

**Legacies of
World War II
in South and East Asia**

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Legacies of World War II in South and East Asia

**edited by
David Koh Wee Hock**



**Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
Singapore**

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Back cover photo: The epitaph inside the Memorial.

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Preface

Sixty years after the end of World War II, are memories of the war fading away or are the issues it generated still real? To find an answer to this question, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies organized an international conference in 2005. It brought together a diverse group of scholars who examined different aspects of the war's legacy. Their general conclusion was that the political and social fallout from the war is alive and divisive.

Two examples present themselves readily. One example is how former Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine prevented China, Japan and South Korea from sitting down together to talk about Northeast Asian integration, and wider Asian integration. Only the presence of ASEAN in the driver's seat of the East Asian Summit process made any kind of dialogue on the issue possible. The other example is the question of comfort women. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's statement — that there is no evidence that Japan's government or army forced women to work in military brothels during the war — appeared to go back on a 1993 apology for the comfort women. His stance has upset many Asian countries and the United States.

The above and other unresolved issues such as the improvement of relations among and between the states in Northeast Asia, with implications for the rest of the international community, will be areas for study in the decade ahead.

Ambassador K. Kesavapany
Director
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore

Foreword

The year 1945 saw the end of the greatest and most devastating conflict mankind has ever known. World War II was waged as a total war: a global conflict fought without restraints. In the upshot, the human and economic costs of almost six years of fighting were staggering: the war was believed to have cost over US\$2 trillion; an estimated 50 million people (roughly 35 million civilians and 15 million soldiers) were killed; cities and industries completely demolished and laid waste; and millions of people uprooted by massive population movements.

The changes that came in the wake of the war were as dramatic. The European continent underwent a major transformation in the aftermath of the war. The end of war in Europe was quickly followed by the Cold War, which in very profound ways provided the framework of the economic and political reconstruction following the dismantling of the German New Order. The Cold War was to influence international politics for more than forty years.

The end of the war triggered the beginning of the end of the European empires in Asia and Africa. Political independence and the departure of the erstwhile colonial powers marked for the new sovereign states of Asia the first successful stage of nationalism. What followed were the more formidable tasks of constructing the post-colonial state and meeting the related challenges of economic and social development. In many ways, the post-war history of the new states of Asia were chronicles of the strategies and methods adopted by these new states to cope with the problems they had inherited from their individual colonial past and wartime experiences. For many individuals and states across Asia, “deeply layered” memories of the war continue to dwell in their current consciousness. Some are orchestrated, but many are spontaneous and even cathartic. National memorialization of war and occupation, textbook controversies, relations between Japan and its Northeast Asian neighbours, “blood debts”, and “comfort women” are some of the present-day realities that consistently elicit strong emotions across generations,

young and old. Tim Harper reminds us that while the events of 1945 “may now be slipping out of the memory of the living”, these “ubiquitous” memories may continue to speak differently to new generations.

While Asad-ul Iqbal Latif may be right that “World War II has gone missing in action from the politics of contemporary Singapore”, it has certainly not stopped taxing the minds of academics and scholars in the country. The universities in the country, National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University, have separately organized conferences commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the fall of Singapore (2002) and of the end of the war (2005). It was on the latter occasion that the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies brought together an illustrious gathering of scholars to reflect on what the war has continued to mean for Asia, some sixty years after the event. While the debate about which legacy is enduring and which is transient may have been grist to the mill of a good academic debate, the insightful essays that are contained in this volume, the outcome of that meeting at the Institute, are thoughtful reminders that in many tangible ways, the war continues to cast its long shadows over many aspects of public and personal life in Asia. The chapters in this volume provide deep and often introspective accounts and analyses of the continued impact of the war in the countries of Southeast Asia, East and South Asia, and by spreading the discussion and analyses across a wider spectrum of states and societies that were involved in the war, the contributors to this volume have collectively provided richer and more nuanced accounts of the varied meanings and memories of the war in different parts of Asia. In sum, the chapters in this volume have provided a better understanding of how the long-term effects of the war are not only felt in the political arena and in international relations, but in schools, education, textbooks, languages and popular culture as well. The stories they tell are not unlike a great epic with a continuously unfolding plot, often with unexpected twists. World War II might have ended sixty years ago, but it is not a forgotten war. Cheah Boon Kheng’s assertion that “exorcising the ghosts of World War II will take a long time” is applicable to Malaysia, as it surely must be for the rest of Asia.

I trust readers will find the essays in this volume thought-provoking and engaging.

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About the Contributors

David CHANDLER has degrees from Harvard College, Yale University and the University of Michigan. He taught Southeast Asian History at Monash University from 1972 to 1997, and is now an Emeritus Professor there, and also a Fellow of the Monash Asia Institute. He has also held visiting appointments at the University of Michigan, Cornell University, Georgetown University, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of Paris. His books include *A History of Cambodia* (4th edition, 2007), *The Tragedy of Cambodian History* (1991), *Facing the Cambodian Past: Selected Essays* (1996) and *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot* (2nd edition, 1999). He is also a co-author in *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia*, edited by N. Owen et al. (2005) and co-editor with Christopher Goscha, of *L'espace d'un regard l'Asie de: Paul Mus 1902–1969* (2006).

CHEAH Boon Kheng retired in 1994 as Professor of History at the Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang, Malaysia. Since his retirement he has held visiting fellowships in Singapore, Canberra and Malaysia. He was Visiting Professor at the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia during June 2004–June 2005. He has written extensively on Malaysian social and political history and is the author of the following books: *The Masked Comrades* (1979), *Red Star Over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict During and After the Japanese Occupation, 1941–1946* (1983); and *Malaysia: The Making of a Nation* (2002).

Sunanda K. DATTA-RAY has practised and taught journalism in Britain, India, the United States and Singapore for nearly fifty years, always seeking to set contemporary events in the context of historical evolution. This interest in the past is reflected in his two main books, *Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim*, and *Waiting for America: India and the US in the*

New Millennium. Now Visiting Senior Research Fellow at Singapore's Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), he was educated in India (La Martiniere, Calcutta) and England (University of Manchester) and worked on British newspapers before joining *The Statesman*, a leading Indian daily newspaper published from Calcutta and Delhi, of which he became Editor in 1985. Since leaving India at the end of 1991, he has been Editor-in-Residence at the East-West Center, Honolulu; Editorial Consultant, *The Straits Times*, Singapore; Visiting Fellow, Corpus Christi College, Oxford; and Senior Fellow, Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University. He is now a columnist in several publications in India and abroad, including the *International Herald Tribune*, and essayist in *Time* magazine. He is currently engaged at the ISEAS in researching Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew's role in Singapore's relations with India.

Tim HARPER is University Senior Lecturer in History at Cambridge University and a fellow of Magdalene College, Cambridge. His first book, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (1999), came out of his doctoral work on war, communist insurgency and the achievement of independence in Malaya and Singapore. Since then, he has published widely on Southeast Asian and World History. He is a contributor to *Globalization in World History*, edited by A.G. Hopkins (2002). His most recent works, co-written with Christopher Bayly, are *Forgotten Armies: Britain's Asian Empire and the War with Japan* (2004) and *Forgotten Wars: the End of Britain's Asian Empire* (2007). He continues to spend a lot of time travelling and researching in Southeast Asia. He has held visiting positions in Malaysia, Singapore, France and the United States, and is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

Andrew HORVAT is Visiting Professor at Tokyo Keizai University where he is also scholar in residence at the International Center for the Study of Historical Reconciliation. Between 1999 and 2005, as Japan representative of The Asia Foundation, Horvat convened symposiums on topics related to historical reconciliation in Northeast Asia. In 2001 Horvat co-hosted a conference comparing the treatment of negative aspects of the past in the teaching of history in the high schools of seven nations. The papers and proceedings of the conference appeared in multilingual format as *Sharing the Burden of the Past: World War II Legacies in Europe, Asia and America*, co-edited with Gebhard Hielscher (Tokyo: Asia Foundation and Friedrich

Ebert Stiftung, 2003). He has also taken an active role in the hosting of symposiums on World War II slave labour (2002), restitution of cultural property looted during wars and periods of colonial rule (2004), and the role of civil society in historical reconciliation in Europe and East Asia (2006). Prior to joining The Asia Foundation, Horvat was a Tokyo-based journalist covering Japan and the Asia-Pacific region for the *Associated Press*, *Southam News* of Canada, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Independent* of London and Public Radio International's "Marketplace" business programme. He received a citation for excellence in business broadcasting from the Overseas Press Club of America in 1994, and was awarded a Shintaro Abe fellowship the following year. He is author and translator of nine books and numerous articles.

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and Anticolonial Movements” in the *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*. In 2003, he was awarded the Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize for academic excellence. His new volume of essays, *Knowledge and Pacification: Essays on the U.S. Conquest and the Writing of Philippine History*, will be launched in late 2007. He is currently completing a book for ISEAS on *History and Nation-building in the Philippines*.

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