

Most Asians believe that Japan has not fully owned up to its WWII era war crimes, as well-depicted in this famous cartoon:



Let's take a look at major statements on Japan's war legacy by monarchs and officials since 1945:

Aug 15, 1945 - The Emperor Declares Japan's Defeat and Reflects on the War

"The welfare of the wounded and the war sufferers and of those who have lost their home and livelihood is the object of our profound solicitude." - Emperor Hirohito in the historic "Jewel Broadcast", declaring Japan's defeat. Shortly after he said:

"We declared war on America and Britain out of our sincere desire to ensure Japan's self-preservation and the stabilization of East Asia, it being far from our thought either to infringe upon the sovereignty of other nations or to embark upon territorial aggrandizement." (????!!!)

Nov 1971- Emperor Hirohito expresses his regrets- sort of

"Yes, there are certain things which happened for which I feel personally sorry."

— Emperor Hirohito in his first interview to foreign journalists, in 1972

then he stated in his first US visit in 1975:

I express gratitude to the people of the United States for the friendly hand of goodwill and assistance their great country accorded us for our postwar reconstruction, immediately following that most unfortunate war, which I deeply deplore."

And a few weeks later he was more restrained:

"It is a fact that many things happened during the war, but there were many people involved in these things or events, so I would like to refrain from talking about these things at the present time."

[The latter statement was at least an honest description of his feeling – you bet he would like to refrain from talking about the war and his role in it...the preponderance of evidence then and now makes it clear that Hirohito was a string-puller, not a puppet.]

Sept 1972- Japanese PM Tanaka expresses his regrets to Zhou Enlai and the Chinese

"It is regrettable that for several decades in the past, the relations between Japan and China had unfortunate experiences. During that time our country gave great troubles to the Chinese people, for which I once again make profound self-examination."

— Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka in a speech in Beijing. Note he stopped short of apologizing to China,

Japan's wartime record was also addressed in the joint communiqué signed by Mr. Tanaka and Zhou Enlai, on **Sept. 29, 1972**: "The Japanese side is keenly aware of Japan's responsibility by causing enormous damages in the past to the Chinese people through war and deeply reproaches itself."

Note: This statement by Japan was a condition for normalization of Chinese-Japanese relations, which occurred shortly thereafter in 1972, so it was not truly "spontaneous".

Oct 1992 - Emperor Akihito to the Chinese takes responsibility for having 'inflicted great suffering'

"In the long history of relationships between our two countries, there was an unfortunate period in which my country inflicted great suffering on the people of China. About this I feel deep sadness."

- Emperor Akihito at a banquet in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing

Aug 1993 - Sex Slaves Inquiry statement – Statement by Secretary Kono - arm's length contrition

"We shall face squarely the historical facts as described above, instead of evading them, and take them to heart as lessons of history." - Yohei Kono, then chief cabinet secretary, in a statement on a report about wartime sex slavery. In the report, the Japanese government acknowledged that its military had forced Asian and European women to work in army brothels during WW II. [Note: Former PM Shinzo Abe backpedaled from this at times, arguing that there was no evidence that Japanese troops abducted and forced "so-called comfort women" into prostitution. This is false and inflammatory.]

August 1995 - 50th Anniversary – PM Tomiichi Murayama issues official statement - A MILESTONE

"In the hope that no such mistake be made in the future, I regard, in a spirit of humility, these irrefutable facts of history, and express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology. Allow me also to express my feelings of profound mourning for all victims, both at home and abroad, of that history."

-

This was the official Japanese statement marking the 50th anniversary of the end of the war. The word "*owabi*" was used in Japanese and was highly significant because it means deep and true remorse. Some view this MURAYAMA STATEMENT as the first and only true apology.

August 2005 – 60th Anniversary - PM Junichiro Koizumi- Aug 2005 - accepting full responsibility, without denial or minimization of the facts, and offering heartfelt apology

"Our country has caused tremendous damage and pain to the peoples of many countries, especially Asian countries, through colonial rule and invasion. Humbly acknowledging such facts of history, I once again reflect most deeply and offer apologies from my heart."

[Note: Shortly after this statement, Koizumi visited Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo where Class A war criminals are enshrined. To Japan's wartime victims (= most of its neighbors) the shrine is a symbol of unrepentant Japanese militarism. Koizumi's visit soon after this statement damaged the statement's credibility.]

April 2015 - Abe's Statement to the U.S Congress in Washington DC

"My dear friends, on behalf of Japan and the Japanese people, I offer with profound respect my eternal condolences to the souls of all American people that were lost during World War II. Our actions brought suffering to the peoples in Asian countries. We must not avert our eyes from that." Abe further noted: "History is harsh. What is done cannot be undone."

Earlier in April, Abe had expressed remorse for Japan's deeds at a conference in Bandung, Indonesia, where he also met Chinese President Xi Jinping. However, a day after their meeting, three of Mr. Abe's cabinet ministers visited the Yasukuni Shrine. Abe himself visited the shrine in 2014.

August 2015 - Abe's 70th Anniversary Statement

A more modulated Abe reiterated his support for past official apologies for the country's rapacious expansionism and said "Japan did inflict immeasurable damage and suffering". Importantly he noted that Japan "must never forget that there were women behind the battlefields whose honor and dignity were severely injured." He refrained from more detail on the wartime sex slaves that the Japanese euphemistically refer to as "comfort women." Abe noted that Japan has repeatedly expressed "deep remorse" and "heartfelt apology" for its actions, noting that "such positions articulated by previous cabinets will remain unshakable into the future." His re-affirming previous statements about Japan's *owabi* (deep regret) was significant, but he did not offer a formal apology himself. His statements were taken verbatim from past official statements.

Abe also pointedly noted that there has been enough apologizing: "We must not let our children, grandchildren, and even further generations to come, who have nothing to do with that war, be predestined to apologize." There is truth and logic to this. But later generations are bearing the burden of this generation's revisionism and partial apologies. (As Arthur Brooks has noted - see Reference List on my [ScholarAtSea](#) website): "A partial apology is often worse than none."

BOTTOM LINE: Japan has indeed issued multiple formal apologies. So the answer to the true or false question is FALSE.

A BIG 'HOWEVER': Revisionist statements from several Prime Ministers, most notably the hawkish Shinzo Abe, and visits and offerings by Japanese leaders to the Yasukuni Shrine, have sent messages of a lack of true contrition for past Japanese misdeeds. Several Japanese apologies have failed to signal acceptance of full responsibility, failed to demonstrate sincere contrition, and very importantly failed to make meaningful offers of repair - all of which are essential ingredients of true apologies. True apologies also involve a degree of vulnerability and risk that is at odds with the Japanese aversion to 'loss of face.' I think it is fair to say that Japan has technically apologized in words, but not always in spirit. The 'comfort women' (an unacceptably inaccurate euphemism for wartime sex slaves) remains the most prominent and inflammatory open wound.