

Japan's Postwar Reconciliation with Southeast Asia

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Although Southeast Asia was brutally occupied by Imperial Japan during World War II, the region has reconciled with postwar Japan. That Southeast Asia is not hostile to Japan today is due to several reasons: the relatively short duration of the Japanese occupation, the pragmatic needs of the Southeast Asian states to deal with immediate security and economic problems rather than to dwell on the past, and the efforts of Japan to be a good neighbor to Southeast Asia since the enunciation of the 1977 Fukuda Doctrine. Public opinion surveys of Southeast Asians towards Japan today and the content analysis of the history textbooks of various ASEAN states show little hostility towards Japan.

Keywords Japan, Southeast Asia, ASEAN, historical reconciliation, history textbooks

The relations between Japan and its two immediate neighbors China and South Korea are bedeviled by territorial disputes and competing national narratives. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine (the symbol of Japanese imperialism to the Chinese and Koreans) in December 2013 further poisoned Japan's bilateral ties with its two Northeast Asian neighbors. However, other than an expression of regret by Singapore on Abe's Yasukuni visit, the other nine member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) were silent on this controversial issue. In July 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping made common cause with South Korea on the history issue against Japan in a speech at Seoul National University (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 2014b). In the same month Xi, in a speech to mark the 77th anniversary of the 1937 incident that led to all-out war between China and Japan, said: "Regrettably, a few people still continue to ignore historical facts that are as hard as iron, and deny and glorify their past aggressions by going against the tide of history" (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 2014a).

The puzzle is why do most Southeast Asian countries, in contrast to China and South Korea, respond differently to Japanese prime ministers' visits to

Yasukuni despite the brutal Japanese invasion and occupation of Southeast Asia during World War II? The corollary question is why have Japan and Southeast Asia reconciled despite that violent past?

Indeed, Japan has come a long way in forging good relations with Southeast Asia since its military occupation of the region between 1941 and 1945. While the Northeast Asian countries are still carrying their burden of history, Japan has, by and large, overcome the painful past with Southeast Asia. Indeed, it took only a few decades of effort and political will to bring about reconciliation despite residual memories of the war. The Japan-Southeast Asian case study shows that it is possible for countries to transcend the trauma of war, and move on to construct a mutually beneficial political and economic relationship. Time does not naturally heal, but common interests, patience, goodwill, and political wisdom on both sides helped to eventually overcome this problem of the heart.

There is no simple and glib explanation for the different outlooks and emotional responses between Northeast and Southeast Asia, especially when war memories are contested (and sometimes selectively and willfully forgotten) between and within these countries. In this article I argue that Southeast Asia is not hostile to Japan today due to the following reasons: the fact that the region suffered much less in three and a half years of occupation than did China and Korea, which were subjected to decades of Japanese imperialism; the pragmatic needs of Southeast Asian states to deal with immediate security threats and economic development rather than to dwell on the past; the authoritarian nature of most Southeast Asian governments, which privileged economic development for regime legitimacy and ignored societal voices about war memories; and the efforts of Japan to be a good neighbor to Southeast Asia as codified by the 1977 Fukuda Doctrine.

The subsequent sections of the article are organized as follows. First is a caveat on the important differences among the Southeast Asian states and their attitudes towards Japan. The next section reveals that public opinion in the ASEAN states is generally not hostile towards Japan. This is followed by an analysis of the history textbooks of four ASEAN states (the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam) and their narratives of the Japanese occupation during World War II. On the whole, these Southeast Asian history textbooks do not inculcate hostility towards Japan despite its imperial past. After that is an analysis of four other ASEAN states (Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar and Indonesia) and their perceptions of external enemies. I argue that these Southeast Asian countries tend to view their immediate neighbors and former colonial masters rather than Japan as their traditional enemies because the Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia was a relatively short interlude compared to the domination of other external powers. The next section argues that Tokyo has proactively sought to be a good neighbor to Southeast Asia since the articulation of the Fukuda Doctrine in 1977 and this is a key reason why the history issue is no longer a

stumbling block in the diplomatic relations between Japan and the ASEAN states.

Important Differences among the Southeast Asian States

Before we account for the differences between Northeast and Southeast Asia towards the issues of memory, reconciliation, and a security role for Japan, two caveats must be lodged. First, the ten ASEAN states are not homogenous and their experiences of World War II differed quite considerably. Countries that suffered least (Thailand), and those that benefited most from Japanese assistance to their independence movements (Burma and Indonesia) against their Western colonial masters, tend to be less critical of Japan's militaristic past. Thailand, allied to Imperial Japan, was not invaded during World War II. Also, war memories and attitudes towards Japan vary significantly within the same country, especially where the military occupiers meted out different treatment to indigenous people and locally resident ethnic Chinese. The younger generation, which did not experience the Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia, also tends to harbor less animosity towards postwar Japan.

Second, we should differentiate among postwar Southeast Asian states, regimes, and societies for a more nuanced approach towards memory and reconciliation. Most of these states had authoritarian systems that privileged national security and economic development for regime legitimacy and often ignored societal concerns about memory of Japanese atrocities and compensation for war victims.

If Imperial Japan had occupied Southeast Asia for half a century and treated the natives in the same brutal manner as it had acted towards the Koreans, then this region is likely to have harbored lasting animosities towards Japan. In a hypothetical world where Japanese imperial rule had persisted for decades in Southeast Asia, resistance would have ensued had the occupiers continually forced Muslim subjects to bow in the direction of Tokyo and the Emperor rather than to Mecca and Allah, or pressured Southeast Asians to change their names to Japanese ones.

Goto has noted that Japan was culturally insensitive during its brief occupation of Indonesia:

In contrast to the Dutch, who recognized Islamic social and cultural values and followed a policy of noninterference, the Japanese tried to impose their values upon the Indonesian population. The practice of forcing people to bow in the direction of Tokyo, location of the imperial palace, particularly enraged Muslims and led to a welling up of intense anti-Japanese sentiment ... Bowing in the direction of Tokyo forced people to turn their backs to Mecca, and paying respect to the emperor meant a conflict with Muslim religious sensibilities. (Goto 2003, 235-236)

However, if Tokyo had applied its softer Taiwanese approach to decades of empire-building in a hypothetical Southeast Asia and co-opted the local elites socialized by the Japanese education system and values, then resistance would probably have gradually diminished and a new generation of native collaborators and admirers of Japan might well have emerged.

My central claim is that pressing security concerns and the developmental needs of newly independent non-communist Southeast Asian states during the Cold War often trumped historical issues in the region's relations with Japan. A corollary is that these regional states and regimes (often authoritarian) pragmatically sought good relations with Japan for economic development and regime maintenance while downplaying societal demands for remembrance of the Japanese occupation, victims of war, and compensation for comfort women. And, democratization in post-Marcos Philippines and post-Suharto Indonesia did not lead to anti-Japanese movements because the history issue had already been settled by the time democratization took place in these two countries. The People's Power revolution toppled the Marcos regime in 1986 while the Asian Financial Crisis (1997-1998) destroyed the Suharto regime.

Unlike China, Southeast Asian states do not instill an anti-Japan credo in their history textbooks because regime legitimacy, national unity and patriotism are not based on anti-Japanese sentiments. Many of these Southeast Asian states have ancient enemies that predate Western colonialism and Japanese militarism. During the Cold War, non-communist regimes in these regions suffered from indigenous communist insurgencies supported by Beijing. The communist regimes of Vietnam and Cambodia were each other's worst enemies and also hostile to the U.S. Some of these states (Burma, Indonesia and the Philippines) also faced internal enemies including separatist movements. In this regard, the Japanese occupation was merely a short and vicious interlude that was overshadowed by more immediate geopolitical threats and domestic challenges in the postwar era.

In their quest for survival, national unity, and development, post-colonial Southeast Asian countries did not have the luxury of focusing on historical differences with Tokyo. This is not surprising. Even Maoist China swept the historical issue with Japan under the carpet when confronted by the external threat of the then Soviet Union and domestic class enemies, real or imagined, within the Chinese Communist Party and the bureaucracy during the Cultural Revolution. By the time Beijing reopened the historical issue in 1982 over a Japanese history textbook that downplayed Japan's invasion of China, the Southeast Asian states had already buried the hatchet with Japan over the past.

Table 1. Most Important Current Partner for ASEAN States (%)

| | United States | China | Japan | India |
|-------------|---------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Indonesia | 43 | 52 | 70 | 19 |
| Malaysia | 36 | 63 | 65 | 25 |
| Myanmar | 48 | 40 | 44 | 16 |
| Philippines | 65 | 32 | 76 | 18 |
| Singapore | 42 | 60 | 50 | 31 |
| Thailand | 38 | 60 | 74 | 22 |
| Vietnam | 54 | 32 | 77 | 24 |

Note: multiple answers allowed.

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2014.

ASEAN States: Public Opinion towards Japan

There is a stark contrast between Northeast and Southeast Asia in terms of the outlook towards Japan. Southeast Asians are relatively more trusting and appreciative of postwar Japan's role in Asia than are Chinese and Koreans. Southeast Asians are also agreeable to the dispatch of Tokyo's Self Defense Forces (SDF) to their region for humanitarian assistance, and appreciate Japanese economic and technical aid, quality consumer goods, and cultural products (e.g., *anime*, *manga*, J-pop, J-fashion, computer games, TV dramas, movies, and icons like *Hello Kitty* and *Doraemon*).

According to a recent public opinion survey of ASEAN countries (Table 1), five out of seven rated Japan to be the most important current partner for ASEAN.

History Textbooks of ASEAN States

A content analysis of history textbooks in selected Southeast Asian states dealing with the Japanese wartime occupation reveals a less emotional and critical narrative than that found in Chinese and Korean texts. Indeed, Tokyo does not appear to be the main enemy or aggressor in the Southeast Asian nations' interpretations of history, even though they are cognizant of the mass sufferings caused by Imperial Japan's invasion of the region. With the passing of the generation that directly suffered from the Japanese occupation in Southeast Asia, the next generation that did not personally experience the horrors of war is markedly less hostile to Japan, especially when Southeast Asian governments and local history textbooks do not brand the Japanese as their main enemies in national narratives. Surveying the history textbooks of ten ASEAN states is beyond the scope of this article. Rather, this section focuses on the history

textbooks of the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam—the four most unlikely cases to reconcile with Japan.

The Philippines had already been granted Commonwealth status in 1935 by the United States (with self-government except in foreign affairs and defense) and was due for full independence a decade after. In this regard, Japanese propaganda of liberating Asia from Western imperialism would certainly ring hollow in the case of the Philippines. Moreover, thousands of Filipinos fought alongside U.S. troops, endured the infamous Bataan death march, conducted guerilla warfare against the Japanese occupiers, and suffered greatly when Manila was destroyed in 1945. Demographically, Singapore and Malaysia have the highest percentage of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia. Many of these “Overseas Chinese” had supported the resistance movement in mainland China against Japan after 1937, thereby incurring the wrath and vengeance of the Japanese military when it occupied the Malay Peninsula and Singapore.

Although the Vichy French regime administered Indochina until Japan seized direct control in March 1945, the wartime economic disruption led to the starvation and death of perhaps two million Vietnamese. Moreover, postwar Japan was an ally of the United States, which fought against North Vietnam to prevent unification with the South under communism. After Vietnam’s occupation of Cambodia in 1978, Japan, the United States, China, and the ASEAN states forged a united front against Vietnam and its ally, the Soviet Union. Relations between Hanoi and Tokyo were only mended after the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia in 1989. Nevertheless, the history textbooks from Vietnam and the other case studies from Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines reveal little bitterness towards Japan.

The Philippines

The only liberal democracy in Southeast Asia, the Philippines does not adopt a single authoritative history textbook prescribed by its Department of Education; schools are free to choose their own textbooks. Not surprisingly, there are many history textbooks in the market with diverse ideologies ranging from Christian conservatism to radical leftist perspectives. However, regardless of their ideological differences, most Filipino history textbooks are candid about the destructiveness of the Japanese occupation and highlight the heroic struggle of the Filipino people against the invaders, but generally do not harbor bitterness towards the Japanese. By contrast, these textbooks do differ in their critique of the Spanish and American colonial masters.

A popular history textbook that has gone through six editions and educated at least two generations of Filipino students is Gregorio F. Zaide and Sonia M. Zaide’s *Philippine History and Government*.¹ In the 6th edition, the Zaides do not blame Japan, America and Spain for the legacy of poor governance in the Philippines: “The greatest enemy of our people is no longer the foreign invaders

or colonizers from outside—the enemy is within—our corrupt and foolish leaders, the lack of unity and discipline of our people, the loss of our talented and skilled professionals, workers and artists who have gone abroad” (Zaide and Zaide 2004, preface).

The Zaides’ account highlights the heroic role of the Filipinos and their loyalty to the United States:

Of the other Asian nations attacked by Japan, the Philippines fought the longest and the hardest. ... We did this because the Americans promised us independence and treated us well. ... One of the cruelest atrocities by the Japanese during the Second World War was the infamous Bataan Death March in April 1942. Some 62,000 Filipino soldiers and 11,000 American troops were forced to march from 7 to 11 days without food, water or medicine. ... The Filipino and American soldiers who escaped to the hills formed local guerilla bands. These guerrillas fought a good war against the Japanese invaders. Pretty soon, the guerrilla movement became a people [sic] war against the Japanese. (ibid., 155, 159)

Astonishingly, the next few paragraphs reflect the values of Christian forgiveness and grace to the Japanese:

During the Second World War, the Filipinos saw the best and the worst in the Japanese. There were many acts of kindness by the Japanese conquerors. ... But many Filipinos also suffered atrocities by the Japanese. We only remember these atrocities in history [because] we do not want them to happen again. ... The postwar Japanese government paid war reparations to compensate for some of the damage. Later, Emperor Hirohito apologized for his country’s atrocities to Filipinos during the war. ... Today, we have forgiven the Filipinos who collaborated and the Japanese who did atrocities to our people. We have good relations with the Japanese today. (ibid., 159-160)

Two observations can be made from the above account. First, the Zaides note that the Philippines already received recompense for its suffering: reparations from Tokyo and an apology from the Emperor. Second, it is almost inconceivable for any Korean or Chinese textbooks today to adopt such a magnanimous, gracious, and conciliatory stance.

Adopting a “nationalist and pro-poor” framework, Renaldo Oliveros and his co-authors portray Japan as another exploiter in the footsteps of Spain and the United States, and the “Second World War as the result of the advanced capitalist countries’ drive to modify their territorial division of the world” (Oliveros, Galvez, and Estrella 2004, 184-185). They continue:

Like the United States, Japan tried to convince the Filipinos that they had come to liberate them. Where the U.S. presented itself as the Filipino’s liberators from Spain, Japan promised to deliver the Philippines from its western oppressors. ...

The Japanese' sugar coated pronouncements of freedom and racial fraternity were belied by their grave abuses and blatant suppression of Filipinos' rights. ... The U.S. imperialists drove imperialists Japan to its knees when they dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and Nagasaki, three days later. ... In essence, this was an imperialist war. (ibid., 191, 194, 196)

The same authors note: "Although the U.S. granted the country its 'independence' in 1946, it still wielded considerable influence and control over the state of affairs. Most of the policies and programs implemented by every succeeding administration of the Third Philippine Republic only served to further American interests in the country" (ibid., 213). They then condemn the U.S. support for President Marcos' declaration of Martial Law in 1972 and note: "Before Marcos was ousted, some 160,000 Filipinos were estimated to have been killed, tortured, illegally imprisoned, along with the six million citizens forced to flee from their homes and fields. Some 2.5 million Filipinos were forced to leave their homes and livelihoods" (ibid., 230).

Noteworthy in the account of radical Filipino historiography is that Japan is by no means the greatest villain. More anger is often channeled against the U.S. neocolonial power, and Filipino leaders and elites for bad governance, corruption, and human rights abuses. Oliveros' historiography implies that there is little to choose between American and Japanese imperialism:

US imperialism only managed to colonize the Philippines after a thorough and merciless war of aggression. The United States employed more than 130,000 US troops against the seven million Filipinos. ... Two hundred thousand Filipino freedom fighters, and more than 50,000 civilians were killed. To crush the Filipino peoples' struggle, the American aggressors resorted to various methods of cruelty: massacre, rape, hamletting, torture, zoning and concentration camps. (ibid., 144)

Another history text by Renato and Letizia Constantino adopts an anti-imperialist perspective and sees the irony of postwar Japan in cahoots with the United States:

The Japanese are no longer the hated symbols of brutality, rapine, and mass murder. Filipinos have accepted their new image as providers of employment and investors of funds for Philippine 'development'. Just as they forgot the brutalities of the Americans at the turn of the century, Filipinos now seem to have erased from their memories the brutalities perpetrated by the Japanese and regard them also as benefactors rather than exploiters. The naïve acceptance of this image is due to a deficient understanding of the dynamics of international economic and political forces abetted by a well-orchestrated propaganda effort intended to make Asians accept Japan as the workshop of Asia and the surrogate of the United States in defending the capitalist system from other ideological forces which threaten the economic order in this part of the globe. (Constantino and Constantino 1999, 28)

The authors similarly note: “The Pacific war was a case of competing imperialisms” (ibid., 29).

The aforementioned Filipino history textbooks reveal the following: Imperial Japan is by no means the only oppressor Filipinos have encountered; and the importance of postwar Japanese investments seems to have erased some of the antipathies towards Japan. The Zaide textbook also conveys that Japan has already paid the price of its invasion: reparations to the Philippines and apologies offered. Despite their different ideological views, Filipino history textbooks do not necessarily view Japan as the greatest villain in their national narratives. This attitude, in part, explains the lack of animosity on the part of Philippines state and society towards Japan today.

The Philippines remains a key recipient of Japanese ODA. The Japanese-led and funded Asian Development Bank is located in Manila. Given its territorial dispute with China today over the Spratlys in the South China Sea, the Philippines welcomes a closer strategic relationship with Japan as a counterweight against a rising China.

Singapore

While Singapore and Malaysia are formally democracies where opposition political parties exist and competitive parliamentary elections do take place, they are similar to communist Vietnam in prescribing a single, government-sanctioned history textbook that covers the Japanese occupational interlude. In this regard, prescribing a single historical orthodoxy by these three countries places them closer to China than to the Philippines and Japan along the spectrum of monolithic—pluralistic historical interpretations for students.

In the case of Singapore's history textbook, its coverage of the Japanese occupation seeks to construct a mythology of a proto-multiethnic nation where different races fought against the invaders and shared a common baptism of fire. Implicit in the account is the lesson that Singapore cannot rely on outsiders (given the ease with which the British troops capitulated) but only on its citizens to defend the city-state. The text reads:

The fall of Singapore marked the beginning of a brief but tumultuous chapter of Singapore's history. ... The Japanese used fear to rule Singapore. The cruelty of the *Kempeitai* kept people in a constant state of anxiety and fear ... Soon after taking control of Singapore, the *Kempeitai* carried out *Sook Ching* which aimed to identify and eliminate suspected anti-Japanese elements among the Chinese community. All Chinese men between 18 and 50 years were told to report ... and 'examined' by the Japanese. ... Those who were identified as anti-Japanese were taken in lorries to Changi and other beaches [and were killed]. (Curriculum Planning and Development Division 2007, 111-112)

This tame account of the Sook Ching (purification) purges is rather odd: no figures were given in this textbook when accounts elsewhere claim that the Kempeitai (military police) butchered between 50,000 and 100,000 ethnic Chinese males within a few weeks in Singapore (Lee 2000, 558). Considering that Singapore's population was only 795,000 in 1942, this ethnic cleansing was indeed very severe on a per capita basis. Astonishingly, this textbook claimed that 400,000 were killed in the Nanking Massacre in China while keeping quiet on the numbers of its own Sook Ching massacre (Curriculum Planning and Development Division 2007, 128). This figure is even more inflated than the Mainland Chinese claim of 300,000 victims. One wonders whether the figures for the Sook Ching massacre were deliberately not mentioned to avoid inflaming anti-Japanese sentiments among young Singaporeans. Unlike certain Filipino history textbooks, there is no graphic description of Japanese brutalities and torture against civilians in this text.

To build a harmonious multi-ethnic nation, the Singapore history text highlights the heroic resistance not only of Chinese volunteers but also of Malays against the invasion: "In 1935, the Experimental Company became the Malay Regiment with about 150 men and was sent to Singapore for advanced training. It was at Pasir Panjang [west coast of Singapore] that the 1st and 2nd Battalion of the Malay Regiment fought gallantly against the Japanese" (ibid., 105).

The Singapore narrative notes the different treatment meted out by the occupational forces to the various ethnic groups:

The Japanese did not regard the Malays and Indians as a threat to their rule. ... Many Chinese became victims of Japanese atrocities. The Japanese perceived the Chinese as a threat to their rule. This was because when Japan invaded China in 1937, they met with strong Chinese resistance, including those from outside China. Before the outbreak of war, the Chinese community in Singapore led by tycoon Tan Kah Kee, called for a boycott of Japanese goods and contributed funds to the anti-Japanese war effort in China. Some even returned to China to join in the fight against the Japanese. (111)

A later section of the textbook mentions that the problem of high unemployment was a major challenge for postwar Singapore in its early years of independence. It then notes that Singapore's strategy of economic survival was to provide incentives to multinational corporations, including those from Japan, to set up factories in Singapore and create jobs for the unemployed (210).

In Singapore's national mythology, the main "villain" is not Japan, but Malaysia. Expulsion from Malaysia in 1965 was Singapore's greatest anguish (111). Another threat identified in the textbook is Indonesia's "campaign of terrorism in Singapore" resulting from its displeasure at the merger between Singapore and Malaysia in 1963 (196-197). Even today, Singapore's meta-narrative is about national survival and acute vulnerability to unpredictable forces among its

immediate neighbors, often jealous of Singapore's material success and who view it as a Chinese city-state that is not "compliant" like the Chinese minorities in Muslim Indonesia and Malaysia. In Singapore's "realist" mentality, the U.S. and Japanese presence is useful for enhancing a balance of power in Southeast Asia against potential regional bullies.

Also omitted from the Singapore history textbook is the discovery of mass graves in 1962—a legacy of the Sook Ching massacre. This triggered a 120,000-strong mass demonstration demanding compensation of SD\$50 million "blood money" from Japan and reignited demands for a civilian war memorial. However, then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew was rather lukewarm to such societal demands. Apparently, his priority was to seek Japanese investments to create jobs and address Singapore's severe unemployment problem. When Singapore broke away from Malaysia in 1965, attracting Japanese investments remained one of the most urgent tasks of Lee's government. Lee recollected:

The only important business I raised with Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda was the "blood debt," compensation for their wartime atrocities. ... He and his officials were most polite and were anxious to resolve the issue before it stirred up past bitterness. We eventually settled this "blood debt" after independence, in October 1966, for \$50 million, half in grants and half in loans. I wanted to establish good relations to encourage their industrialists to invest in Singapore. (Lee 2000, 559)

To seek closure on the issue of the Japanese atrocities, a civilian war memorial was unveiled, but it was designed for nation-building purposes.² The war memorial symbolized the sufferings of all ethnic groups rather than just the Chinese, even though this group comprised most of the victims of Japanese repression. The manner in which the Singapore history textbook has been written and the civilian war memorial depoliticized reveals that the pragmatic considerations of an authoritarian state for economic development and national survival overrode societal demands for compensation from Japan and remembrance of the war. In the 1980s, Singapore adopted Japan as its industrial and social model. Quality control circles, house unions, and the *koban* system (neighborhood police posts) were introduced to Singapore; and Harvard Professor Ezra Vogel's *Japan as Number One* became recommended reading for the Singapore cabinet.

Malaysia

The Malaysian history textbook is also very selective in its interpretation of the Japanese occupation. It places the Japanese invasion of Malaysia against the backdrop of Tokyo's wars and empire-building in Asia beginning with the 1895 Sino-Japanese War (Ramlah 2004, 3). The text explains that Japan's insatiable need for resources, such as oil, tin and rubber, led to its invasion of Asia, even though Japan's rhetoric, in Malay, was "Asia Untuk Orang Asia" (Asia for Asians)

and “Semangat Asia” (Asian Solidarity and Spirit) (*ibid.*, 5). The textbook also includes a propaganda poster from the occupation period of a Japanese soldier extending a helping hand from above to a Malay below against the backdrop of a radiant sun. This poster invoked the Muslim deity: “Oh Allah. Please get the Japanese army to protect us from the [British] oppressors” (6).

For the sake of its multi-ethnic nation building, the Malaysian history textbook does not mention that many Malay Sultans collaborated with the Japanese, and that the ethnic Chinese in Malaysia suffered much more than the Malays and Indians.³ Moreover, it ignores the mutual distrust and vicious cycle of violent ethnic clashes between the Chinese and Malays in 1945, fueled by the Japanese occupation policy of divide and rule. However, the textbook did mention the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM), the first Malay nationalist party, and its collaboration with the Japanese. It also pointed out that 70,000 Malays provided forced labor to build the Thai-Burmese “death railway.”

While the text mentions the common sufferings caused by the depredation of war, there are no vitriolic remarks against Japan. The Malaysian text concludes:

The Japanese occupation inflicted all kinds of suffering upon our people. The beautiful slogans of the Japanese were nothing but tricks intended to achieve their aims. Among our people, there was a surge of nationalism, with different intensities depending on their ethnic origins. The Japanese occupation taught us that we must expel all forms of colonialism, West or East.” (38)

A restrained history textbook about the Japanese occupation is no surprise given the friendly relations Kuala Lumpur extends to Tokyo. Malaysia under then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad adopted a “Look East” Policy to learn from Japan to facilitate his country’s rapid industrialization. Mahathir also envisaged Japan playing a leading role in an East Asian Economic Caucus (which excluded the United States) and even urged the Japanese to stop apologizing about the past—probably the only Asian leader (besides then Taiwan President Lee Tenghui) to do so.

Another example of selective amnesia about the Japanese occupation in Malaysia is the lack of a national civilian war memorial. Anniversaries at a national memorial to mark World War II in Malaysia could have been a catharsis for the generation who survived the occupation and the families and friends of war victims. The memorials that do exist are private, Chinese ones (including those linked to the Malayan Communist Party), usually at the sites of the mass war graves. Lim Pui Huen wrote: “The monuments reveal two very different perceptions and two very different memories of war on the part of the Chinese and the Malays [in Malaysia]” (P. H. Lim 2000, 155).

Vietnam

The template of the Vietnamese history textbook is the great leadership of the Vietnam Communist Party and the patriotic struggle of the Vietnamese people against foreign aggressors. The Japanese occupation gave the Vietnamese communists the opportunity to throw off the yoke of French colonialism. The text reads:

In Autumn 1940, the fascist Japanese invaded Indochina in order to establish more military bases to fight the allied forces. When they invaded, the French surrendered, opening the gate to welcome the Japanese into Vietnam. From then, the Vietnamese people under two exploitive powers—the Japanese and the French—became poorer and life more difficult. Because of that more than two million people died of starvation. (Nguyen 2006, 158)

Further on the Vietnamese textbook examines the last months of the Japanese occupation:

On 9th March 1945, the Japanese seized weapons from the French. The defeated French colonists either fled or surrendered. The French could not even protect Vietnam but within five years, they sold Vietnam twice to the Japanese. Before 9th March, the Viet Minh government had negotiated with the French many times to cooperate with the Vietnamese to fight the Japanese. But the French didn't respond but instead attacked the Viet Minh even more. Even when they lost and ran away, they also killed many political prisoners in Yen Bai and Cao Bang provinces. (ibid.)

The text continues:

The fact is that from autumn 1940, our country had become a colony of Japan and not a colony of France anymore. When the Japanese surrendered to the allied forces, our Vietnamese people stood up to overthrow the government and established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The truth is that our people have taken Vietnam back from Japan, not from the French. The French ran away, the Japanese surrendered, King Bao Dai stepped down and the Vietnamese people broke the colonist's chain of a hundred years to set up an independent Vietnam. (ibid.)

This Vietnamese history textbook covering the Japanese interlude levels more criticisms against the French than against the Japanese. This is notwithstanding the claim by Vietnam that two million Vietnamese perished from starvation during the Japanese occupation. In the collective memory of the Vietnamese, the United States was a temporary enemy that tried to block Vietnam's unification during the American War ("Vietnam War" to the Americans), while China is a perennial threat (though a temporary ally during the American War). Vietnam is sensitive to living in the shadow of China, but not of Japan, in the past two millennia. Given Hanoi's tense relations with Beijing over their territorial dispute

in the Paracels and the Spratlys in the South China Sea today, the Vietnamese are seeking assistance from Tokyo and hope that the latter will be a counterweight to Beijing.

Other Southeast Asian States and Their Enemies

Thailand

Thailand, an ally of Japan during World War II, opportunistically enlarged its borders under the Japanese. Thailand fought a border war with the Vichy French in 1941, and snatched territories from Cambodia and Laos. Thailand also took the Shan states from British Burma and the four northern Malay states of Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, and Trengannu from British Malaya. If Japan had won the war, Thailand would surely have become its surrogate in Southeast Asia.

In the collective memory of the Thais, Japan is not an enemy. Rather, Thai popular culture and movies perceive the Burmese as the nation's ancient enemy. Burmese kings raided Thailand to capture slaves to build magnificent pagodas, and even destroyed the Thai kingdom of Ayutthaya (its ruins are a wonderful tourist site today). Box office hits in Thailand include the movie of a Thai queen (a Siamese equivalent to Joan of Arc) who rode on elephants to repel the Burmese invaders. The 2001 movie *The Legend of Suriyothai* was a mega hit in Thailand. This was an epic tale and political history of the kingdom of Ayutthaya, culminating in Queen Phra Suriyothai riding to battle against the Burmese invaders at the Battle of Hatawaddy in 1548. The other traditional enemies of Thailand are Vietnam and Cambodia. More recently, Hanoi was a threat to Bangkok when Vietnamese troops occupied neighboring Cambodia between 1978 and 1989. The greatest threats to Thailand today are from within—the conflict among its political elites concerning the role of former Prime Minister Thaksin, and the violent Muslim separatist movement in Southern Thailand.

Cambodia

In the aftermath of the Angkor Empire, the Khmer nation declined and became a vassal of Thailand and Vietnam. French colonialism probably saved Cambodia from being partitioned and swallowed up by its two neighbors. Until March 1945, the Vichy French, and not Japan, directly administered Cambodia. The history of Cambodia is probably one of the most tragic any nation has endured in the postwar era: civil wars, American saturation bombing against Vietcong sanctuaries, a Khmer Rouge government bent on genocide, and a Vietnamese invasion.

Tokyo subsequently participated in the Cambodia peace process and dispatched its troops for the United Nations Peacekeeping mission in Cambodia in the early 1990s. When the forces of co-Prime Ministers Hun Sen and Prince

Ranariddh were on the verge of a civil war in 1997, Tokyo successfully brokered a ceasefire followed by a national election. There is no anti-Japanese sentiment in Cambodia, especially when Tokyo has offered generous ODA and assisted in peacebuilding. The natural enemies of Cambodia are Thailand and Vietnam—not Japan.

Myanmar

Burmese nationalist leader Aung San (the father of Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate) and 29 young men who opposed British colonial rule (collectively known as the “Thirty Comrades” in Burmese narratives) sought assistance from Japan, including military training on Hainan Island, China in 1941. Aung San then led the Burma Defense Army (BNA), which was trained by Japanese instructors.

In 1948, Burma won independence from Britain. Although Aung San was assassinated in 1947, some of the Thirty Comrades became key leaders and the BDA the embryo of the modern Burmese army. Ne Win, one of the Thirty, became the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces in 1949 and the paramount leader between 1962 and 1998. In this regard, Burma was similar to South Korea where Japanese-trained officers (including President Park Chung Hee) became the top leaders of an independent country. But unfortunately, Burma did not match the type of economic development that South Korea achieved. During the socialist era led by Ne Win, Burma maintained a close, informal relationship with the veterans of the *Minami Kikan*, a spy agency of the old Imperial army.

Burma (subsequently renamed Myanmar by the military junta) faced domestic insurgencies from various ethnic groups including the Karens, Chins, Kachins, and the Shans. After the junta's crackdown on the democratization movement in 1989, Myanmar became an international pariah, shunned especially by the West. The junta's external foes were the European Union (EU) and the United States. However, Tokyo took an approach different from its U.S. ally. It sought to play a bridging role between the junta and Aung San Suu Kyi and adopted a softer line towards Myanmar. Tokyo also offered humanitarian aid and assistance to repair the airport in Yangon for “navigation safety” as incentives for the junta to release Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest and liberalize its politics. Not surprisingly, Myanmar did not view Japan as a threat and avoided harping on any historical issues with Tokyo. But relations between Myanmar and Japan dipped in 2003 when the latter joined the West in extending a sanctions regime after Aung San Suu Kyi was detained in June of that year.

Since 2010, Myanmar has adopted various political reforms and the United States and the EU have gradually lifted their sanctions on the former pariah state. Tokyo has now switched from cautious engagement to enthusiastic engagement with Myanmar. Japan is developing the Thilawa industrial park near Yangon, offering various developmental projects by Japan International Cooperation

Agency (JICA), and has appointed Sasakawa Yohei of the Nippon Foundation as the representative of the Japanese government for national reconciliation in Myanmar.

Indonesia

In their quest for independence Indonesian nationalist leaders Sukarno and Hatta collaborated with the Japanese occupiers. To bolster its military position in Java and other parts of the former Dutch East Indies, the Japanese military established PETA (Sukarela Tentara Pembela Tanah Air, or the Army of Defenders of the Homeland) and other auxiliary troops. During the war, an estimated 25,000 Javanese were trained and attached to the Japanese army (Lebra 1977). However, PETA revolted against Japan when Indonesian leaders became frustrated by a lack of genuine independence and were eager to take advantage of Tokyo's weakening position. After 1945, PETA formed the kernel of the Indonesian military which fought a successful war of independence against the returning Dutch. Indonesia gained its formal independence in 1949.

Postwar Japan sought to maintain good relations with Indonesia in order to gain access to its rich natural resources and sea-lanes of communications vital to Japanese oil tankers (Nishihara 1976). It also made good geopolitical sense for Japan to keep good ties with a key player in the Non-Aligned Movement and the largest member of ASEAN. Not surprisingly, Indonesia is one of Japan's largest ODA recipients.

Jakarta does not view Tokyo with hostility. During the era of President Sukarno, Indonesia's enemies were the West, including Britain, which promoted the merger of Malaya with Singapore, folded Sabah and Sarawak into Malaysia, which Indonesia viewed as a "neo-colonial" entity deemed inimical to Indonesia's interests. After Suharto became President, Indonesia turned to the West and Japan for investments and trade for economic growth. Jakarta also viewed Communist China with hostility because it perceived that Beijing aided the PKI (Communist Party of Indonesia), which allegedly launched an abortive coup in 1965, killing a number of Indonesian generals. Diplomatic relations with Beijing were not restored until 1990. In the post-Cold War era, relations between Tokyo and Jakarta remain cordial.

The Fukuda Doctrine: A "Heart-to-Heart Relationship" with Southeast Asia

Japan's Postwar Challenge in Southeast Asia

By the early 1970s, Japan had emerged as the world's second largest economic superpower and had also settled the issues of normalization and reparations with all the ASEAN countries. However, when then Prime Minister Tanaka

Kakuei visited various Southeast Asian countries in 1974, violent anti-Japanese demonstrations erupted in Bangkok and Jakarta. These riots were not triggered by historical grievances and war memories but by more immediate issues about perceived economic exploitation by Japanese companies—Japanese management's refusal to promote indigenous talent, and the preference of Japanese corporations to conduct business with ethnic Chinese domiciled in Southeast Asia (reputed to be more business savvy and reliable) rather than with indigenous people. Violent protests against Tanaka were also conveniently used by anti-governmental forces to embarrass the regimes of Thailand and Indonesia.

A year after the anti-Japanese riots in Bangkok and Jakarta, the geopolitical landscape of Southeast Asia turned even more hostile to Japan. Tokyo's American ally suffered a humiliating defeat in Vietnam after Saigon fell to Hanoi in 1975. Southeast Asia was then divided into the noncommunist ASEAN states and the communist states of a unified Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. More turbulence appeared to loom over the horizon in Southeast Asia. The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) had to seriously consider and recalibrate its relations with Southeast Asia against the backdrop of the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. In November 1976, at a meeting comprising Japanese ambassadors from Southeast Asian countries to review their nation's relations with the region, it was concluded that Tokyo must support and strengthen ASEAN as a regional organization, and also seek better relations with Vietnam to wean it away from the Soviet Union (Wakatsuki 2006, 150-154).

In the following year, ASEAN extended its first invitation to Japan to attend its summit in Kuala Lumpur. This was a golden opportunity for Tokyo to establish closer ties with the ASEAN states. Then Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo seized the opportunity not only to attend the summit but also tour five ASEAN countries and Burma. On the last stop in Manila, Fukuda articulated the following three tenets of his doctrine: (1) Japan will not become a great military power again; (2) it will seek a "heart-to-heart relationship" (*kokoro to kokoro no fureai*) with Southeast Asia; and (3) Tokyo will play an active political role by supporting ASEAN as a regional organization and acting as a bridge between ASEAN and the communist Indochinese countries for regional peace and stability (Sudo 1992; Lam 2013).

According to Ambassador Tanino Sakutaro (then director of MOFA's Southeast Asian Division Two of the Asia Bureau, which drafted Fukuda's keynote speech delivered at Manila), President Marcos responded very favorably to Fukuda's speech by remarking that this was precisely what Southeast Asia had wanted to hear for a long time.⁴ Arguably, the Fukuda Doctrine was a diplomatic milestone for Tokyo's relations with Southeast Asia. Not only was it postwar Japan's first codification of a foreign policy doctrine, it also sought to begin a new era with the region by categorically rejecting its past militarism and establish a heart-to-heart relationship with Southeast Asia in order to overcome the

problems of the past. Obviously, Japan lacks a similar heart-to-heart relationship with China and South Korea today.

Walking the Talk: The Fukuda Doctrine in the Post-Cold War Era

It was impossible for Tokyo to play a bridging role between the communist and non-communist protagonists of Southeast Asia after Vietnam's invasion and occupation of Cambodia in 1978. However, after Vietnam's withdrawal from Cambodia in 1989, Japan sought to play an active role to restore peace in Cambodia by participating in the Paris Peace Talks, funding UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) which was led by a Japanese national, Akashi Yasushi, and subsequently dispatching the Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF) for UN peacekeeping in Cambodia—a first since the end of the Second World War. The Southeast Asian states did not oppose Japan's SDF dispatch to Cambodia; China and Korea predictably expressed concern about such a move. If the historical issue between Japan and Southeast Asia had not been resolved, the latter would most likely have criticized the deployment.

In the post-Cold War era, Tokyo has applied the tenets of the Fukuda Doctrine to Southeast Asia. It has neither flexed its military muscles nor adopted an aggressive diplomatic style in the region; it has made good on the heart-to-heart relationship by extending some 12 trillion yen (US\$97 billion) worth of ODA to Southeast Asia since 1954; offering a US\$80 billion aid package to the region when it was reeling from the 1997-98 Asian Financial Crisis; representing the region in G-7 Meetings; and participating in regular summits with ASEAN. Tokyo has also sought to play an active political role in the region by acting as an intermediary between the Philippines and China in their 1995 Mischief Reef dispute in the South China Sea, creatively brokering a peace deal between co-Prime Ministers Hun Sen and Prince Ranariddh when their rivalry threatened to drag Cambodia into a civil war again in 1997, and proposing the antecedents to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia's only multilateral forum for discussing security issues.

Southeast Asia has also accepted the Japanese initiative in forging the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) in November 2004, in Tokyo, to enhance the security of the Straits of Malacca and other territorial waters. Southeast Asia has also been receptive to Tokyo's peace-building efforts in Aceh, Mindanao, East Timor, and Cambodia—areas that have suffered from violent internal conflict (Lam 2009). Southeast Asia also recognized that Japan's largest postwar dispatch of a thousand troops to Aceh in the aftermath of the December 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami was purely for humanitarian assistance and had nothing to do with its militarism of the past. In 2007, Singapore invited Japan to set up a cultural center in the city-state to disseminate its popular culture (including *manga* and *anime*) to Southeast Asia. The point to note is that if Japan had not

reconciled with Southeast Asia over the issue of history, the latter would have been much less welcoming to a Japanese cultural, political, and security role in the region.

Moreover, given Beijing's excessive claims to the South China Sea, based on its self-declared nine-dash line, many ASEAN states, especially Vietnam and the Philippines (both claimant states), are wary of China and welcome Japan as a counterweight to a rising China.

Conclusion

While seeking to maintain good relations with Beijing, the ASEAN states also welcome strong ties with Japan as a balance and hedge against a rising China. Is a cordial Southeast Asia-Japan relationship a model for reconciliation for Northeast Asia? The answer is not obvious. As mentioned earlier, the historical experiences of Northeast and Southeast Asia are quite different. Moreover, Southeast Asia does not have territorial disputes with Japan while China and South Korea do have such squabbles with Japan.

Another difference between Southeast and Northeast Asia is their responses to the rise of China. The Southeast Asians seek to live with, and take advantage of, the inevitability of a rising China—that scenario is nothing new to them. However, for Japan, there is the fear that a rising China is displacing it from its leading position in East Asia. The Southeast Asians do not have such pretensions.

The cordial state of relations between Japan and Southeast Asia today would have been unthinkable half a century ago when war memories were still raw. In contrast, war memories, transmitted from one generation to another, persist in China and South Korea while historical amnesia is prevalent in Japan today. Indeed, it appears that Japan's postwar reconciliation with China and South Korea will continue to be elusive in the 21st century.

Notes

The author would like to express thanks for the useful critique by an anonymous referee.

1. Another interesting textbook that adopts a liberal perspective, written by Teodoro A. Agoncillo, highlights the Hukbalahap movement led by Marxists and Socialists, which fought against peasant exploitation and the Japanese occupation (Agoncillo 1990). For a vivid account of the Japanese atrocities during the destruction of Manila in 1945, see Zulueta and Nebres 2006, 203-204.
2. On the discovery of mass graves as a catalyst to a civilian war memorial in Singapore, see Lim 2005.
3. On the different perspectives of the occupation among the ethnic groups in Malaya,

see Lim and Wong 2000. For an account of the Japanese military's divide and rule policy, which culminated in ethnic clashes between the Chinese and Malays, see Cheah 2002.

4. Tanino Sakutaro, interview by the author, November 28, 2006.

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