See Wertheim (1956: 263-6).

During the first year in Japanese captivity, roughly 80 per cent of the 12,000 Filipino scouts died, compared with a mortality rate of about 30 per cent among the American POWs. See Waterford (1994: 142).

For the figures, see Dower (1986: 298).

For the figures, see Miller (1949: 310-11). According to another source the number of Japanese POWs captured in Okinawa (1 April – 30 June) was 7,401. See Appleman (1948: 489). During the entire three-year campaign in Burma, some 1,700 Japanese were captured while approximately 144,000 were killed. In Kinvig (2000: 48).

There is no consensus as for this figure. The total number of Japanese troops captured prior to the formal surrender was 41,464 according to American reports (The War Reports [1947: 267]) and 42,543 (of whom 3,877 were non-combatant) according to the Japanese POW Information Bureau (Hata 1998, II: 529). Hata (1996: 263) assesses the total number to be about 50,000, but this figure seems to include more than 8,000 Japanese POWs in Chinese captivity. For the number of POWs in China at the end of the war, see Hata (1998, II: 531).

There are several studies of Japanese behaviour in captivity during the Pacific War, notably Krammer (1983), Nimmo (1988), Straus (2003) and Sareen (2006). Two large-scale mutinies of Japanese POWs in captivity are well known. The first was in February 1943 at Featherston in New Zealand, ending with forty-eight Japanese dead; the second was in August 1944, at Cowra in Australia, with 234 Japanese dead. On these uprisings, see Asada (1972), Carr-Gregg (1978), Gordon (1994) and Sanders (1990). On the cooperation of Japanese POWs with their captors and their deliberate decision never to return to Japan, see Benedict (1946: 38-42), Krammer (1983), and Gilmore (1995) and (1998: 94-8). For notable memoirs of Japanese captives in American, British, Chinese and Russian captivity, see Sakamaki (1949), Hokari (1962), Aida (1966), Uchimura (1985), Komada (1991), Oba (1996) and Ooka (1996). On the soldier’s considerations and dilemma of becoming a POW, see Fuji (2000: 182-8). For studies and narratives of Japanese soldiers who avoided surrender after the war and remained in the jungles of the Philippines and
other south-west Pacific islands, see Sankei Shimbun (1972), Onoda (1974), and Gillin and Etter (1983).

Some half of the 594,000 Japanese soldiers who fell into Soviet hands in August 1945 never returned to Japan.

While still accounting for only little of the difference between the Japanese treatment of POWs compared with the German, recall that on average the American POWs in Japanese captivity were incarcerated for longer periods than their compatriots in German captivity; that the tropical area under Japanese control was more prone to fecal-oral and airborne transmission of infectious disease than the areas under German control; and that several thousand POWs in Japanese captivity, but very few in German captivity, died of drowning through the sinking of their prison ships by the Allies.

Among the 235,473 Anglo-American POWs in German captivity in this period, 9,348 died (4.0 per cent) (Waterford 1994: 145), whereas among the 132,134 Anglo-American POWs in Japanese captivity 35,756 died (27.1 per cent) (Dower 1986: 48). Among the 50,016 British POWs in Japanese captivity, 12,433 died (24.9 per cent), see Mellor (1972: 836-7), and among the 22,376 Australian POWs 8,031 died (35.9 per cent).

While the data are inconclusive for the entire mortality of American POWs in Japanese captivity, the Army (including the Army Air Forces) had 28,256 POWs, of whom 11,516 died in captivity (40.8 per cent). See Army Battle Casualties (1953: 8–9). Among the 25,580 American POWs captured in the Philippines, some 10,650 died (41.6 per cent). See Kerr (1985: 339–340). In the European theatre, however, of 93,941 Army and Air Corps POWs only 1,121 died (1.2 per cent). Navy casualty data are allocated to naval vessels, not to theater of operations. However the Navy (including the Marine Corps) had 1,343 men who died as prisoners in Japanese captivity. See US Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (1950: 171–4). Marine Corps personnel captured in the Philippines from December 1941 to May 1942 totaled 1,388. Data on numbers of those dying during captivity, repatriated, and still living are not available separately for the Philippines. See US Department of Veterans Affairs (2006: 6).

Whereas the mortality rate of Russian POWs in German captivity during the First World War was about 4 per cent it soared to 57.5 per cent in the Second World War. For the figures, see Rachamimov (2002: 39–42) and Schulte (1988: 181), respectively.

Due to space constraints, I do not discuss here the predictors found irrelevant to the Japanese case. They include the following: Form of Government, International Standards, Enemy Attitude to Japanese POWs, Number of POWs, Involvement of Civilians, GNP. For a discussion of these predictors, see Kowner (2009).

In her major book on this topic, however, Utsumi (2005) traces two phases, as this chapter does, in the distinction between Westerners and Asians, the first from 1874 to 1937 and the second until 1952.

The Second Russo-Japanese War (Nomonhan Incident or Battle of Khalkhin Gol) is excluded from this table due to the absence of a definite reference group (from a Japanese perspective) in this conflicts.
I omitted here the Japanese figures for the First World War and the Second Russo-Japanese War due to the limited scale and duration of the conflicts.

On the introduction of flogging in Japan's new colonies in the years after the Russo-Japanese War, concurrent with dramatic expansion in the powers of the colonial police to dispense summary justice (by this means), see Botsman (2005: 211–20).

On the revival of pan-Asianism in Japan during the 1930s and its culmination in the early 1940s, see Saaler (2007: 11–16).

For this insight see Ferguson (2004).

Only eighteen Germans were executed during the First World War for desertion and cowardice. See Bruntz (1938: 206).

The main argument against the adoption was lack of reciprocity: 'Although to be taken prisoner is contrary to the ideology of the Japanese servicemen, those of foreign nations may think differently. Accordingly, although this Convention in form appears to impose reciprocal obligations, in actual fact it would impose duties only on us' (quoted in Hata [1996: 254]).


For the myth making of the heroic death of Hirose Takeo in 1904, see Shimazu (2004).

On the harsher Japanese attitude to Taiwanese and Koreans since the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, see Shao (2007: 93-8) and Robinson (2007: 98), respectively.