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War memory and nation-building in South East Asia

Kevin Blackburn

Abstract: This article analyses why some countries in South East Asia have set aside a national day to remember the Japanese Occupation in the cause of nation-building and why other countries have tended to choose not to remember the Japanese Occupation because for them it does not further nation-building. Singapore, the Philippines and Burma have all remembered their experience of struggle and sacrifice during the Second World War to further national unity. However, most South East Asian countries have chosen at a national level not to commemorate this undoubtedly major watershed in the region's history.

Keywords: war; memory; nation-building; commemoration

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Publicly remembering and commemorating the Japanese Occupation during the Second World War in South East Asian countries tends broadly to follow two patterns. Some South East Asian countries have historically developed over the decades since the end of the Second World War a national day for commemorating shared wartime experiences of national suffering and resistance as part of the process of nation-building. These nation-states have sought to foster a collective memory of a shared past and shared sacrifices in war to assist their efforts in encouraging a greater sense of nationhood. Yet in other South East Asian countries equally affected by the Japanese Occupation, and equally engaged in nation-building, there is a national amnesia about remembering the wartime past.

According to Nicholas Tarling, creating national days to remember

collective sacrifices, such as those in times of war, is part of how states engage in nation-building in South East Asia. Other similar aspects of nation-building by states in the region, he observes, have included creating flags, anthems, symbols, rituals, histories and museums.¹ Wang Gungwu writes that ‘nation-building is an immediate and pressing task in South East Asia’, and it started the day after the independence celebrations were over when ‘nationalist slogans that promised a great new beginning had to be translated into policies and actions that not only confirmed the power of the state but also launched the project to make nationals of every citizen’.² In the Philippines, as late as 1980, Jose Diokno, one of the most well respected Philippine politicians in the post-independence era, could still lament that the Philippines were ‘a state but not yet a nation’.³ In Singapore, too, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong (1990–2004) even in 1999 told parliament, when speaking on a report into fostering stronger emotional connections among the different races of Singapore into the twenty-first century, ‘It must be implemented and strengthen the process of nation-building. For Singapore is not yet a nation. It is only a state, a sovereign entity.’⁴ Newly independent states in South East Asia, notes Tarling, have had to turn their peoples into nations through nation-building that encourages a sense of collective memory, shared history and common culture.⁵ It is thus not unusual to see national days that have their origins in the Second World War being used by South East Asian states for these purposes to build a sense of nationhood.

Despite the watershed the Japanese Occupation represented in their histories, some South East Asian countries simply do not mark or commemorate it at a national level. Among historians of South East Asia, it is widely recognized that the period was a catalyst for nationalism and demands for independence as well as a time of suffering and hardship for many.⁶ However, only a few countries of the region publicly

¹ Nicholas Tarling (2005), *Nationalism in South East Asia: If the People Are With Us*, Routledge, London, p 166.

² Wang Gungwu, ed (2005), *Nation-Building: Five Southeast Asian Histories*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, p 13.

³ Cited in Greg Bankoff and Kathleen Weekley (2002), *Post-Colonial National Identity in the Philippines: Celebrating the Centennial of Independence*, Ashgate, Aldershot, p 10.

⁴ Goh Chok Tong (1999), *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, 5 May, Vol 70, column 1475.

⁵ Tarling, *supra* note 1, at p 11.

⁶ Anthony Reid (2005), ‘Remembering and forgetting war and revolution’, in Mary S. Zurbuchen, ed, *Beginning to Remember: The Past in The Indonesian Present*, Singapore University Press, Singapore, p 171.

remember or commemorate the events of the Japanese Occupation in their nation-building efforts of using history to support nationalist goals.

It is worthwhile examining why different South East Asian countries fall into either the group that has a national day for remembering its nation's wartime experiences, or the other group that forgets, at least at a national level. This would entail making comparisons of the consequences that commemorating the events of the Japanese Occupation have for nation-building. Perhaps not remembering the Japanese Occupation is viewed by some countries in the region as furthering nation-building rather than remembering a time of wartime divisiveness or a period of history that may overshadow other events deemed more important for national history? The first step is to outline how war memory has been used in countries that nationally commemorate the experience of the Japanese Occupation, that is, in Singapore, the Philippines and Burma. The second step entails examining how nation-building in other South East Asian countries has meant not commemorating the Japanese Occupation at a national level.

Singapore

In South East Asian history, the crucial date that marks the Japanese Occupation and the beginning of the end of empire in the region is that of the fall of Singapore. In Singapore, 15 February 1942, marking the date of the surrender of Singapore, has since 1998 been designated Total Defence Day. While not a national holiday, the day is marked in all Singapore schools as a time to remember national suffering during the Japanese Occupation through drawing lessons from historical storytelling and re-enactments. In some schools, young cadet soldiers with a theatrical bent are hired to act as Japanese soldiers to take schoolchildren prisoner, then shout at them and order the pupils around. At one secondary school in 1999, this was so realistic that some children had to be taken to hospital and others were traumatized.⁷ At other schools, students go hungry or are served minute amounts of the basic foods available during the Japanese Occupation, such as tapioca, to remind them of the hardships of their great-grandparents.⁸

The lessons found in Singapore's history and social studies textbooks teach schoolchildren that the Japanese Occupation demonstrates that

⁷ *Straits Times* (Singapore), 2 March 1999.

⁸ *Straits Times* (Singapore), 15 February 2003.

they must prepare themselves to defend the country against any future invasion, which could bring about similar suffering. This is because modern Singapore is a country in which all males, on reaching the age of 18, must commence over two years of National Service, and then continue with regular military training. To deter any potential future enemy, Singapore claims that it can bring 300,000 well trained men under arms in 24 hours. The social studies textbook for secondary schools used since 1994 explicitly makes a connection between the failure of the British in defending the people of Singapore from the Japanese in 1942 and the need for National Service and military training in contemporary Singapore. The textbook says that, ‘from the British defeat we learn’ that ‘a country must always be well-prepared for any attacks from enemies’ and that ‘it must not depend on others to protect its people’. The textbook goes on to draw the lesson from life during the Japanese Occupation as being that ‘the people must be trained to defend their own country’. Thus, ‘in 1967, the government started National Service’ in order ‘to enable all young men to be trained to defend Singapore in case of war’.⁹ Clearly, commemorating the Japanese Occupation is used to ready the schoolchildren to make their commitment to the defence of the nation.

On the morning of 15 February in Singapore at the four 64.7 metre tall pillars of the Civilian War Memorial built in 1967 in the heart of Singapore’s civic district, representatives of Singapore’s different ethnic communities – Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians – as well as hundreds of schoolchildren, veterans, representatives of the armed forces, plus a cabinet minister representing the Singapore government, gather for a wreath-laying ceremony. Each pillar of the Civilian War Memorial symbolizes one of the four main ethnic groups; and these pillars merge into the base of the monument representing the overall nation.¹⁰ In recent years, the ceremony has been started by the ‘All Clear’ siren that would be used if Singapore were to be attacked. It is closed by prayers said by leaders of Singapore’s Inter-Religious Council representing the Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh and Zoroastrian faiths, one minute of silence and the playing of the last

⁹ Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore (1994), *Social Studies: Secondary 1*, Longman, Singapore, p 97. See also Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore (1994), *History of Modern Singapore: Secondary 1*, Longman, Singapore, p 153; and Curriculum Planning and Development Division, Ministry of Education (1999), *Understanding Our Past: Singapore From Colony to Nation*, Federal Publications, Singapore, p 103.

¹⁰ *Straits Times* (Singapore), 16 February 1967.

post. This ceremony has taken place every 15 February since 1967, when the unveiling of the monument by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew replaced February ceremonies by the Chinese community at massacre sites of dead civilians.¹¹ Lee's speech at the 1967 dedication ceremony of the Civilian War Memorial addressed the idea of remembering common suffering to further nation-building:

'This piece of concrete commemorates an experience which in spite of its horrors, served as a catalyst in building a nation out of the young and unestablished community of diverse immigrants. We suffered together. It told us that we share a common destiny. And it is through sharing such common experiences that the feeling of living and being one community is established.'¹²

The historian Diana Wong has observed that in contemporary Singapore, commemoration of the Japanese Occupation has reinforced what she sees as the Singapore government's 'survivalist' message: that for Singapore to survive as a small country with large and not necessarily friendly neighbours, its citizens must unite across its ethnic divisions to be vigilant, self-reliant and make sacrifices for the defence of their nation.¹³ Indeed, on Total Defence Day, Singapore schoolchildren are told to remember the atrocities of the Second World War in order to understand more fully the Ministry of Education's National Education message of survival of the nation in terms of defence: 'We must ourselves defend Singapore'. The Singapore government explained when announcing the establishment of Total Defence Day that, 'the day in 1942 when Singapore fell to the Japanese' would 'serve as a reminder that everyone has a part to play in the country's defence'.¹⁴

¹¹ Kevin Blackburn (2000), 'The collective memory of the *Sook Ching* massacre and the creation of the Civilian War Memorial of Singapore', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol 73, No 2, pp 71–90.

¹² Prime Minister's Speech at the Unveiling Ceremony of Memorial to Civilian Victims of Japanese Occupation on 15 February 1967, in Republic of Singapore Prime Minister's Speeches, Press Conferences, Interviews, Statements, etc (National University of Singapore).

¹³ Diana Wong (2000), 'Memory suppression and memory production: the Japanese Occupation of Singapore', in T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama, eds, *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, pp 232–233.

¹⁴ *Straits Times* (Singapore), 18 May 1997.

The Philippines

Memory of the Japanese Occupation manifests itself in many facets of the popular culture of the Philippines.¹⁵ This strong public memory of the Second World War is enshrined in the commemoration of 9 April as the national holiday known as the Day of Valour, or in Tagalog, *Araw ng Kagitingan*, marking the fall of Bataan in 1942. On this day, Filipino and American troops on the Bataan Peninsula surrendered to the Japanese, and then began the Bataan Death March of 62,100 Filipinos along with 9,921 Americans, of whom 5,000 to 10,000 Filipinos and 650 Americans died.¹⁶ Many of these Filipinos later joined the anti-Japanese resistance after they were released. On 9 April every year, the President of the Philippines, or if he or she cannot attend, the Defence Secretary or Vice-President, leads a national ceremony remembering the suffering and sacrifices of the war veterans and the Philippine people under the Japanese Occupation. They lay a wreath at the *Dambana ng Kagitingan*, or Shrine of Valour colonnade complex, at the bottom of Mount Samat, Bataan. This building is overlooked by a huge 92 metre white concrete cross on top of the 553 metre mountain. The *Dambana ng Kagitingan* cross is so large that it has a lift inside, which visitors can take to a viewing platform at the arms of the cross. The commanders of the Philippines armed forces attend, as do the Japanese and American ambassadors. The President inspects the guard of honour from the Philippines military, then addresses a crowd of thousands, many of whom are Filipino Second World War veterans.

Addressing veterans at the 2006 ceremony, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (2001 to present) explained the significance of the Day of Valour to nation-building, 'As we commemorate the death march, we celebrate the valour of Filipinos to face adversities in the name of freedom and show our resilience in the face of difficulties that come our way'. Arroyo added, 'We have won many victories in our struggles, because we help one another and because we know how to sacrifice. The struggle is still long and heavy but we are determined to win...'¹⁷ On 9 April, the sacrifices of the past have been remembered by the

¹⁵ Ricardo T. Jose (2001), 'War, violence, history and memory: the Philippine experience of the Second World War', *Asian Journal of Social Science*, Vol 29, No 3, pp 457–471.

¹⁶ Stanley L. Falk (1962), *Bataan: The March of Death*, W.W. Norton, New York, pp 196–198.

¹⁷ *Manila Bulletin*, 10 April 2006. See the online version at <http://www.mb.com.ph>; and see the recent speeches of the President of the Philippines at <http://www.ops.gov.ph>.

presidents of the Philippines from Manuel Roxas (1946–48) to Arroyo so that they can call upon the Philippine nation to make future sacrifices in the cause of nation-building. In 2006, Arroyo urged that this same sense of ‘citizens’ sense of self-sacrifice’ was needed in the current era of economic and fiscal reform. At various ceremonies across the nation, Filipino schoolchildren re-enact wartime suffering in plays and cultural presentations, while adults and veterans walk the path of the 104 kilometre Bataan Death March from Mariveles, Bataan, to San Fernando.

The Day of Valour had its origins in Bataan Day soon after the war. In the 1940s and early 1950s, Filipino veterans and American forces stationed in the Philippines gathered to mark 9 April as Bataan Day and also 6 May as Corrigedor Day, when the Japanese finally overran American and Filipino troops remaining on Corrigedor Island off the Bataan Peninsula.¹⁸ On 1 December 1945, to help keep alive the memory of American and Filipino resistance to the Japanese during the war, the area on the Bataan Peninsula in which the *Dambana ng Kagitingan* is now located was proclaimed a national park by pre-independence President Sergio Osmena (1944–46).¹⁹ At early Bataan Day ceremonies, the country’s first three presidents after independence, Manuel Roxas (1946–48), Elpidio Quirino (1948–53) and Ramon Magsaysay (1953–57), would affirm that the USA, because of a ‘brotherhood in arms’ formed at the fall of Bataan, would assist the Philippines in reconstructing the country from the ruins of the Japanese Occupation and help build the nation against disunity and insurgencies such as the Huk Rebellion. When commemorating Bataan Day in 1947, Roxas, surveying the problems of nation-building in the Philippines, proudly proclaimed that the Americans were the Filipinos’ ‘truest friends’ and that the American forces and Filipino forces were ‘brothers in arms’ who ‘have fought shoulder to shoulder...in the same ranks, in the same uniforms, under the same command’.²⁰ In the early post-war period, there was a strong belief that the USA and the Philippines were united at Bataan fighting for democracy. ‘The flower of our race were [*sic*] sacrificed on the sanguinary battlefields of Bataan for the cause of democracy’, Congressman Amado M. Yuzon recalled in the Philippines Congress when evaluating what Bataan meant in early 1949.²¹ The early commemorations of Bataan

¹⁸ *Manila Times*, 8 and 10 April 1947.

¹⁹ *Daily Mirror* (Manila), 8 April 1972.

²⁰ *Manila Times*, 8 April 1947.

²¹ Amado M. Yuzon (1949), *The Republic of The Philippines Congressional Record: The House of Representatives*, 1 February, p 103.

Day confirm Theodore Friend's work on the impact of the war on the relationship between the Philippines and the USA. He argued that Japanese Occupation led to a post-war relationship in which there was little sign that the Philippines was seeking to assert its sovereignty. Instead the experience tied the Philippines more closely to the USA so that it willingly acquiesced to dependence upon American military power and economic dominance.²²

What was forgotten in the early post-war remembering of Bataan Day was the collaboration between the Japanese and members of the Philippine elite. Friend in his research sees this as a mutual forgetting by both the Americans and the Filipinos. He points to General Douglas MacArthur's support for Roxas as an early post-war president of the Philippines, despite knowing that although Roxas was a member of the resistance, he also collaborated with the Japanese.²³ Very few Filipinos who were put on trial for collaboration were actually convicted before President Roxas declared a general amnesty in January 1948.²⁴ This joint American and Philippine mutual forgetting of collaboration is illustrated in President Magsaysay, a staunch wartime anti-Japanese fighter, sending Philippine Senator Jose P. Laurel, the wartime puppet president of the Japanese, to lead a mission to the USA to negotiate an economic agreement in 1955.

At the tenth anniversary of the fall of Bataan in 1952, there were joint national commemorations in the Philippines and in the USA, where Congress declared that 9 April should be marked nationwide as Bataan Day.²⁵ In Manila, Magsaysay, then Defence Secretary, gave the Bataan Day address on behalf of the President of the Philippines. He stressed that the sacrifices of Bataan had been made by American and Filipino soldiers for the 'ideals of democracy', which were still 'under attack in our land' in the form that 'calls itself communism', of which 'our own Huks are examples'.²⁶ Interestingly, he also told the rich landlords to practise the spirit of self-sacrifice shown at Bataan rather than the greed and exploitation that he saw as the root cause of the Huk peasant rebellion. This illustrates Tony Stockwell's point that in South East Asia,

²² Theodore Friend (1988), *The Blue-Eyed Enemy: Japan Against the West in Java and Luzon, 1942-1945*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, p 247.

²³ Friend, *supra* note 22, at p 244.

²⁴ David Joel Steinberg (1967), *Philippine Collaboration in World War II*, Solidaridad Publishing House, Manila, pp 160-163.

²⁵ *Daily Mirror* (Manila), 8 April 1952; and Gil J. Puyat and Macario Peralta Jr (1952), *The Republic of the Philippines Congressional Record: Senate*, 3 April, pp 744-745.

²⁶ *Manila Times*, 10 April 1952.

'nation-building acquired added importance with the advent of the Cold War' as 'nation-states were erected as bunds against the surge of communism' and appeals to nationalism were used to check the expansion of international communism.²⁷ In 1954, Magsaysay, as President of the Philippines, made 9 April a national holiday so that the whole nation could mark the day.²⁸ A tradition was established in the early 1950s, whereby the President would declare Bataan Day a public holiday, until finally the Philippine Congress passed a resolution in 1960 making Bataan Day one of the official holidays.²⁹

Magsaysay's successor President Carlos Garcia (1957–61), like Magsaysay himself, a war veteran and fighter in the anti-Japanese resistance, also gave speeches at Mount Samat that placed Bataan Day in the context of the Cold War. However, with the defeat of the Huk Rebellion, the call for self-sacrifice shifted from defending the nation to nation-building in other ways. In 1958, Garcia urged that newly erected memorials to 'the Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor' must 'continue to fire the spirit of nationalism and strengthen unity among our people' and 'continue to prove to us that in nation-building, as in war, sectional and partisan bickerings and breast-beatings have no place. Above all, they must continue to inspire in us the highest order of national discipline and unqualified patriotism.' Garcia added, 'I must deeply emphasize this last consideration because I believe that if there was any time in our post-war history when the need for the highest order of national dedication and selflessness on our part is greatest, it is at this stage of our national life.' He was invoking the spirit of Bataan for exercising restraint in fixing the economy: 'The disturbed state of our economy needs the institution of remedial measures which would entail some degree of sacrifice on part of the people'.³⁰ Even Senator Estanislao Fernandez of the opposition Liberal Party, while disagreeing with Garcia and his Nacionalista Party on many elements of policy, could concur on the eve of Bataan Day in 1961 that the Filipino soldiers of Bataan 'have not sacrificed themselves in vain, as far as the task of nation building is concerned', as he gave examples of the reconstruction of the country after the war and its economic development.³¹

²⁷ Tony Stockwell (2005), 'Forging Malaysia and Singapore: colonialism, decolonization and nation-building', in Wang Gungwu, *supra* note 2, at p 196.

²⁸ *Manila Times*, 10 April 1953 and 9 April 1954.

²⁹ *The Republic of the Philippines Congressional Record: Senate*, 10 March 1960, pp 774–776, and 8 April 1960, pp 1217–1236.

³⁰ *Manila Times*, 10 April 1958.

³¹ *The Republic of the Philippines Congressional Record: Senate*, 7 April 1961, p 806.

It became common to call upon the spirit of Bataan Day to rally the nation around economic policies that would entail individual sacrifice so that the nation as a whole could advance economically. At the 20th anniversary in 1962, President Diosdado Macapagal (1961–65) gave voice to his hope that the ‘spirit that spurred Filipino soldiers to risk their lives’ at the fall of Bataan would inspire the Filipino people in the ‘great task of nation-building’ so that the administration could pursue ‘the quest for a better life for each and every Filipino citizen’.³² Macapagal was the president who pushed through the Agricultural Land Reform Code that transformed many peasants from being tenants to landowners, although the reform displeased many landlords.

The malleability of what the memory of the Bataan and the Japanese Occupation could be used for reached absurd heights under President Ferdinand Marcos (1965–86). His political career had been assisted by him fabricating his war record so that he appeared the most decorated Filipino war veteran.³³ He used Bataan Day to parade his 27 (mainly fake) war medals. Early in his administration, newspaper columnists, when there was still freedom of the press, would complain about how Marcos’s cronies used the occasion for his self-glorification.³⁴ One Marcos crony, Pete S. De Jesus, wrote for Bataan Day 1973 in the pro-Marcos *Bulletin Today*, ‘Today, the Filipino Dream is close to reality...through the foresight and determination of Bataan’s most authentic and famous hero, President Marcos’.³⁵

It was during the Marcos administration that the massive *Dambana ng Kagitingan* complex was constructed in 1967 and officially unveiled by him on 9 April 1969.³⁶ In his administration, the defenders of Bataan and Corregidor, Marcos being the most prominent among them, were commemorated as being part of a long line of nationalist heroes going back to Lapu Lapu, who is revered for defeating and killing the explorer Ferdinand Magellan in the Battle of Mactan when his Spanish fleet landed on Philippine soil on 27 April 1521.³⁷ The

³² *Manila Times*, 9 April 1962.

³³ Sterling Seagrave (1988), *The Marcos Dynasty*, Ballantine, New York, pp 72–91; James Hamilton-Paterson (1998), *America’s Boy: A Century of Colonialism in the Philippines*, Henry Holt, New York, pp 86–93. See also the article ‘The most decorated Filipino soldier Marcos: a living legend’, in the *Sunday Times Magazine* of the *Manila Times*, 9 April 1967, pp 62–63.

³⁴ *Manila Times*, 11 April 1967.

³⁵ *Bulletin Today* (Manila), 8 April 1973.

³⁶ *Daily Mirror* (Manila), 8 April 1972; and *Manila Times*, 10 April 1972.

³⁷ See Angel C. Anden (1948), ‘Victor at Mactan’, in the *Sunday Times Magazine*, in the *Manila Times*, 2 May, pp 9–11. See also, Jose Amiel Angeles (2007), ‘The battle

Daily Mirror of Manila nationalistically trumpeted on the eve of Bataan Day 1972 that 'Mactan and Bataan are the touchstones, the inspiring lessons of the Filipino's indomitable will and heroic character' in 'the story of their struggle for freedom: from Mactan to Bataan'. While Lapu Lapu 'dealt the first blow against the aggressor,' the *Daily Mirror* wrote, 'Bataan had many Lapu-Lapus and a host of anonymous heroes'.³⁸

On 2 April 1980, Marcos replaced Bataan Day with what he called *Araw ng Kagitingan*, or the Day of Valour. He changed the date for remembering the war to 6 May, explaining that there would be just one day for remembering the valour of the war heroes instead of having separate commemorative days for Bataan and Corregidor, and that of Besang Pass (14 June). At Besang Pass, he and other Philippine anti-Japanese guerrillas are supposed to have prevented 70,000 Japanese troops from reinforcing General Tomoyuki Yamashita in 1945.³⁹ The change proved unpopular with veterans, who disliked the change of the traditional date.⁴⁰ After the fall of Marcos in February 1986, the now free *Manila Times* also rued 'incorporating the three events into *Araw ng Kagitingan*, with Marcos, of course as the self-styled hero of both Bataan and Besang Pass. It was the day of the year when Marcos paraded his fake medals. There is no reason why the country should perpetuate such a celebration.' The editor described changing the date back to 9 April as 'Erasing signs of a dictator'.⁴¹ On 30 June 1987, President Corazon Aquino (1986–92) re-designated *Araw ng Kagitingan* as 9 April.⁴²

Araw ng Kagitingan survived Marcos's corruption of it. Commemoration of Filipino experiences during the Japanese Occupation was adapted to assimilate imagery of the mass protests and demonstrations known as 'people power' that had led to Marcos's fall. Speaking at the first post-Marcos *Araw ng Kagitingan* at Mount Samat in 1986, Vice-President Salvador Laurel declared that in commemorating Bataan, 'we commemorate the birth of a national commitment to peace that comprises the coercive force behind people power'.⁴³ In the following years

of Mactan and the indigenous discourse on war', *Philippine Studies*, Vol 55, No 1, pp 3–52.

³⁸ *Daily Mirror* (Manila), 8 April 1972.

³⁹ *Bulletin Today* (Manila), 3 and 4 April and 6 and 7 May 1980; and *Manila Times*, 9 April 1988.

⁴⁰ *Manila Times*, 10 April 1987 and 9 April 1989.

⁴¹ *Manila Times*, 9 April 1986.

⁴² *Manila Times*, 9 April 1988.

⁴³ *Manila Times*, 7 May 1986.

of coup attempts against Aquino, *Araw ng Kagitingan* was used to invoke the wartime experiences to preserve liberty. Referring to five military coup attempts from 1986 to 1988, the editor of the *Manila Chronicle* on the newspaper's front page warned, 'unlike 46 years ago when Filipinos died fighting the Japanese Imperial Army to preserve the sanctity of land and people, the aggressors of today are of our own skin and blood'.⁴⁴ Aquino herself reiterated this on *Araw ng Kagitingan* in 1990 when she said, 'Those who love liberty should cherish it and should be willing to fight for it when necessary'.⁴⁵

Araw ng Kagitingan grew more significant as a nation-building event in the Philippine calendar in the wake of the nationalistic revival in the Philippines brought about by Filipinos feeling a greater sense of pride at having got rid of the Marcos dictatorship and restored democracy themselves. Heightened interest in *Araw ng Kagitingan* was marked by occasions such as the initiating of the annual Death March Friendship Run in cooperation with the Veterans Federation of the Philippines in 1989.⁴⁶ In 1993, President Fidel Ramos, through Executive Order No 75, created the National Heroes Committee 'to study and recommend the proclamation of national heroes'. This committee listed figures from Lapu Lapu all the way to Benigno Aquino in a national pantheon of heroes who fought for the Philippines and its freedom. Included among them were ordinary people, such as the 'defenders of Bataan and Corregidor, ordinary Filipinos who fought the Japanese invaders to the last, and whose extraordinary bravery we commemorate today as *Araw ng Kagitingan*', wrote the *Manila Times*.⁴⁷

Ramos's successors have continued to link the defenders of Bataan and Corregidor with defending democratic ideals in nation-building. President Joseph Estrada (1999–2001) on *Araw ng Kagitingan* in 2001 declared at Mount Samat, 'The martyrdom of those who fell in the night and the amazing endurance of those who survived are worth being told and re-told to remind us that we must carry on their fight for freedom and democracy'.⁴⁸

In the Philippines, thus, we see that the national day for commemoration of the Japanese Occupation has for over 60 years been used to

⁴⁴ *Manila Chronicle*, 9 April 1988.

⁴⁵ *Manila Times*, 10 April 1990.

⁴⁶ *Manila Times*, 9 April 1989.

⁴⁷ Earl Pareno (1995), 'Heroes: April 9 Ng Kagitingan', in *Sunday Times Magazine*, *Manila Times*, 9 April, pp 5–7.

⁴⁸ See the recent speeches of the President of the Philippines at <http://www.ops.gov.ph>.

extol democratic ideals in its role as an agent for nation-building – with the exception of the Marcos dictatorship. Then, it was used for what Tarling has called regime-building, in conjunction with nation-building.⁴⁹ For a South East Asian contrast in how commemoration of the war has been used for nation-building, Burma provides an interesting foil to the Philippines. In Burma, commemoration of wartime resistance against the Japanese has also been used for nation-building. However, such commemoration has clearly not been for the pursuit of democratic ideals, as in the Philippines, but for strengthening the military and its regime.

Burma

In Burma, 27 March is the national holiday known as Armed Forces Day, marking the day in 1945 on which the Burma National Army under Aung San began armed resistance against the Japanese forces occupying the country. On 27 March at Naypyidaw, Burma's new capital city, the parade of soldiers is meant to remind the ethnically diverse people of the nation of what the military sees as its great achievements. These are: the role the military played in resisting the Japanese, in what is described as an anti-fascist struggle, gaining independence from the British, and keeping the country together in almost continuous struggle against separatist movements since the end of the Second World War. Robert H. Taylor argues, 'The date 27 March, now Army Day, is perceived as the symbolic beginning of modern Myanmar when the army seized its destiny to forge an independent state despite the odds and despite the enemies which surrounded it. The Myanmar national story has become conflated with the story of its army.'⁵⁰

On 27 March, the military assembles in the large open public square at Naypyidaw below three giant statues of Burma's most powerful warrior kings. These are Anawrahta (reigned 1044–77, and who was the first king to unite Burma politically), Bayinnaung (reigned 1551–81, a warrior king who restored Burma's political boundaries and conquered the Shan states while extending Burma's northern borders with China) and Alaungpaya (reigned 1752–60, another warrior king who subjugated the Mons). The tall sculptures of the ancient kings of

⁴⁹ Tarling, *supra* note 1, at p 221.

⁵⁰ Robert H. Taylor (2007), 'The legacies of World War II for Myanmar', in David Koh Wee Hock, ed, *Legacies of World War II in South and East Asia*, Institute of South-east Asian Studies, Singapore, pp 70–71.

Burma represent the military regime's desire to see themselves as an extension of Burmese forces that brought the glories of past military victories, which now evoke Burmese nationalism and pride. Speaking at Armed Forces Day in 2006, Senior General Than Shwe, Commander in Chief of the Defence Forces, urged, 'Our *Tatmadaw* [military] should be the worthy heir to the traditions of the capable *Tatmadaws* established by noble kings, Anawrahta, Bayinnaung, and Alaungpaya'.⁵¹

This conflation of nationalism and the military on Armed Forces Day has a history going back decades. The names of these three great Burmese kings portrayed in sculpture at Naypyidaw, as well as others from Burmese history, are the very names of the key columns of the armed forces that converge on the square from different points. Another column for Armed Forces Day is named after Hsinphyushin (reigned 1763–76) who, just as Bayinnaung had done in the sixteenth century, sacked the Thai capital of Ayudhaya. There is also a column named after Kyanzittha (reigned 1084–1113), who consolidated the territorial gains of his father Anawrahta's unification of Burma and entered into partnership with the Mons.⁵² For decades, the military forces have paraded in columns named after their ancient conquering kings every 27 March.⁵³

Before the capital was moved from Rangoon (Yangon) in 2006, the main ceremony was held at Resistance Park, and the columns would converge on it from all parts of the city. Resistance Park was the location from where Aung San, as commander, rallied the Burma National Army on 17 March 1945 to attack the Japanese Imperial Army at various locations on 27 March 1945. As the troops left, they were showered by well-wishers with sprigs of eugenia leaves, signifying victory. This has been re-enacted every Armed Forces Day. 27 March was more commonly known as Resistance Day before General U Ne Win and the military took over Burma in 1962. It was Ne Win, as Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Forces, who in 1955 at the 27 March military parade first spoke of Resistance Day actually being Armed Forces Day. Donald Seekins suggests that after the military took over in 1962, it consciously sought to change the name from Resistance Day to Armed Forces Day to impress upon the people of Burma the nation-building

⁵¹ *New Light of Myanmar*, 28 March 2006. See the online edition, <http://mission.itu.ch/MISSIONS/Myanmar/NewsArchives/newsindex.htm>.

⁵² *New Light of Myanmar*, 28 March 2007.

⁵³ *Working People's Daily*, 29 March 1983 and 29 March 1988; and see *Working People's Daily*, 29 March 1975.

role of the army.⁵⁴ The propaganda of the military has tended to indicate that the name change was made by Ne Win in 1955, expressing it as ‘when the need arose for the *Tatmadaw* to choose a day to be designated as the “Armed Forces Day”, it chose the Anti-Fascist Resistance Day’.⁵⁵

In 1954, according to the military junta of Burma’s propaganda sheets, the armed forces under Ne Win staked their claim for ownership of 27 March when they had staged their first elaborate military parade ceremony for the commemoration of the day.⁵⁶ This was a spectacular ceremony exactly re-enacting Aung San’s rally of the Burma National Army at Resistance Park on 17 March 1945. Aung San’s eight columns of soldiers that marched out of the park were shown as eight rays of light moving across a giant illuminated map of Burma, indicating where they were going to take up their positions against the Japanese.⁵⁷

In the 1950s, the military under Ne Win increasingly sought to appropriate 27 March as Armed Forces Day: a process not completed until they had full power in the 1960s. Previously, Resistance Day commemorations had not emphasized the armed forces, but the political party that started the resistance to the Japanese – the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL). The leader of the AFPFL, Prime Minister U Nu, or a senior member of the government, would usually give the key Resistance Day address and start by emphasizing the role of the party. In 1951, he told the national mass rally on 27 March:

‘As you all are aware, the AFPFL was formed with the primary purpose of acting as the vanguard of the people against the Japanese imperialists. Indeed that resistance against the Japanese under the leadership of AFPFL had been successful. When the resistance against the Japanese was over the onus of offering resistance again fell on AFPFL which successfully discharged its duty. As a result of that success, AFPFL was able to regain independence – which had been

⁵⁴ Donald M. Seekins (2007), *Burma and Japan Since 1940: From ‘Co-Prosperity’ to ‘Quiet Dialogue’*, Nias Press, Copenhagen, p 36.

⁵⁵ Myo Htut (1989), ‘A day of great significance’, *Working People’s Daily*, 26 March, p 11; and see Pe Pin Min Gaung (1989), ‘The ninth anniversary of the Resistance Day observed’, *Working People’s Daily*, 27 March, p 7.

⁵⁶ Pe Pin Min Gaung, *supra* note 55.

⁵⁷ *Nation*, 28 March 1954; *New Times of Burma*, 30 March 1954; Pe Pin Min Gaung, *supra* note 55.

lost for over hundred years – and hand it over to all the indigenous peoples of the Union.’⁵⁸

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the military’s commemoration of what it designated Armed Forces Day began to rival in prominence the annual Resistance Day address made by the AFPFL government.⁵⁹ Burmese society became increasingly militarized as the army gained in influence because of its successes against the insurgencies of several ethnic groups. The AFPFL government declined in esteem because of political instability. On 27 March 1962, just weeks after Ne Win and the military had seized power on 2 March 1962, the address for Resistance Day was given by Brigadier Sein Win. He gave a different version of 27 March 1945 and independence, with the military as the vanguard, not the AFPFL. Win declared, ‘Just as the patriotic Burmese forces of 17 years ago succeeded in winning Independence by staging the first phase of the revolution with the active co-operation of the people, so also the Army of today needed the wholehearted co-operation of the people if it was to succeed in carrying out the second phase of the revolution’.⁶⁰

The message of the military as the vanguard instead of the AFPFL in the fight against the Japanese, British colonialism and disunity was thereafter proclaimed by representatives of the military junta in control of Burma. Ne Win’s version of the past with the military at the centre of historical events was repeated on Armed Forces Day throughout the 1970s and 80s. *Thura* [the brave] Kyaw Htin, Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Forces, told the nation on Armed Forces Day 1984:

‘Throughout our *Tatmadaw*’s history, the *Tatmadawmen* as true patriotic *Pyithu Tatmadaw* [people’s military] members resisted against colonialism and fascism and valiantly went into battle with perseverance for the nation’s independence. After gaining independence also, our *Tatmadaw* stood in the fore of the people in combating and overcoming all forces of danger to the State for the purposes of safeguarding the Union from disintegrating and for perpetuating our national independence and sovereignty.’⁶¹

⁵⁸ *New Times of Burma*, 28 March 1951. See also ‘Attendance of Thakin Nu at a commemorative service for those killed in the liberation of Burma 1950’, FO 371/83221, The National Archives, London.

⁵⁹ See *New Times of Burma*, 29 March 1959 and 29 March 1960.

⁶⁰ *Nation*, 28 March 1962.

⁶¹ *Working People’s Daily*, 28 March 1984.

Since the 1950s, there has been an annual Armed Forces Exhibition telling this same story of the military as the builder and protector of the nation from ancient times to the colonial period, into the Japanese Occupation, through the struggle for independence and the fight against the insurgents. The annual exhibition's importance was often highlighted by Ne Win's (or another high-ranking military officer's) visits to its opening. These visits would invariably be reported on the front page of the controlled press.⁶²

In the crushing of the pro-democracy movement after 1988, the military used their version of the past with the armed forces as the key historical movement in Burmese history to legitimize their actions. On Armed Forces Day 1989, General Saw Maung, the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Forces, linked the actions of the military in crushing democracy to being in accord with preserving Burma's unity stretching back to ancient times: 'Our motherland which Anawrahta, Kyanzittha, Bayinnaung, Alaungpaya, and Hsinphyushin, and Bogyoke Aung San had built up, nurtured, and consolidated through the ages, cannot be allowed to be in disorder and to disintegrate during our time'.⁶³

On the landmark fiftieth anniversary of Armed Forces Day in 1995, the message from General Than Shwe, the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Forces, focused on the Japanese Occupation, but once again played up the role of the military in nation-building: 'From the time it launched the Anti-fascist Resistance the *Tatmadaw* attained the status of a national army that represents the nation and all the national people'. His speech exemplified how the military had appropriated Resistance Day to show that it had created the modern nation: 'On 27 March 1945, our *Tatmadaw* made its own decision and legitimately declared war and launched the Resistance. Therefore, this day was designated Armed Forces Day because it was the day attributes of a national army were attained and the Anti-fascist Resistance was launched.'⁶⁴

General Shwe in his Armed Forces Day addresses has continued to stress the legitimacy of the military's power as lying in its revolt against the Japanese when the army commenced its self-proclaimed role of being at the vanguard of the modern Burmese nationalist movement. He regularly outlined the history of the *Tatmadaw* under the Japanese, and how the Japanese were initially supportive of an independent army set up by the nationalist movement in Burma, but later switched to

⁶² *Working People's Daily*, 28 March 1985.

⁶³ *Working People's Daily*, 28 March 1985.

⁶⁴ *New Light of Myanmar*, 28 March 1995.

wanting to reduce it in size and change its name.⁶⁵ He would end by saying ‘that our *Tatmadaw* was able to transform itself from an organization under the influence of others [the Japanese] into the National *Tatmadaw*’.⁶⁶

Thus, in Burma, the military junta uses – for both regime-building and nation-building – the conception of the armed forces being a people’s nationalist liberation movement formed during the Japanese Occupation to free Burma from the Japanese and the British. In the ruling junta’s version of the wartime past, the military’s role is that of a nationalist vanguard, always at the centre of Burma’s modern history. The regime effectively commemorates the events surrounding 27 March 1945 to uphold its perception of the military as both the creator and protector of the modern Burmese nation. Burma’s use of 27 March 1945 is similar to Singapore’s use of 15 February 1942 in terms of war memory being used to bolster the importance of defence and military preparedness in their different societies. This contrasts starkly with the Philippines, where war memory has also been regularly used for nation-building, but has equally often been used to reaffirm the nation’s commitment to democratic ideals, which are viewed as integral to Philippine nationalism.

A national amnesia about the war in most South East Asian countries?

In Singapore, the Philippines and Burma, the memory of selected events of the Japanese Occupation is marked on a national day each year as part of a public commemoration or remembering of a collective past aimed at nation-building. However, in other countries of South East Asia, similar national days that have arisen out of the memory of the Second World War are absent. This is the case in Indonesia and Vietnam, even though their national independence days, respectively marked on 17 August 1945 and 2 September 1945, were soon after the surrender of the Japanese. There has been little effort on the part of the Vietnamese and Indonesian states to evoke the memory of the Japanese Occupation and the war on these days, as compared with the commemorations of Singapore, the Philippines and Burma. Examining this ‘national amnesia’ of the Japanese Occupation might suggest some

⁶⁵ *New Light of Myanmar*, 28 March 2000.

⁶⁶ *New Light of Myanmar*, 28 March 2004.

paths to explore in the relationship between war memory and nation-building.

Anthony Reid, in his study of the lack of commemoration of the Japanese Occupation in Indonesia, suggests some explanations. He noted that despite there being hundreds of thousands of Indonesians who were *romusha*, or forced labour, under the Japanese, many of whom died on the Burma–Thailand Railway, and others who were ‘comfort women’ or sexual slaves to the Japanese, ‘the major institutions are not much interested’ in marking their suffering. He indicated that the process of creating a shared past in nation-building in Indonesia had meant that there was no national remembering of the Japanese Occupation. ‘Overlaying private and family memories of the war, and increasingly replacing them in the consciousness of the youth is the official history’, writes Reid.⁶⁷

In Singapore, the Philippines and Burma, remembering the events of the Japanese Occupation is essential in creating a common collective memory for nation-building. However, in Indonesia, nation-building dictates that the Japanese Occupation is downplayed so that history conveys Indonesian nationalism more strongly. The Japanese Occupation does not loom large in collective memory of the past ‘because of the overwhelming accent laid on the subsequent revolutionary period in which Indonesians themselves play the leading part’, Peter Post and Elly Touwen-Bouwsma write.⁶⁸

While 17 August 1945 was taken as the ‘central date of the nation’, in the Sukarno period from 1946 to 1967, Reid continues, ‘official history was explicitly revolutionary, negating the pre-1945 past except as prelude to revolution, and pointing to an elusive messianic future’. He goes on to argue that in the Suharto period (1967–98), official national history ‘placed the Indonesian Army and Suharto himself at the centre of national history; and it subordinated all other dates to those of revolutionary struggle – especially 17 August 1945’. Reid concluded that in the public remembering of Indonesia’s past, ‘The Japanese Occupation was an important prelude to that event, but to commemorate its portentous happenings as turning points in their own right would risk diluting the transcendent quality of 1945, and giving the Japanese a share in the glory that belongs to Indonesians themselves in asserting their independence’.⁶⁹ Demonstrating an awareness of this point, Sukarno

⁶⁷ Reid, *supra* note 6, at pp 172–173.

⁶⁸ Peter Post and Elly Touwen-Bouwsma (1997), *Japan, Indonesia and the War*, KITLV, Leiden, p 5.

⁶⁹ Reid, *supra* note 6, at pp 172–174.

himself, in his 17 August 1959 address, angrily denounced accusations that the Indonesian Revolution from 1945 was 'Japanese-made'.⁷⁰

Sukarno's anger was specifically in response to the publication in the 1950s of the memoirs of former high-ranking Japanese military officials in Indonesia, Nishijama Shigetada, Miyoshi Skunkichiro and Admiral Maeda Tadashi. They claimed to have contributed to the writing of the independence declaration while Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta were at Admiral Maeda's official residence before its announcement.⁷¹ However, Sukarno's 1959 national day address more generally illustrated the prevailing desire to forget collaboration with the Japanese to achieve independence. The Japanese had assisted in broadcasting Sukarno's nationalist speeches across Indonesia. Sukarno was made head of a Japanese-sponsored commission to create a constitution for an independent Indonesia. They also raised a volunteer army, *Peta* [*Pembela Tanah Air*, Defenders of the Fatherland], which later became the army with which the Indonesian nationalists fought the Dutch. The Japanese education system helped foster thousands of *pemuda*, or politically aware youths, who were determined to fight for independence. In return for Japanese help, Sukarno assisted them in recruiting forced labourers, who later died in their thousands from Japanese ill-treatment on war projects such as the Burma–Thailand Railway.⁷² Thus, remembering these complex events of the Japanese Occupation rather than focusing on completing the goals of the Indonesian nationalist struggle that followed after 1945 was obviously not conducive to fostering nation-building.

Examining commemorations of 17 August 1945 bears out the conclusions of Reid, Post and Touwen-Bouwisma. In the early celebrations, Sukarno's speeches often outlined how independence and the Indonesian Revolution constituted an uncompleted project that had to be realized by looking towards the future rather than the past.⁷³ As late as 1962, Sukarno was still saying in his 17 August address that the Indonesian

⁷⁰ Sukarno (1959), *The Rediscovery of Our Revolution: Address by the President of Indonesia on the Seventeenth of August 1959*, Department of Information, Jakarta, p 35.

⁷¹ Anthony Reid (1980), 'Indonesia: from briefcase to sword', in Alfred W. McCoy, ed, *Southeast Asia Under Japanese Occupation*, Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University, New Haven, CT, p 13.

⁷² Friend, *supra* note 22, at pp 165–166.

⁷³ See the collection of Sukarno's speeches for 17 August in Sukarno (1961), *Dari proklamasi Ke Re-So-Pim: Pidato-Pidato PJM. Presiden Republik Indonesia Dr. IR. Soekarno, pada 17 X 17 Agustus*, Biro Research, Departemen Luarnegeri, Jakarta.

Revolution had not been completed by gaining full sovereignty in 1949, but was 'still far from being ended'.⁷⁴ While viewing the independence exhibition the day before his speech, he indicated that 'now we feel capable to complete our revolution,' adding that 'our struggle was devoted to the destruction of the colonial remnants but now to the national construction'.⁷⁵ In his last 17 August address in 1966, called 'Never leave history', Sukarno talked of the ongoing project of building 'the unity of consciousness to complete our Revolution, our REVOLUTION. Once again our REVOLUTION, which is not completed yet.'⁷⁶

When the army under General Suharto took charge of Indonesia after 1966, 17 August was still not used to invoke the wartime past or the history that gave birth to the proclamation and the 1945 constitution. Suharto never outlined the circumstances of the Japanese Occupation that gave rise to these objects of nation-building. Indeed, it was not until 1985 that Suharto even mentioned Sukarno at all in his proclamation day address, and that was in a brief sentence indicating Sukarno and Hatta's authorship of the proclamation of 17 August 1945.⁷⁷ On the fiftieth anniversary, Suharto reiterated the idea of looking to the future in pursuing economic progress rather than back to the past: 'We see development as a continuation of the struggle we waged during the periods of the War for independence and revolution'.⁷⁸

In the post-Suharto period too, there has been less focus on commemorating the past and a greater emphasis on the future development of the country. The 17 August addresses of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004 to present) and his post-Suharto predecessors have been similar to those of the Suharto period. Sukarno's rhetoric of an unending revolution coming out of Indonesia's history has been replaced with the administration recounting what it has done and its hopes for the future. The *Jakarta Post* wrote in its editorial of the 2007 address, 'From beginning to end, the speech was little more than a list of what the President claimed to be the achievements of his administration. The rest was a to-do list for the country.'⁷⁹ There has been little evocation of history in the speeches, and the circumstances of the Japanese Occupation seem even further away from the commemorations than

⁷⁴ *Indonesian Herald*, 18 August 1962.

⁷⁵ *Indonesian Herald*, 18 August 1962.

⁷⁶ *Indonesian Herald*, 18 August 1966.

⁷⁷ *Jakarta Post*, 19 August 1985.

⁷⁸ *Jakarta Post*, 18 August 1995.

⁷⁹ *Jakarta Post*, 18 August 2007. See the online edition at <http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

ever before. In many respects, marking 17 August does seem to mean forgetting the significance and complexity of the Japanese Occupation that brought about the proclamation of independence.

In Vietnam, which proclaimed its independence on 2 September 1945, just a few weeks after the surrender of Japan on 15 August 1945, a similar amnesia – or more specifically a selective remembering – has existed for what seem to be similar reasons. The events of the Communist Party coming to power in the ‘August Revolution’ of 1945 feature more significantly in commemoration of the Vietnamese proclamation of independence than do similar events in Indonesian celebrations of its own proclamation. Still, remembering the struggle for independence flowing from the ‘August Revolution’ has tended to be viewed as more suitable for nation-building than for recalling the suffering of horrendous famine and other hardships, as well as the various contesting nationalist groups of the Japanese Occupation, of which the Communist Party was just one. The revolution was still an uncompleted project that would not end until South Vietnam fell on 30 May 1975.

In 1965, on the twentieth anniversary of the 2 September declaration of independence by Ho Chi Minh, North Vietnam’s Premier Pham Van Dong (1955–87) gave the key national address. However, he did not commemorate the circumstances of the Japanese Occupation that produced the proclamation of independence, but used the occasion to look to the future. Pham Van Dong urged the nation to look back ‘at the victorious path they have trodden over the past twenty years, close their ranks, heighten still further their will to fight against US aggression’ to continue ‘the revolutionary struggle’ to bring about a unified Vietnam. According to Pham Van Dong, they were still engaged in a revolutionary war, which had commenced at Ho Chi Minh’s 1945 declaration and would be waged until South Vietnam was unified with the North. Pham Van Dong told the Vietnamese people: ‘The proclamation of independence, and the words of President Ho Chi Minh, the founder of the New Vietnam, turned every Vietnamese patriot into a staunch fighter and to win victory for the revolutionary cause of the entire people, for the interests of the people and the glory of the fatherland’.⁸⁰

What was required for nation-building, according to the Vietnamese leaders, was not to remember the complex historical events of the Japan-

⁸⁰ This is Vietnam News Agency’s second transmission, 1 September 1965 (05.15 GMT) in *North Vietnam News Agency*.

ese Occupation that had produced the 1945 proclamation, but to remember simply the Communist Party as the vanguard of national liberation from 1945 onwards. David Marr has noted that the 'August Revolution' that brought the communists to power after the Japanese surrender in 1945 is often portrayed in official Vietnamese history as orchestrated by the Communist Party. In many official accounts, the Communist Party seems to get the 'credit for everything'.⁸¹ However, he argues that it occurred more spontaneously as a result of complex causes that lay in the historical context of the Japanese Occupation.⁸² Admitting this complexity of the events of 1945 is similar to delving into the Japanese Occupation for Indonesia. It takes the focus off the Communist Party and its revolutionary role. Tran My-Van has noted that remembering the Japanese Occupation in Vietnamese history brings up rival nationalist groups that could have claimed to be leading the country to independence, but were suppressed by the Communist Party.⁸³

Remembering the events of the Japanese Occupation has seldom been a feature of addresses and celebrations of 2 September since the unification of Vietnam in 1975. The national address given on 2 September has largely proclaimed a brighter future, as in Indonesia, or has used history to focus on the future. In his 1975 national day address, Pham Van Dong extolled the years that waited ahead of Vietnam, declaring that only now was the nation unified: 'For us Vietnamese, a glorious chapter of history has been turned and a new period begun: the period of peaceful construction'. However, he still believed that there was an ongoing revolution: 'this revolutionary process is continuing'.⁸⁴

Pham Van Dong's successors into the twenty-first century have kept to the theme of revolution that he complained about in his addresses. Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet (1991–97) portrayed the proclamation of independence in terms of the Communist Party leading the country to complete liberation in the 30 years leading up to 1975. 'The August Revolution', declared Vo Van Kiet on National Day 1992, 'ushered in a new period of very hard struggle marked by very glorious victories in the millenary history of the Vietnamese nation'. He added that from that moment onwards, 'under the leadership of the Party our people

⁸¹ David Marr (1992), *Vietnam*, Clio Press, New York, p 81.

⁸² David Marr (1995), *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

⁸³ Tran My-Van (1999), 'Japan through Vietnamese eyes (1905–1945)', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol 30, No 1, pp 139–146.

⁸⁴ *Vietnam Courier*, October 1975, p 3.

had struggled continuously throughout 30 years, carried out two wars of resistance...to regain independence'.⁸⁵ In 2005, when giving the National Day address, President Tran Duc Luong spoke of the 'August Revolution' having 'put an end to feudalism' and 'ushered in a new era' in which 'the working people are the masters of their country'.⁸⁶

Other South East Asian countries such as Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia and Brunei have no day at all on which the war can be recalled, despite the event being a significant one in their histories. Among these countries, Malaysia offers an interesting contrast to examine why there is a national amnesia about the Japanese Occupation for reasons other than those for Indonesia and Vietnam. According to Cheah Boon Kheng, in Malaysia there has been an official forgetting of the Japanese Occupation because of the divisiveness of the period for the major ethnic groups of Malaysia, the Chinese, Malays and Indians.⁸⁷

In Malaysia, there was a small but influential number of Malays from the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* [Union of Malay Youth] nationalist political party collaborating with the Japanese in the hope of obtaining independence. In contrast, the Chinese of Malaysia were massacred in large numbers by the Japanese because they were seen as supporting the anti-Japanese movement in China. Thus, anti-Japanese guerrilla forces, known as the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), became predominantly Chinese. The MPAJA was led by the Chinese communists, as they were the most organized of the resistance, and the group that the Japanese military could not tolerate at all. As in Indonesia, the Japanese sought to raise volunteer armies, which were drawn mainly from the Malays, and these were used by the Japanese against the mainly Chinese guerrillas. The Indians sought no common cause with the other ethnic groups. Instead, they raised the Indian National Army under the nationalist Subhas Chandra Bose, which aimed to liberate India by force with Japanese assistance. The result of this wartime ethnic division was an orgy of communal violence soon after the Japanese surrendered, particularly between the Malays and Chinese.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ *Vietnam Courier*, October 1992, p 1.

⁸⁶ *Vietnam News*, 4 September 2005.

⁸⁷ Cheah Boon Kheng (2007), 'The "blackout" syndrome and the ghosts of World War II: the war as a "divisive issue" in Malaysia', in Koh, *supra* note 50, at pp 47–59.

⁸⁸ Cheah Boon Kheng (1987), *Red Star Over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict During and After the Japanese Occupation, 1941–1946*, 2 ed, Singapore University Press, Singapore.

Even 60 years after the end of the war in Malaysia, divisive attitudes arising from the Japanese Occupation are difficult to change so that nation-building can be fostered through feeling that there is a shared national past. The Malaysian film *Paloh*, made during 2002 and 2003 by director Adman Salleh, with Cheah Boon Kheng as one of the historical consultants, tried unsuccessfully to bring to the Malaysian public's attention that there were personal connections that cut across the war-time ethnic and political divides.⁸⁹ This objective probably explains why *Paloh* was funded by *Filem Negara Malaysia*, the national film department.

Paloh, set in the Malaysian town of the same name in the state of Johor, featured what was said to be a 'real-life' romance between a female Chinese member of the resistance and a Malay soldier from the volunteer army. Members of the Malay volunteer armies and the Chinese MPAJA were shown secretly cooperating at times due to personal connections. The film tried to show a shared sense of community and humanity between the Malays and Chinese, despite being on different sides of the conflict. However, when *Paloh* was released in July 2003, the film failed at the box office, confused audiences, and only reinforced the perceptions of the race-based violence of the time. The best that Malaysian movie reviewers were able to say was that *Paloh* was a 'brave attempt by director Adman Salleh to dissect a complex theme'.⁹⁰

Another recent attempt in Malaysia to represent certain aspects of the Japanese Occupation publicly soon after the release of *Paloh* also illustrated how divisive the period is in the public memory. This was the creation of war memorials by the Chinese community organization Gecinta to the Chinese and communist-led MPAJA at a Chinese cemetery outside Kuala Lumpur at Nilai in the Malaysian state of Negeri Sembilan. The first monument was erected in December 2003 in memory of the communist leaders of the MPAJA who were massacred by the Japanese at the Batu Caves, near Kuala Lumpur, on 1 September 1942. The second was a monument to all members of the MPAJA who died in the war, which was erected in December 2005.

Erecting memorials to the veterans of the MPAJA, who later formed the core of the communist forces that fought the British and then the Malaysian government until a peace agreement in 1989, created controversy. There was outrage from Malay army veterans and politicians.

⁸⁹ *New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 24 September 2002.

⁹⁰ *New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 12 July 2003.

Datuk Seri Zainnudin Maidin, Information Minister in the United Malays National Organization (UMNO)-dominated government, denounced the two monuments. He said, 'After we gained independence and fought off the communists, it is regrettable that some parties have memorials for the communists'.⁹¹ There were calls from Malay political leaders such as Mohamed Hassan, the *Mentri Besar* [Chief Minister] of the Malaysian state of Negeri Sembilan, for the demolition of the monuments.⁹² Chinese leaders in the government had a different perspective. Deputy Home Minister Tan Chai Ho and Dr Chua Soi Lek, Vice-President of the government's Chinese political party partner, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), protested that not all of the anti-Japanese fighters were communists. Datuk Liow Tiong Lai of the MCA's youth wing added, 'We are honouring them for fighting the Japanese. Whether they were members of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) is a separate issue.'⁹³ However, it was not a separate issue for many Malay army veterans, such as Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Mohd Idris Hassan, who asked, 'How do you justify building monuments to commemorate those who fought the Japanese when there is proof that a large number of them actually committed all kinds of atrocities against the people of this country under the communist banner?'⁹⁴ With such open fighting over the history of the Japanese Occupation, even within the ranks of the Malaysian government, Cheah Boon Kheng's thesis that nation-building in Malaysia dictates a need to forget the Japanese Occupation seems to be vindicated.⁹⁵

In comparing the South East Asian countries that commemorate the events of the Japanese Occupation with those that do not, the influence of nation-building is significant. If commemorating the impact of the Second World War enhances nation-building, a day marking the Japanese Occupation will be designated, as in Singapore, the Philippines and Burma. However, in South East Asian countries where not remembering the Japanese Occupation is seen as better for nation-building by

⁹¹ *Straits Times* (Singapore), 19 December 2006.

⁹² *Straits Times* (Singapore), 22 December 2006.

⁹³ *New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 23 December 2006.

⁹⁴ *New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 28 December 2006.

⁹⁵ See also Kevin Blackburn (2009), 'Nation building, identity and war commemoration spaces in Malaysia and Singapore', in Rahil Ismail, Ooi Giok Ling, and Brian Shaw, eds, *Southeast Asian Culture and Heritage in a Globalising World: Diverging Identities in a Dynamic Region*, Ashgate, Farnham, pp 93–114; and P. Lim Pui Huen and Diana Wong, eds (2000), *War and Memory in Malaysia and Singapore*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore.

various governments and regimes, the nation-states of the region will ignore this crucial watershed in the history of South East Asia. The most notable of the countries that do not mark the Japanese Occupation, even though their independence days in 1945 were products of the forces unleashed during the Japanese Occupation, are Indonesia and Vietnam. Their 1945 independence dates have been evoked as the beginning of their national revolutions. The Japanese Occupation has been downplayed so as not to overshadow these national revolutions. However, the argument can also be put the other way: Singapore, the Philippines and Burma mark the Japanese Occupation because they did not declare independence at the time. In Malaysia, too, the Japanese Occupation works against nation-building, not because it might overshadow a declaration of independence, but because of its divisiveness in public memory.