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## **DAILY LIFE OF JAPANESE PRISONERS OF WAR IN KAZAKHSTAN USING THE EXAMPLE OF SPASSK CAMP +**

The article examines the life of Ahiko Tetsuro, a soldier of the Imperial Japanese Army, arrested in Kazakhstan as a result of World War II and remaining in Kazakhstan after his release, the conditions of his arrest, the nature of life in Kazakhstan. The camp is considered from the inside, from the point of view of Ahiko Tetsuro. In addition, the memoirs and interviews of Ahiko Tetsuro are a valuable source of information about the internment conditions in the Spassky camp, the fates of other Japanese, daily life in the camp, the level of equipment. Highlighting the life and experiences of Ahiko Tetsuro, the quality of life of prisoners accepted for free work in the Spassky camp, the daily routine in the camp, provision of necessary things, the amount of food, the nature of forced labor, and other aspects of camp life emerged anew. Not only about the situation in the Spassky camp, but also about the return of prisoners of war, especially Japanese, the consequences of the arrest, how Ahiko Tetsuro was captured and how his life continued after his release. Information about the historical period under consideration was obtained from the memoirs of Ahiko Tetsuro using methods of everyday research and historical hermeneutics.

**Key words:** Ahiko Tetsuro, World War II, Japanese prisoners of war, prisoners of war, prisoner of war camps, GULAG, Karlag, forced labor.

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### **Қазақстандағы жапондық соғыс тұтқындарының күнделікті өмірі Спасск лагері мысалында**

Мақалада Екінші дүниежүзілік соғыс нәтижесінде Қазақстан жерінде тұтқындалған және тұтқыннан босатылғаннан кейінгі Қазақстанда қалған Жапония императорлық әскерінің сарбазы Ахико Тэцуроның карлагтағы өмірі, тұтқындалу жағдайы, лагерьдегі өмірдің сипаты іштен көзқарас арқылы қарастырылады. Сонымен қатар, Ахико Тэцуро естеліктері, сұхбаттары арқылы Спасск лагеріндегі тұтқындалу жағдайы, басқа жапондықтар тағдыры, лагерьдегі күнделікті өмір, жабдықталу деңгейіне қатысты құнды дереккөз екені айқын. Ахико Тэцуро өмірін, бастан кешкенін саралау арқылы Спасск лагеріндегі тегін еңбек күші ретінде қабылданған тұтқындар өмірінің сапасы, лагерьдегі күн тәртібі, тұтқындардың қажетті заттармен жабдықталуы, азық-түлік мөлшері, мәжбүрлі еңбек сипатын және тағы басқа лагерь өмірінің тың тұстарына жаңадан қарауға мүмкіндік пайда болды. Тек, Спасск лагеріндегі жағдай туралы емес, оған қоса әскери тұтқындардың, әсіресе жапондықтардың еліне оралу үрдісі, тұтқындалу салдары, Ахико Тэцуро қалай тұтқынға түсті, тұтқыннан босатылғаннан кейінгі өмірі қалай жалғасты деген сұрақтарға жауап сұрақтарға жауап беріледі. Күнделіктілігі, тарихи герменевтика ғылыми зерттеу әдістері арқылы Ахико Тэцуро естеліктерінен қарастырылып отырған тарихи кезең туралы ақпарат алынды.

**Түйін сөздер:** Ахико Тэцуро, Екінші дүниежүзілік соғыс, жапон соғыс тұтқындары, әскери тұтқындар, тұтқын лагерлері, ГУЛАГ, карлаг, мәжбүрлі жұмыс.

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### **Повседневная жизнь японских военнопленных в Казахстане на примере Спасского лагеря**

В статье рассматривается жизнь Ахико Тэцуро, солдата Императорской японской армии, арестованного в Казахстане в результате Второй мировой войны и оставшегося в Казахстане после освобождения, условия его ареста, характер жизни в Казахстане. лагерь рассматриваются изнутри, с точки зрения Ахико Тэцуро. Кроме того, мемуары и интервью Ахико Тэцуро являются

ценным источником информации об условиях интернирования в Спасском лагере, судьбах других японцев, повседневной жизни в лагере, уровне оснащения. Выделяя жизнь и переживания Ахико Тэцуро, качество жизни заключенных, принятых на бесплатную работу в Спасский лагерь, распорядок дня в лагере, обеспечение необходимыми вещами, количество продуктов питания, характер принудительного труда, другие аспекты лагерной жизни проявились заново. Не только о ситуации в Спасском лагере, но и о возвращении военнопленных, особенно японцев, последствиях ареста, о том, как попал в плен Ахико Тэцуро и как продолжилась его жизнь после освобождения. Сведения о рассматриваемом историческом периоде были получены из мемуаров Ахико Тэцуро методами повседневного исследования, исторической герменевтики.

**Ключевые слова:** Ахико Тэцуро, Вторая мировая война, японские военнопленные, военнопленные, лагеря для военнопленных, ГУЛАГ, карлаг, принудительные работы.

## Introduction

During the Second World War, after the end of the war, representatives of various nationalities from the warring states of the USSR were arrested and mobilized for forced labor in Gulag camps. After the collapse of the USSR, historians had an opportunity to conduct research on labor camps and prisoners there, which were previously inaccessible. One of the results of the Soviet-Japanese war of 1945 was the appearance of prisoners of war of the Japanese army on the territory of Kazakhstan. The article pays special attention to Ahiko Tetsuro, who was imprisoned in the karlag. This is because Ahiko Tetsuro's memoirs about her life in captivity can provide a wealth of information about the labor camps and the people who were imprisoned in the camps. Ahiko Tetsuro – A cadet at the Imperial Military Academy, Ahiko Tetsuro is the last Japanese to arrive as a prisoner of war from Sakhalin Island. Japan's surrender on September 2, 1945 marked the end of World War II. The last samurai of the Japanese imperial army passed through the hell of Stalin's camps and remained in Kazakhstan.

There is no war without prisoners of war. According to statistics: during the Second World War, from 1939 to 1945, about 15 million people were arrested, every third died in camps – German, Soviet, Allied. More than two million Soviet soldiers returned to their homeland. According to current data, more than six million foreign prisoners of war passed through Soviet and Allied camps (Mukhamedzhanov, 2012: 169). Not all of them returned to their homeland. At this point, the nature of Ahiko Tetsuro's life as a prisoner in the Spassk camp, his life after captivity, and the work process and daily conditions of the prisoners of war in the Spassk camp are the main issues. The purpose of the research is to look at the issue of prisoners of the Spassk camp and general prisoners of war from a new perspective through the memoirs of Ahiko Tetsuro (Ten, 2009).

## Research material base and methods

Domestic research on the issue of prisoners of war and prisoners in the history of Kazakhstan began to take shape in the early 90s in the context of the rise of public consciousness and the liberalization of the political regime. The researchers gained access to previously classified archival documents and statistical data, as well as research by foreign authors. During this period J.K. Kasymbek, K. S. Aldajumanov's articles on military prisoners in Kazakhstan and the exploitation of their labor, repatriation of prisoners and civilians, and the work of workers in Kazakhstan's forced labor system were published. S. D. Dilmanov was one of the first Kazakh researchers who raised this issue in his works. His work contains valuable information revealing the history of the labor camps on the territory of Kazakhstan, one of the subsections of the work was devoted to the process of using the camp contingent as free labor. In particular, the author presents a well-founded statement about the low efficiency of camp production and the consequent futility of forced labor (Dilmanov, 2002).

Information about prisoners of war of the Second World War and the Great Patriotic War, about those arrested in Central Kazakhstan, D.A. Shaimukhanov and S. D. It is cited in one of the chapters of the work "Karlag" by Shaimukhanova. S.D. Shaimukhanova's monograph "Political persecution in Kazakhstan" contains information about foreign prisoners held in Kazakhstan camps (Shaimukhanova, 2000).

L.M. Mikheeva's work is of great interest, in which the problem of prisoners of war of the Second World War on the territory of the republic is considered for the first time in the dissertation research. The common value of his works is the attempt to raise the issue on the basis of introducing into scientific circulation the materials that reveal the history of the camps located in the territory of Central Kazakhstan (Mikheeva, 2007).

In addition, the collection of documents published by the author team of the Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan is dedicated to the fate of Polish citizens, including prisoners of war. G.K. Kokebaeva studied the issue of the return of German prisoners of war to their homeland based on the research of the archives of the Federal Republic of Germany. The author believes that at the beginning of the formation of Germany, the issue of prisoners of war was the object of the Soviet government's ideological confrontation with the Western world. The researcher concludes that German prisoners of war were able to return to their homeland only after ten years of hard labor in Soviet camps. This, of course, was contrary to the principles of international law, which require humane treatment of prisoners of war. Prisoners of war are not criminals, military detention is the temporary isolation of servicemen of the enemy's army to prevent their further participation in hostilities.

A more complete view of the formation of the GUPVI system in Kazakhstan shown in publications of Sh. Altaev, B. O. Zhanguitin. The undoubted advantage of these works is the introduction of archival materials from a number of Russian archives into scientific circulation, which allowed them to understand the peculiarities of the formation of the GUPVI system in Kazakhstan (Altaev, Zhanguitin, 2006). Important information about the organization of the system of camps in the territory of Kazakhstan S.T. Orumbayev's works. The author examines, in particular, the creation and functioning of Karlag. A. to study the issue of Japanese prisoners of war. Aldanazarov made a great contribution. In his works, many aspects of the life of prisoners of war in the camps were touched upon, and in the post-war years, he published a large amount of information on the placement of burial places of Japanese servicemen on the territory of Kazakhstan. The problem of using prisoners of war in the construction of the city of Zhezkazgan was shown in the article of Alzhapparova B. The work of S. V. Yeleukhanova is of great interest, in which a detailed analysis of the mode and conditions of guarding, detention of prisoners of war of Spassk camp No. 99 for prisoners of war was carried out by studying the military guard of Karlag.

Foreign historiography's interest in everyday history is reflected in the study of sports activities of Japanese POWs in post-World War II Siberia. It is surprising that Japanese prisoners participated in various sports activities, despite the difficult conditions in the camp, hard work, extreme cold, and hunger. Studies conclude that "such activities seem to

be necessary to raise the morale of prisoners" (Yamada 2001: 537-552). The participation of prisoners in sports events was published in the *Nihon Simbun* (Japan Times) newspaper. The *Nihon Simbun*, despite being under the control of the Soviet military political administration, was the only source of information for the approximately 600,000 Japanese POWs in Siberia.

Clara Geber-Mérida (2019) analyzed the songs written by Japanese prisoners of war while they were in a concentration camp in the Soviet Union in a historical context.

The purpose of promoting sports and cultural activities among Japanese prisoners of war was to influence the prisoners politically. This was, on the one hand, an attempt to encourage the Soviet government to question the imperialist ideology of Japan. If we look at the memoirs of the prisoners, we can see that cultural and sports activities were needed by the prisoners as spiritual nourishment. Such events were a simple way of socializing with other camp prisoners. Through the lyrics, the prisoners released emotions that could not be expressed otherwise. It was also beneficial to the Soviet government, because ideological education through such activities was fluid.

Memories of World War II by Japanese POWs in Australia are explored in an article by Christina Toomey. Analyzed memories of the war in Australia and comments about the suffering of prisoners (Twomey Christina 2013: 321-330).

Jacob Frank is an author who studied the repatriation of Japanese captured by the Soviet Union and their fate. In his work "Japanese Prisoners of War, the American-Soviet Conflict, and the Role of Repatriated War Veterans in the Early Cold War in East Asia", he described the influence of diplomatic struggle on the fate of Japanese prisoners of war (Jacob Frank, 2021:119-136).

Arnold Krammer in his work "Japanese Prisoners of War in America" shows that during the Second World War there were 400,000 German soldiers, 53,000 Italians, and 5,000 Japanese prisoners of war in about 550 camps in the United States (Krammer, 1983: 67). Prisoners of war, used for harvest work from the beginning of 1943 to the end of 1945. Compared to the USSR, the conditions of prisoners of war in America were somewhat favorable. The articles of the international conventions on the rights of prisoners were respected. For example, prisoners of war in American camps had a relatively free life, mingled with working farm families, staged theater productions and concerts, and participated in debates about democracy. Krammer described the

general situation and character of Japanese prisoners of war in the United States (Krammer, 2015: 122).

Brandon Scott in his work “The Untold Story of Camp McCoy: Japanese Prisoners of War in the Heart of Wisconsin During the Second World War” told the story of the Japanese prisoners of war at Camp McCoy during the Second World War. Brandon Scott examined the daily life of Japanese prisoners at McCoy Prison, their work, their thoughts about suicide and escape from prison, and their fate when they returned to Japan after the end of World War II (Brandon, 2023: 46).

The stay of Japanese soldiers and officers in labor camps of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (NKVD) from 1945 to 1956 was confirmed in foreign historiography under the name “Siberian internment”. “Siberian Internment” Japanese researchers Yasuo Wakatsuki, Gunji Abe, Toshio Kurihara and American historians E. Barshey and V. Nim was recognized for his works.

Ya. Wakatsuki, G. Abe, T. Kurihara, U. Nimmon studied the history of ideological re-education of Japanese prisoners of war. E. Barshey conducted research through the memories of prisoners who returned to Japan, and laid the foundation for the motives that prompted former prisoners of war to write memoirs. Subjective memories and letters of prisoners returned from NKVD camps, questionnaires based on the results of interrogations of prisoners of war by Japanese officials served as the data base for the works of foreign researchers. Unfortunately, the vast majority of these sources are not available to domestic historians. Japanese and American historians studying the subject of “Siberian internment” do not rely on documents in Russian archives. Foreign researchers focus on the daily history of the Japanese, reconstructing life in the camps.

The study of Japanese prisoners of war in the USSR in foreign historiography has its own characteristics. It can be noticed that the problems of organization of political and investigative work related to the Japanese, implementation of their repatriation have not been studied in foreign historiography. In these problems The study is necessary to determine the nature of the policy of the Soviet government towards Japanese prisoners of war.

One of the most important directions in foreign historiography is the study of the process of arresting Japanese soldiers in the USSR. The arrests were the result not only of the hostilities, but also of the geopolitical situation in the Pacific region, researchers say. Foreign historiography pays particular attention to cases of violence and abuse of prisoners of war by Soviet soldiers and officers. The issues

of repatriation of Japanese POWs after the end of the war, the socio-psychological consequences of long-term captivity, the reaction of Japanese society to the return of POWs, and the involvement of ex-POWs in the process of reform and reconstruction in post-war Japan are examined.

These studies form the theoretical and methodological basis of the article. In order to fulfill the tasks set in the article, Ahiko Tetsuro’s memories and interviews were used as a basis. Historicity, accuracy, consistency and scientific objectivity form the methodological base. They made it possible to see the whole picture of the problem and, at the same time, to reveal the characteristic features of the Spassk camp, the aspects of the period of the prisoners of war in the forced labor system, and to look at it from a differentiated point of view in terms of determining changes in their socio-political situation. A set of microhistorical, hermeneutic, analysis and synthesis scientific methods was used to achieve the research goal.

## Research results and discussion

### *Ahiko Tetsuro’s life in captivity*

Ahiko Tetsuro was born into a fishing family in Japan. At the age of 15, his father sent him to study at the South Sakhalin Military School. In 1945, with the end of the war and the annexation of South Sakhalin to the USSR, Ahiko stayed on the island for three years, repairing boats and waiting for help from his country. Three years later, Ahiko, convicted under Article 58 and imprisoned for 10 years, was in the Spassk camp, where she spent 6 years. About that period, Ahiko himself says: “In 1949, when I was very thin and sick, I was brought and assigned to the third section of the Spassk camp. Then I learned that prisoners capable of work were sent to the first and second sections. To the third and fourth sections they were sent to die. I was like a skeleton. I was still 18 years old. That’s why I was assigned to the third division. There were weak people nearby, they couldn’t walk. But if the foreman came, they would hardly get up and go to work... If someone fell, he was beaten with a stick. They would get up, and if they couldn’t get up, they would leave, or they would beat them with sticks. It was very sad to see people who were very weak and couldn’t walk – they died there” (Yoshikawa, 2024)

Other than Ahiko Tetsuro, there were also Japanese among the prisoners. On August 16, 1945, by order of the Emperor of Japan, tens of thousands of Japanese soldiers led by generals surrendered their weapons to the Soviet Army. Japan does not

consider its soldiers prisoners of war, but considers them unlawfully detained. Article 9 of the Potsdam Declaration of July 26, 1945 stated: “After disarmament, the Japanese armed forces shall be permitted to return to their homes with the opportunity to lead a peaceful and working life.” As a whole, Japanese prisoners of war were in labor camps on the territory of Kazakhstan.

Of the countries that fought against Japan, only the USSR did not fulfill this clause. On August 23, 1945, the State Defense Committee adopted a resolution that instructed the immediate transfer of about 500,000 Japanese prisoners of war to the territory of the USSR, which was carried out. Out of the total number of prisoners on the territory of Kazakhstan (58,900 people), 25,000 people were placed in Karaganda region. Most of the Japanese prisoners of war successfully returned to their homeland. On April 22, 1950, the USSR officially announced the end of the repatriation of prisoners of war (Zhangutin, 2006: 109).

Ahiko Tetsuro was not among the POWs who returned home. After the death of Stalin in March 1953, Karlag’s farm was reorganized in accordance with the resolution of the Council of Ministers of May 8, 1953, the board was dissolved. Until now, there were 226 settlements of Karlag, after its dissolution, 16 highly efficient districts were organized on its territory. Ahiko was pardoned as a minor at the time of her arrest, she was 18 at the time. “Go home? Where to home? Japan is far away. I came out of the gate in old clothes, torn pants, bare feet. Where am I going? No money, no documents. Only a certificate of release. When it was warm, I slept on the street. I ate in the miners’ canteen. I took the bread with me. The workers in the kitchen were friendly – they didn’t chase you out.

It was difficult: no work, no money. Who am I? Where do I go? I went like this for three months. I slept on the street and ate in the canteen. The miners took pity on me, I worked for the Saransk construction department to unload cement. Then the foreman of Saran administration hired me as a construction worker. Together with other builders, I built the cities of Tentek (Shakhan), Aktas. Have you seen the Palace of Culture? I put it again. Two years later, I learned that the Japanese POWs were being sent home. I went to camp. I asked the boss, “Why is my name not on the list of Japanese sent home?” He said to me: “You did not fight against the USSR, You are not a soldier. There...” Then I wrote a letter to the Japanese embassy in Moscow. I didn’t get an answer. It was very sad and difficult: now I am alone in a strange, foreign country.”

After learning that the return of prisoners of war had ended, Ahiko sent a letter to the Japanese embassy in Moscow for two more years, trying to return to her homeland, but there was no response. Having given up hope of returning to his homeland, Ahiko begins to live in Karaganda (Yoshikawa, 2024).

#### *Japanese in the Spassk camp*

The Spassk camp for prisoners of war in Karaganda was established on June 24, 1941, on the second day of the Great Patriotic War, on the basis of one of the departments of Karlag. Already in August, the first echelon with foreign fighters arrived here – in the first days of the war, 1,400 enemy fighters were captured (Yeleukhanova, 2009).

It was the largest camp for prisoners in Kazakhstan. Between 1941 and 1950, about 70,000 prisoners passed through it: 30,000 Germans, 22,000 Japanese, 6,000 Romanians, 1,600 Austrians. Also French, Italians, Lithuanians, Czechs, Hungarians... More than seven thousand foreign soldiers remained forever in the land of Karaganda. Five thousand were buried in Spassk. Two thousand unmarked graves are scattered throughout the territory. And they cannot be restored. Burial sites have long been flooded, destroyed by new constructions, buried in ore bowls (Mikheeva, 2007:30).

Since the end of the 1980s, foreign embassies began to place memorial plaques for their compatriots who died in the Spasskoye cemetery.

The Japanese in the camp were kept apart from the Europeans. The diet was also slightly different. They were given fish and rice. The Japanese themselves did not mix with other prisoners of war and did not come into contact with the local population.

The leaders of the camp took advantage of the special mentality of Asians and sent them to the most difficult and exhausting jobs. They mainly worked in the mines of Balkhash region. The local people still remember those tough sad samurai. Every morning, silent lines of Japanese marched into the mine and returned by midnight. None of them said anything. But they worked without stopping. Japanese prisoners carried out the plan by 120, even 150 percent. And the country’s economy was in dire need of labor in the post-war period. Therefore, in the first years of repatriation, prisoners who were not suitable for work were returned to their homeland.

But later, another order was issued: advanced workers of production, who followed the plan and exceeded it, had the advantage of returning to the country quickly. That is, a strong incentive was in-

roduced to work better and more efficiently. And there was no one to match the Japanese. But the plans of the Soviet government did not include a quick return of the Japanese to their homeland. It worked too well. They were the last to be returned to the country.

Japanese prisoners of war left the Spassk camp in the mid-1950s. And in 1987, the Japanese government signed an agreement with Kazakhstan on the export of the remains of Japanese prisoners of war buried in Karlag.

Forced labor camps were provided with the necessary resources by the instructions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of the USSR, and the equipment requirements were at the same level for all camps. According to the requirements, the camps had to be surrounded by a fence with a height of two and a half meters. Barbed wire stretched several rows over the fence along the perimeter. At a distance of five meters from the fence, there were warning zones consisting of seven rows of barbed wire on the inside and outside. At every corner of the area there were watchtowers with telephones to communicate with the camp headquarters. All enclosures are equipped with an alarm system and lighting. Most of the POW rooms and facilities are located in the camp area. Camp administration and soldiers' barracks are located outside the camp. Prisoners of war were strictly forbidden to live outside the camp.

Prisoners of war were not given gloves and overalls. The lack of gloves and equipment at work in the camps increased the number of injuries, forced the prisoners of war to work carefully, and therefore the work efficiency decreased sharply. The camps tried to make the most of POW labor, but sometimes paid little attention to POW safety. Prisoners of war's ignorance and failure to observe basic safety rules often led to tragic consequences.

The causes of accidents can often be identified as: natural wear and tear of technical equipment of Soviet enterprises, lack of production skills, lack of

understanding of production and technological processes, lack of safety instructions due to lack of Russian language skills of prisoners of war. The number of accidents in the management of the camps was not specifically estimated, the breakdown of reporting and statistics was ineffective, it was a planned economy and a socialist competition between institutions of this type.

For many reasons, the instructions and requirements were not observed in all camps, and were often grossly violated. Most of the camps in the area were hastily equipped and did not fully comply with established guidelines.

### Conclusion

Thus, the fate of the Japanese Ahiko Tetsuro shows the tyranny of the power structures and the totalitarian nature of the Soviet state, through which many prisoners of Karlag and other correctional camps had to pass. Ahiko is one of those who managed to survive in such conditions and it is important to preserve her story. Ahiko's case is one of the exceptions. That's why I think Ahiko's fate and memories contributed to the subject of prisoners. According to the memoirs of Ahiko Tetsuro, the study concluded that the ineffectiveness and negligence of the organization of the forced labor system of prisoners of war, the unwillingness and inability of industrial companies to accept many prisoners of war at the same time, as well as the overactive desire to maximize the work of prisoners of war without fully considering safety regulations, led to a tragic result, , led to a significant number of deaths of prisoners of war. It should be noted that natural climatic factors, economic factors, as well as the capabilities and needs of local self-government have not been taken into account. During the operation of the camp system, there were problems with providing food to the prisoners of war, suitable living conditions were not created, this situation affected the death of the prisoners of war.

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