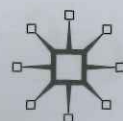


A New History of Southeast Asia

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Edited by M. C. Ricklefs

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10

World War II in Southeast Asia (1942–1945)

Introduction: pre-war Japanese-Southeast Asian encounters

As we saw in the preceding chapter, during the 1930s Depression most Southeast Asians became painfully aware of the socio-economic strains of being connected to the global economy. The Depression also stimulated greater indigenous dissatisfaction with, and undermined confidence in, colonial regimes. Naturally many Southeast Asian reformers and nationalists began to look elsewhere than to Europe for models of independence and modernity. Japan was a particularly powerful model.

By the mid-nineteenth century, some Japanese leaders were already advocating adoption of Western technology as a means to strengthen Japan militarily. The country pursued a dramatic reform and modernization process following the Meiji Restoration of 1868. New forms of ship-building, mining, railways, manufacturing – of armaments, textiles, glass, chemicals, and so on – and other modern activities were introduced. Western styles of clothing and architecture were part of a reform and revival process that, by the early twentieth century, made Japan a world power. These transformations also led Japan to have a more assertive interest in its region: Korea, Manchuria, and the rest of China as regions where it might exercise imperial dominance and Southeast Asia as a source of raw materials vital to its continued growth as a modern industrialized and imperial state.

Japanese intellectuals had long divided Asia into two categories: lands under the influence of Chinese culture and 'outer barbarians', which included most of Southeast Asia. Following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, however, Japan shaped its modernization on Western industrialized models, attenuating its traditional admiration for things Chinese. By the time the two nations went to war in 1894–95, the Japanese side saw the conflict as one between the civilized (Japan) and the backward (China). Along with its European-style modernization, Japan often shared Western colonial images of Southeast Asia backwardness. Racist stereotypes of the kind associated with the contemporary Western mentality can thus be found in the ideas of Japanese observers of Southeast Asia at that time. Recognizing that the natural resources of Southeast Asia were important to Japan's industrialized future, as early as 1893 the Overseas

Development Society was established, devoted to the peaceful immigration of Japanese into the region. Thus, just as Southeast Asians were increasingly looking towards Japan, Japan was intensifying its interest in the region.

In the early twentieth century, it was primarily the potential for securing natural resources and establishing consumer markets in Southeast Asia that attracted the attention of Japanese government, military, industrial, and business interests. In the wake of Japan's colonial occupation of Taiwan (1895), crushing defeat of the Russians (1904–05), invasion of China (1931), and creation of a puppet state in Manzhouguo (Manchukuo, 1932), the Japanese military saw Southeast Asia as another potential sphere of Japanese imperial influence. For their part, Southeast Asian nationalists, such as U Ottama of Burma, Raja Hitam of Riau in the Netherlands East Indies, and General Artemio Ricarte of the Philippines, were impressed with Japan's successes and visited there in hope of gaining financial and political backing. The Indonesian nationalists Mohammad H. Thamrin and E. F. E. Douwes Dekker also built contacts with the Japanese, as did the Islamic *Ulamas* of Aceh, led by Mohammed Daud Beureu'eh. Ironically, despite the attraction Japan held for an earlier generation of Vietnamese nationalists like Phan Boi Chau (see Chapter 9), few of their 1930s counterparts seem to have looked to Tokyo until the outbreak of World War II.

Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations (1933), its unilateral policies in Manchuria, and the establishment of the Greater Asia Society signaled Japan's growing assertiveness. Yet, peaceful economic engagement was the norm as Japanese banks, sugar companies, and storage conglomerates, along with its Borneo Oil Company and Japanese-owned newspapers began to emerge in the region alongside a growing expatriate Japanese community. For the time being, however, Japan's southward advance policy (*Nanshin seisaku*) was shaped by political priorities in China, which dictated that engagement with Southeast Asia would continue to function within the framework of the Western colonial rule.

The Japanese conquest of colonial Southeast Asia: an overview

Seizing the so-called Southern Resource Area, securing a defence perimeter through the Pacific Islands on its eastern border and against India on its west, and containing China were Japan's primary objectives in its invasion of Southeast Asia in 1941. The Japanese were particularly keen on capturing the region's oil, tin, rubber, and rice, for these were needed to sustain both the war in China and the inevitable conflict with the Western powers. A necessary first step was neutralising the United States Pacific Fleet in Hawaii. On 7 December 1941 (8 December in Southeast Asia), Japanese aircraft attacked the naval and military installations of the United States at Pearl Harbor and on Oahu, sinking numerous American battleships and aircraft and killing thousands of military personnel. Designed to immobilize the American military in the Pacific and to demoralize the American home front, this surprise attack won – if only briefly – the Japanese respite on their eastern flank in their drive towards Southeast Asia.

Japanese plans for conquering Southeast Asia were audacious and ambitious, especially since the majority of their naval power had to be committed in the Pacific Theatre in order to hold back American forces. Expecting a protracted struggle against the European and American powers, the Japanese needed to secure Southeast Asia swiftly and then integrate it into an autarchic economy that would enable Japan to endure a long war.

As discussed below, Japan was able to obtain a military presence in French Indochina through diplomatic pressure, but elsewhere in Southeast Asia it used force. The plan was for almost simultaneous attacks by the 25th Army on British Malaya and Singapore, and by the 15th on Burma and Thailand – the latter was in fact a potential ally, but it was targeted for strategic reasons. The Philippines and Indonesia were to be occupied by the 14th and 16th Armies respectively. More than an hour before the air strikes at Pearl Harbor, the Japanese launched their Malaya-Singapore and Thailand campaigns by landing in northern Malaya. Firepower and speed characterized this operation. Seventy days after landing, the Japanese had advanced 1100 km (approximately 680 miles) south, forcing the numerically superior British forces to capitulate. From the start the British were outmaneuvered by the Japanese, who had clear superiority in the air. The arduous battles that were expected on land barely took place. The poor British strategy of retreating to delay the enemy advance and the quick collapse of British military morale were partly to blame. Their surrender of Malaya and Singapore (15 February 1942) facilitated the subsequent swift seizure of Burma from under-resourced British colonial forces there. The Japanese victory in the Philippines was equally swift and complete.

Japan's sudden emergence as the new occupying power in Southeast Asia had varying effects. It dismantled European and American colonial administrations, forcing their official personnel, military, and civilian employees to escape or to spend the war in horrific imprisonment. In some cases, indigenous political activists could now align themselves with Japanese initiatives to produce an 'Asia for the Asians'. Other politicians who had cooperated with European administrators were often imprisoned or were left with little opportunity to participate within this new system. Similarly, Japan's vision of a Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere drew support from some Southeast Asians while others saw it as a new form of colonialism. For some urban nationalists, Japan's vision of an East Asian economic community at first seemed consistent with their visions of an independent national community. For many villages, however, such ideas had little impact, for their lives continued to be based on more traditional forms of kinship, work, religion, and ethnicity. In the Philippines, there were both local collaborators with the Japanese and the most extensive armed resistance against them to be found in Southeast Asia. In short, the new political order introduced by the Japanese drew different responses from various communities within the former Western colonies. The diversity of ways in which student activists, seasoned politicians, soldiers, ethnic minorities, businessmen, women, and rural villagers responded to these new policies would set the stage for many of the issues facing these societies when, after the war, the Western powers reappeared.

The Japanese declared themselves liberators of Southeast Asia from the

colonial West, but ironically then imposed similar forms of governance through local elite collaborators and institutions. They attempted to win the support of local populations through a deliberate, yet sometimes haphazard, propaganda machine. As various case studies below will illustrate, European symbols of governance – buildings, street signs, newspapers, books, schools – were dismantled or censored in favor of local languages and indigenous cultural monuments. In many cases, particular communities, such as the Chinese or Indian minorities and Eurasians who had worked within the colonial administrative system, were persecuted or held as prisoners. For other communities, however, the Japanese provided new political and socio-economic opportunities based on alleged common histories, interests, concerns, and values.

It needs to be remembered that, after Japan's stunning initial victories, the tide of war quickly turned against it as the American Southwest Pacific Command regained the initiative in the Pacific. The Japanese advance was halted in the battles of the Coral Sea in May 1942 and Midway in June. After the American victory at Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands in February 1943, the Japanese were on the defensive in the Pacific until the end of the war. From early 1944 they were also on the defensive on their western (Burmese) front in the face of the counter-offensive from India by the British-led South East Asia Command. As the imperial Japanese forces collapsed on all fronts, American President Truman authorized the use of atomic bombs against Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945. Tens of thousands perished in the bombings and many more succumbed to radiation poisoning. On 15 August 1945, less than four years after their attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan's plans for conquest of East and Southeast Asia culminated in surrender – not only bringing to an end Japan's own imperial ambitions, but also opening an era that would bring Western colonialism to an end in Southeast Asia, as will be seen in Chapter 11.

The theatres of war

Singapore and British Malaya

On the same day that Pearl Harbor was bombed, Japanese forces, spearheaded by the 25th Army – veterans of combat in China – landed on the east coast of southern Thailand and northeast Malaya. Capitalizing on British hesitation and failure to launch *Operation Matador* – the pre-emptive Allied plan to advance into neighboring Thailand (at that stage still uncommitted in the conflict but sympathetic to Japan) to destroy the invading force at sea and deny it a beach-head – Japanese troops rapidly swept down the west and east coast of the Malay peninsula towards their prize: the capture of the strategic British naval base and army HQ Malaya Command at 'Fortress' Singapore. At the same time, Japanese naval bombers, flying from airbases in southern Indochina, began their strategic bombing of sites in Singapore. Equipped with the superior and highly maneuverable Mitsubishi A6M *Zero* piloted by experienced aircrew, Japanese fighters soon established air superiority over Malaya as they came up against the obsolete *Vildebeeste* torpedo-bombers, the ageing Brewster *Buffalos*, and the handful of *Hurricane* fighters. On 10 December 1941, Japanese bombers

found and sank *Force Z*, comprising the battleship *HMS Prince of Wales*, accompanied by the cruiser *HMS Repulse*, sent to interdict the landings on the east coast.

With the sinking of the two main British warships in the South China Sea off Kuantan, the Japanese forces had complete command of the sea in the battle for Malaya and Singapore. Although the British and Commonwealth defenders outnumbered the invaders, they were unable to concentrate their forces or hold their lines, and were constantly outflanked and overwhelmed by the numerically inferior, but battle-hardened and highly mobile Japanese soldiers equipped with light tanks that the Allied defenders did not possess. And while the big naval guns at Singapore could manage full traverse and fire towards Malaya, their flat trajectory and the fact that most of their ammunition was of the armor-piercing variety for firing at ships at sea over long distances made them ineffective for the bombardment of ground forces. Fifty-four days after their invasion, Japanese forces had pushed the defending British and Commonwealth troops to the doorsteps of Singapore, forcing the British to blow up the causeway that linked Malaya and Singapore on 31 January 1942, delaying the Japanese advance by a week.

The main Japanese assault on Singapore finally began at midnight on 8 February with an amphibious landing on the northwest part of the island, following the launch of a diversionary attack on the island of Pulau Ubin in the northeast the night before. From their beachhead in the northwest, Japanese forces pushed towards the south, west, and center of Singapore, reaching the strategic central Bukit Timah area by 11 February. Overrun Allied units were forced to retreat to the southern and eastern parts of the island, while in the southwest, at Pasir Panjang Ridge, the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Malay Regiment held on stubbornly and blunted the Japanese advance for 48 hours until the regiments were almost wiped out to a man. As the remaining Allied units fought on, civilian casualties mounted as nearly a million people crowded into the city area in the south. With the capture of the main MacRitchie Reservoir on 14 February, water failure was imminent, and with it the threat of an epidemic. The next day, Japanese troops broke through the north of the city. With dwindling fuel, food and water stocks, and mounting civilian tolls, the noose around Singapore tightened, and Lieutenant-General A. E. Percival, the General Officer Commanding HQ Malaya Command, finally agreed to surrender the 'impregnable fortress' of Singapore to his Japanese counterpart, Lieutenant-General Tomoyuki Yamashita, on 15 February 1942. It was a stellar victory for Yamashita; he achieved in 70 days what he had estimated would take at least 100 days – the destruction of British rule in Malaya and the capture of Singapore.

British Burma

The Japanese invasion of British Burma began in January 1942 and soon destroyed the colonial state. The retreat of the European power was surprisingly swift, suddenly returning the countryside to control by local village leaders. In the cities, evacuating civil servants and soldiers opened the jails, released

criminally insane patients from hospitals, closed universities, and even shot animals in the Rangoon zoo in what has been called a 'scorched state' policy. Police stations, municipal offices, courts, hospitals, the Port Trust, and even social clubs were deserted in haste. Fearing that the Japanese would arrest anyone associated with the British administration, many Indians – something like 400,000 – and indigenous personnel fled in panic to India with the British, bringing the machinery of the colonial state to a grinding halt. Many died in this disorderly flight. The British military retreat became a rout in the face of Japanese flanking tactics. Thus, the Japanese invasion of British Burma did within months what generations of rebels, reformers, and radicals had not been able to accomplish for the previous 50 years – the complete removal of British authority.

The Japanese occupation brought Burmese nationalism to an important new stage. In the 1930s, a group of radical students – those who called themselves *Thakins*, as noted in the preceding chapter – feared colonial arrest and therefore fled to China, where they met Japanese agents who convinced them to raise a Burma Independence Army (BIA). Calling themselves 'the Thirty Comrades', these young men went to Japan and received training in intelligence work, military strategy, political organization, and guerrilla warfare. Their leader, *Thakin* Aung San, secretly left Burma only in 1940, hoping to gain aid from the Chinese Communists. He was, however, arrested by the Japanese in Amoy (Xiamen) and, with little choice in the matter, found himself working with the Japanese despite his own distaste for their version of Fascism.

By the time of the Japanese invasion, the BIA had already penetrated Burma's countryside, recruiting locals to its ranks. The BIA supported the invasion through sabotage, securing intelligence, translating, and operating beyond enemy lines. During the war, the Thirty Comrades developed personal relationships with followers that would be crucial to their political careers. Discussions that were once limited to the elite circles in the cities about citizenship, notions of national security and conceptions of a new national community now penetrated the countryside through the recruitment efforts of the BIA, creating new bonds of personal and political allegiance that would last well into post-war Burma. As the BIA swelled in size, Japanese authorities became worried about it. In July–August 1942, they disbanded it in favor of a new Burma Defense Army (BDA) with stricter recruitment requirements, smaller numbers, and better Japanese control.

Because there was little actual Japanese presence in much of the countryside, local networks of authority and patronage re-emerged. This gave village headmen and nationalist leaders opportunities to strengthen their roles at the expense of the central government. Many young men from these communities were tied directly or indirectly to the BDA, so that the very idea of a Burmese nation began to be associated with wartime experience and one's military role. In this manner, nationalist ideas occupied the same space as military ones – the idea of the nation and the army developing symbiotically. This bonding experience was not, however, shared by all, for nearly 30 percent of the population lived in areas too remote to have experienced colonial control in the past or Japanese control in the present. These rural communities, although officially

part of what had been British Burma, never quite comprehended or associated themselves with the new identities developing through the BDA.

The American Philippines

In April 1941, as war loomed between Japan and the United States, Manuel Quezon, President of the Philippine Commonwealth, established the Civilian Emergency Administration (CEA). Tasked to prepare Filipinos for war, the CEA conducted tests of sirens, blackouts, and evacuations. Two months later, American President Roosevelt incorporated the Philippine Army and Navy into the American Army in the Philippines, creating the 50,000-strong US Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) under the command of General Douglas MacArthur. MacArthur's costly ten-year defense plan included the training of a large reserve of citizen-soldiers to supplement a professional army, who would then be dispersed throughout the archipelago. Meanwhile, the American War Department developed a defensive strategy designed to delay anticipated Japanese aggression in the Pacific. Prolonged defense would be made on Bataan, the gateway to Manila's harbor. There were, however, no preparations in the event of Bataan's fall. Less than a year later this omission would prove deadly for the USAFFE.

On 8 December 1941, just hours after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Japanese 14th Army under the command of General Masaharu Homma invaded the Philippines. The bombing of key naval and airforce installations, including Camp John Hay, Clark Field, Nichols Field, Cavite, and Batangas, immobilized the USAFFE. Having secured the Lingayen Gulf in Pangasinan, the Japanese Navy set their sights on the central plains of Luzon, the country's ricebowl. As the USAFFE retreated, MacArthur declared Manila an open city. On 2 January 1942, the Japanese army took control of the capital. To seal off the country's southern reaches from an American counter-attack, the Japanese forces headed toward Mindanao, committing atrocities along the way.

This great offensive forced the Commonwealth government led by Quezon, the High Commissioner's Office, and USAFFE officers headed by MacArthur to flee to Corregidor, an island fort in Manila Bay, where they waited for evacuation to Australia. General Jonathan Wainwright's North Luzon Force held off the Japanese advance in order for General Parker's South Luzon Force to withdraw north and west towards the Bataan peninsula. Fatally, forces on Bataan were ill-prepared for a prolonged stand. To prevent Japanese capture of their supplies, USAFFE logistics officers destroyed food, gasoline, and other provisions. The situation was thus made dire for some 80,000 troops and the 26,000 Filipino refugees who followed them.

From January to March 1942, the remainder of the USAFFE on Bataan and the reorganized US Forces in the Philippines under Wainwright engaged the Japanese army in ferocious battles. Exhaustion, dwindling supplies, disease, and the aggressiveness of the Japanese offensive led, however, to the defeat of the Filipino and American forces. In the aftermath of the fall of Bataan and Corregidor, the 70,000 or so defeated soldiers, including the sick and wounded from the army hospitals, were forced onto the infamous 90-km (56-mile)

Bataan Death March. Some 10,000 of them died in a matter of nine days from exhaustion, illness, hunger, beatings, and executions.

Dutch Indonesia

The Japanese invasion of Indonesia began on 10 January 1942. After the surrender of Singapore on 15 February, the Netherlands East Indies became the front line of the Japanese southward advance, but Dutch colonial and allied forces were no match for the Japanese. In the Battle of the Java Sea in late January, a combined Dutch, British, Australian, and American fleet was destroyed. Most Indonesians gave the colonial forces little or no support. In Aceh, the All-Aceh Union of Ulama's (PUSA), led by Daud Beureu'eh, actually rebelled against the Dutch and drove the colonial power out even before the Japanese arrived. On 8 March 1942 the Dutch Governor-General surrendered in Batavia and the Dutch colonial regime came to an end, never to be restored. Some 65,000 Dutch military men were interned along with about 25,000 other Allied troops and about 80,000 civilians. Some 60,000 of the latter were women and children. The conditions in Japanese prison camps were horrific: about 40 percent of the civilian male internees died, 20 percent of the military, 13 percent of the female civilians, and 10 percent of the children.

The Japanese conquest of Indonesia was thus swift and the consequences of its occupation were momentous. But it was not to last long: barely three and a half years, in fact. From the beginning, the Japanese faced formidable problems. They were few in number when compared to the vast size of Indonesia and its population, which was then around 75 million. Their lines of supply were extended and exposed and it was not long before the depredations of Allied submarines rendered maritime connections with Japan tenuous. The Japanese knew that they might need somehow to hold this vast area and population against an Allied counter-attack; this was one of the principal considerations driving Japanese policy towards the local people, as will be seen below.

Indonesia was now potentially a front line for an Allied counter-offensive launched from the Pacific and Australia, but in fact the Allies decided not to counter-attack the main Indonesian islands. Instead, the Allied re-conquest of Southeast Asia threw the British-led South East Asia Command against Japanese forces in Burma while the American Southwest Pacific Command swung northwards to reconquer the Philippines. As a part of their northward sweep, the American forces took Morotai in eastern Indonesia in September 1944.

French Indochina and Thailand

French Indochina and Thailand had very different experiences from the rest of Southeast Asia, since by the time of the Japanese campaign both had governments directly or indirectly allied with Tokyo. Phibun's militaristic orientation, hostility toward the Western colonial powers, and general admiration for Japan made him an ally whose cooperation was all the more desirable given Thailand's strategic location as a jumping-off point for attacks on Burma and Malaya.

While the Thai put up a token show of resistance when Japanese troops landed on their territory on 8 December 1941, within a few hours Phibun stopped the fighting and then signed a treaty with Tokyo three days later. To consolidate Thailand's links to what seemed likely to be the winning side, in January 1942 he declared war on Britain and the United States, although this action had little real effect because Thai diplomats in those countries remained more sympathetic towards their hosts than towards their Prime Minister.

Indochina's situation was even more anomalous because it was among the colonies controlled by the Vichy government in defeated France, whose pro-German stance made it a *de facto* ally of the Japanese. During 1940–41 the colony came under strong pressure to allow Japanese forces access to its territory and facilities. The French were less than enthusiastic about such demands, but were not in a position to refuse or resist. By the end of 1941, there were Japanese troops scattered around Indochina, particularly in the strategic coastal regions. The colonial regime under Admiral Georges Decoux maintained political control in an uneasy coexistence with the Japanese. While some Japanese diplomats and officers forged links to local nationalists (particularly among the Vietnamese), strategic priorities dictated that they not rock the boat by stirring up any significant trouble against their lukewarm French allies.

This coexistence lasted until March 1945, when the fall of Vichy and the subsequent infiltration of pro-de Gaulle elements into Indochina, combined with fears of an Allied landing in the colony, led the Japanese to seize power from the French. The 9 March *coup de force*, as it is usually known, brought the imprisonment of top-ranking French officials and military officers – although some escaped into the jungle – and the granting of nominal independence to the Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Lao monarchies. In the event, Indochina was spared an Allied invasion, but it did suffer bombing of its ports and coastal shipping during the final months of the war. More importantly, perhaps, the five-month period of Japanese control dramatically changed the political and military status quo in the different parts of the colony and provided the opportunity for new actors to take the stage, as will be seen below.

Japan's impact across Southeast Asia

The Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia was important throughout the region. In broad terms, Southeast Asia was transformed by the destruction of the European colonial states and the emergence of political elites who would come to rule the successor independent states. These leaders were often more radical than earlier politicians who had in some places been able to collaborate with the colonial state in order to press for reform. But in no place was this crucial transition straightforward or free of violence.

British Burma

In Burma, younger politicians were able to achieve a greater presence in the political arena by marginalizing rivals who had cooperated with the British. With Japanese financial and political support, urban reformers mobilized new

recruits from the countryside, contributing to the growth of nationalist sentiment that would frustrate the return of British colonial power. Just as the Japanese espoused 'Asia for the Asians', young Burmese nationalists shouted 'Burma for the Burmese', denoting not only a new-found confidence in who they were and what they stood for, but a sense of common ancestry, history, and cultural identity.

Yet in Burma the Japanese period also allowed pre-existing political patterns and ideals to develop and mature. As we saw in the preceding chapter, since the 1930s nationalist organizations like the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA), the General Council for Burmese Associations (GCBA), and the General Council of Sangha Sammeggi (GCSS) had provided new opportunities to communicate among the many political and religious activists. Political elites such as the *Thakins* were already connecting with rural constituents and communities. Ideas about what constituted an independent national community were already being discussed among students, seasoned politicians, and politically active monks. Most significant among these groups was the *thakin*-led *Dobama Asiayone* ('We Burmans Society'). Through these efforts, ideas about an independent national community were already being adopted, reshaped, and re-interpreted to fit local concerns, priorities, and agendas.

Thus, cultures of nationalism were already present within British Burma at the time of the invasion in 1942. But because many of the political groups were divided along personal, class, and ideological lines, the influence of the Japanese upon these political communities varied. With the removal of British personnel from Rangoon and other locations, Japanese military officers and political agents and Burmese politicians filled the posts left vacant. Japanese officials allowed a few local, urban-based elites the privilege of displaying symbols of power, rank, and administrative office that had been granted to them only in limited degrees by the British. Those who were associated with the colonial order were arrested, persecuted, or forced to leave with the evacuating British. Many of the new leaders were young nationalists who had been trained by the Japanese in the late 1930s or those who had helped organize and recruit for the BIA. To these young nationalists, fighting alongside the Japanese in the BIA signaled their commitment to independence and an expression of their anti-colonialism. For the moment, differences in ideology, class, experiences, or aspirations among these various political elites were put aside. These pre-war tensions, however, remained only slightly below the surface.

The Japanese authorities had only limited success in stabilizing the Burmese political landscape, as personal rivalries among Burmese continued to flourish in the rush to obtain positions of influence. In the political vacuum left by the retreating British, there arose opportunities for rival politicians to settle scores, obtain influence, and move up in the political hierarchy. The Japanese concentrated on administering the major cities while BIA officers and *Thakins* took control of local areas by erecting new governing committees, often in conflict with one another and with older politicians or the Japanese army. The initial so-called *Baho* (central administration) government was chaotic. Neither it nor the succeeding provisional government established in 1942 – as head of which the Japanese installed Dr Ba Maw – nor indeed the supposedly independent

Burmese government set up in August 1943 under Ba Maw, could do much to promote stability beyond Rangoon as local interests and leaders continued to assert their autonomy. In short, pre-war rivalries re-emerged and influenced the political scene, with an effect on both the growth of nationalism and the newly formed Burma National Army (BNA).

Realizing the complexity of Burmese socio-political culture, Japanese policy-makers attempted to reach out to urban elites, in part because they needed their help to administer the state, but also to produce an image of Japan that might win popular support for the regime. The Japanese identified Buddhism as a key element of Burmese identity. While 'Asia for the Asians' was a call along racial lines that sought to differentiate Asia generally from the West, specific programs tailored for the Burmese were introduced along religious lines, in the hope that the Japanese might be regarded as fellow Buddhists, despite Burmese being Theravada Buddhists while the Japanese were followers of Mahayana. In 1942, the Japanese attempted to tap into local religio-nationalist rhetoric by sponsoring a United *Pongyi* (monks) Association, designed to purge Burma of its enemies and to promote the purification of Buddhism, under the guidance of the Japanese. A Greater East Asia Buddhist Conference in Tokyo was to be a way of bolstering Japan's image not only as a great military power, but as a center of religious authority and pilgrimage. Numerous Burmese relics of questionable origin were gathered and enshrined in a temple in Japan, so as to include Burma's sacred geography within the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

Other measures included Japanese sponsorship of associations for minorities such as the Karens. These and other minorities were particularly concerned about how their interests would be represented in a government dominated by the ethnic majority Burmans. These associations allowed the Karens to voice their concerns while helping the Japanese curb those within such communities who traditionally were pro-British. Demonstrating sensitivity to minority groups while emboldening them with political support allowed the Japanese to ingratiate themselves with such groups, in much the same way as the British had developed their own relationships with minorities.

The Japanese were most successful in winning popular support through their sponsorship of the East Asia Youth League. Essentially a public service corps, the league was run by Burmese and concerned itself with providing safety shelters, sanitation measures, and library and educational activities for the general society. Membership was broad and included Indians and other minority communities that were only marginally represented in more prominent government institutions. While apolitical in theory, this league provided the inspiration for other corps with strong political leanings. These 'national service' legions included the 'Blood', 'Political', 'Sweat', and 'Leadership' Armies. These were all initiated under the leadership of the Japanese-installed head of state Ba Maw.

There were also attempts to revitalize royal court customs, which had been in decline since the British conquest and abolition of the monarchy in 1885. Ba Maw incorporated traditional royal symbols – court music, clothing, titles, protocols, and Brahmin attendants – into official activities in an attempt to garner support and legitimacy for his Japanese-sponsored government and to

articulate leadership and authority through more traditional symbols. Public events connected to secular politics were repackaged using images and language thought to be congenial to the masses. The launching of the *Mahabama* (Great Burma) Party in 1944 was accompanied by the planting of a sacred tree alongside Rangoon's royal lakes from a region of the country that had seen the birth of many of Burma's most famous kings. Although it is difficult to say whether these measures were actively supported by the Japanese, it is important to note that only under Japanese rule did such cultural symbols re-enter the political arena. It is not at all clear, however, that the Burmese masses were favorably impressed.

The Japanese occupation allowed once-marginalized elites greater participation in affairs of the state while limiting the roles of those who had cooperated with the British. The concepts, terms, symbols, and philosophies that would shape independent Burma remained as mixed as they had been under the British. Differences of class, education, ethnicity, and religion continued to influence how citizens of the future Burma imagined their national community. Once Burmese leaders saw that the tide of the war was turning, they prepared to collaborate with the British in the hope of securing an independent Burma, which had always been their primary objective. Few expected the returning British to be keen on re-establishing their own control.

Japanese control was meanwhile falling apart. The writer John Masters – then an officer in the Indian Army – captured the drama of the final South East Asia Command counter-attack down the Irrawaddy valley in 1945:

The dust thickened under the trees lining the road until the column was motoring into a thunderous yellow tunnel, first tanks, infantry all over them, then trucks filled with men, then more tanks, going fast, nose to tail, guns, more trucks, more guns – British, Sikhs, Gurkhas, Madrassis, Pathans, Americans ... All these men knew their commanders and as the vehicles crashed past most of the soldiers were on their feet, cheering and yelling. The Gurkhas, of course, went by sitting stiffly to attention, whole truck loads bouncing four feet in the air without change of expression ... This was the old Indian Army going down to the attack, for the last time in history.¹

On 3 May 1945, the British reoccupied Rangoon. As this western front of the Japanese empire collapsed, the stage was set for a confrontation between the former colonial power and the forces of local nationalism, a confrontation that would end in independence for Burma.

Dutch Indonesia

The Japanese divided Indonesia into three zones of occupation. Sumatra was under the 25th Army, while Java and Madura were under the 16th Army. The

¹ John Masters, *The Road Past Mandalay: A personal narrative* (London: Michael Joseph, 1961), 311.

rest of Indonesia was under the Japanese Navy. Each of these commands had different concerns, priorities, and approaches. The 16th Army recognized that nationalist sentiments were relatively widespread in Java, even though nationalist leaders and organizations had been repressed for the previous decade or more by the colonial authorities. So from early on the 16th Army had to formulate an approach to local nationalist leaders that might serve Japanese objectives. The 25th Army did not face such a situation in Sumatra and was less inclined to pay attention to local nationalism until the very end. The Navy considered the east of Indonesia a 'backward' area and adopted generally repressive policies towards local people.

The Japanese wished to extract Indonesia's strategic resources such as oil, rubber, tin, and bauxite to sustain their war effort. This was, after all, one of the main reasons for the entire southward offensive. But utilizing these products proved difficult in wartime conditions, particularly because of Allied destruction of Japanese shipping. As a consequence, production fell precipitously. Inflation went totally out of control; by the end of the occupation the occupation currency that the Japanese printed was worth only about 2.5 percent of its face value.

The Japanese imposed harsh controls, requisitioned food supplies to the detriment of Indonesians, and forcefully recruited labor. By 1944 famines were occurring. The infamous recruitment of 'volunteer laborers' (*romusha*) for work even as far away as Burma and Siam led to the deaths of something like 150,000–400,000 ordinary Indonesian villagers. Several peasant uprisings occurred and were brutally crushed. The occupiers conducted public punishments including beheadings and their military police (*Kempeitai*) created a general atmosphere of terror. Even in the dark days of the Depression and political repression since the late 1920s, Dutch rule had never been as full of suffering or as brutal as the Japanese period, a situation shared across much of occupied Southeast Asia.

Although the Japanese presented themselves as liberators from European colonial oppression, in fact they were obliged by local realities to use many of the same approaches as the Dutch. They mostly relied on the same classes of local administrators to run the country and kept Dutch colonial law in place except where it was inconsistent with Japanese military law. But other aspects of European influence were abolished. The Dutch and English languages were not allowed and Japanese was introduced – a decision which by itself brought higher education almost completely to a standstill. Streets were renamed and European statues were torn down.

In Java, the 16th Army knew that its principal resource was the 50 million or so people who lived there. The two most promising groups of leaders who might assist to mobilize these people were the pre-war nationalist politicians and the Islamic religious leaders (*kyai*) of the countryside. Modernist Islamic activists also sought opportunities under the Japanese, but the latter never quite trusted them and recognized that, in any case, Modernists' influence was largely restricted to urban areas whereas the bulk of the population was rural. It took some experimentation before the Japanese could create political structures that served their purposes. In April 1942 the 16th Army set up a 'Triple-A

Movement', based on the slogan of Japan as the leader of Asia, the protector of Asia, and the light of Asia – bombast characteristic of Fascist regimes, but it seems not to have impressed Indonesians. The Triple-A Movement flopped and the Japanese decided that they had better press pre-war anti-colonial figures to support them. So they turned particularly to Sukarno, Hatta, and Sjahrir, now released from Dutch detention.

There was, however, a significant difference among the three leading nationalists. Hatta and Sjahrir were European-influenced Socialists and, therefore, anti-Fascist in principle. Despite their imprisonment by the Dutch, on the eve of the war they had offered to support the colonialists against the Japanese. This did not, however, interest the Dutch; it would indeed have required an unusually large leap of imagination for them to accept this offer. With the Japanese now in charge, Hatta decided to try to work with them to advance the cause of Indonesian independence. Sjahrir would remain aloof from the regime, try to build a clandestine network of activists, and attempt to establish contact with the Allies (which proved impossible). Sukarno, on the other hand, although one of the most highly educated Indonesians of his generation, had never been outside Indonesia, had never seen more liberal and open aspects of life in Europe and was instinctively rather attracted to the populist appeals of Fascism. In his experience of the Japanese occupation lay some of the roots of his later bombastic, authoritarian style as first President of Indonesia.

The Japanese also turned towards Islam. By late 1942 they were cultivating rural *kyais*, whose religious schools – which emphasized both martial and spiritual disciplines – resonated with Japanese notions of *Bushido*. But with the more educated and puritan leaders of Islamic Modernism they had problems. The leading Modernist Haji Rasul led objections to bowing towards the Emperor in Tokyo, which he saw as offending Muslims' obligation to pray only in the direction of Mecca and to recognize only one God, and to the Japanese abolition of Arabic in schools. The Japanese had to give way on the latter issue. They also had to abandon the demand that their war be declared a Holy War (*jihad*), a nonsensical idea in Islamic thought, for a Holy War could hardly be fought on behalf of non-Muslim *kafir* such as the Japanese. Such issues enhanced the distrust between the Japanese and the urban Modernists. But cooperation went well with the rural *kyais*, over a thousand of whom underwent propaganda-filled training courses in Jakarta by the end of the war.

Semi-military youth movements were formed from early 1943 onwards. Auxiliary forces called *Heiho* were also formed to support the Japanese military. At the end of the war perhaps 2 million youths were in such organizations and some 25,000 in *Heiho*. The most significant of the proto-nationalist movements were set up from late 1943 onwards. In October *Peta* (an acronym for *Pembela Tanah Air*, Protectors of the Fatherland) was created as an auxiliary guerrilla force. This formed an Indonesian army that at the end of the war had 37,000 men in Java, 1,600 in Bali and 20,000 in Sumatra, where it was commonly given its Japanese name *Giyugun* (volunteer soldiers). *Peta* officers were *kyais*, former teachers, former members of the colonial armed forces and government officials. Among them was Soedirman, a former Islamic schoolteacher who would become the leading military figure of the Indonesian Revolution.

A new organization for controlling Islam was set up in October 1943 called *Masyumi* (from *Majlis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia*, Consultative Council of Indonesian Muslims). The urban Modernist politicians were kept away from its leadership, which was instead given to figures from the non-political *Muhammadiyah* educational system and Kyai Haji Hasjim Asjari of the Traditionalist, rural-based organization Nahdlatul Ulama. In January 1944 *Jawa Hokokai* (Java Service Association) was set up under the leadership of Sukarno and Hasjim Asjari for everyone over the age of 14, but of course was closely supervised by the Japanese. They now promoted Sukarno as the leader of a future state of Indonesia. On 7 September 1944, the Japanese Prime Minister explicitly promised that independence would come at some stage. *Barisan Hizbullah* (God's Forces) was set up as a military wing for *Masyumi* in December 1944; at war's end it had some 50,000 members. *Jawa Hokokai* also got its own guerrilla force called *Barisan Pelopor* (Vanguard Column), with 80,000 members by the time of the Japanese surrender.

Java was now ripe for revolution: mobilized and politicized by desperately hard times and anti-European propaganda, with thousands of young men who had at least basic levels of military training and with Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere disintegrating in the face of Allied victories. From March 1945, planning began for Indonesian independence under Japanese auspices – a process which the latter carefully supervised. On the Indonesian side, there was debate about whether the philosophical basis of the state should be Islam or some form of secular nationalism. Sukarno and others favored the latter and carried the day: *Pancasila* (the Five Principles) was to be the foundation of the Indonesian state and, as it turned out, a focus of political contention for decades to come.

By July 1945, with their empire on the point of collapse, the Japanese decided that Indonesia should be given independence soon in the hope of frustrating the re-establishment of a European colonial state. But it was too late. Before the Japanese could arrange the final steps and a declaration of independence, the war came to its horrific end. Because the Allied campaigns bypassed all but a tiny part of the eastern archipelago, when Japan surrendered on 15 August, there was a military vacuum in Indonesia. There had been no Allied reconquest and there were no Allied forces present in the main islands. It was to be several weeks before the first Allied representatives reached Batavia – to which the Japanese had already given its older Indonesian name, Jakarta. So military control rested nervously in the hands of demoralized and apprehensive Japanese forces. Now Indonesians themselves could take the initiative, for with Japanese authority in disarray and no Allied forces present to accept their surrender, there was an unprecedented opportunity for independence to be grasped.

British Malaya and Singapore

To Sir Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister, the fall of Singapore was the 'worst disaster' that had befallen British arms. Defeat by an underrated power – and an Asian one at that – was a devastating blow to British military

pride. That some 120,000 Allied prisoners of war were taken by the Japanese in the Malayan campaign – and paraded openly in the streets for the local population to see – further added to Britain's humiliation. The myth of British invincibility was shattered forever. In London, a reappraisal of Britain's colonial record in Malaya was put into motion and, arising from that review, the Colonial Office undertook the planning of a new constitutional policy that would result in its controversial Malayan Union scheme after the war. That scheme envisaged London taking the unprecedented step of creating a united Malaya through what amounted to the annexation of the legally still-sovereign Malay states and their union with the former British Straits Settlements of Penang and Melaka. Even more ground-breaking was the proposal that Singapore, the remaining settlement, was to be detached from the Malayan Union to remain as a separate colony.

But while the shock of defeat was acutely felt in London, the scale of the tragedy reverberated even more resoundingly in the Asian communities in Malaya and Singapore who now faced a cruel occupation. Notwithstanding Japanese professions of 'Asia for Asians', they made it plain that their mission was empire-building, not liberating Asians from other empires. Singapore was quickly renamed *Syonan-to* or 'Island of the Light of the South' to reflect the island's new position as the center of the southern regions of Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. In short, Malaya was now a Japanese colony within the empire – and its new masters would do as they pleased with it. The pre-war Federation of Malaya was dissolved and the peninsula was divided into ten provinces, each administered by a Japanese governor. Tokyo time, two hours ahead of Malayan time, was adopted as the standard for Malaya and Singapore. In October 1943, the four northern Malay states of Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, and Perlis were transferred to Thai control, partly to reward Bangkok for its support of Japanese objectives, but mainly to reduce the Japanese area of command and to release troops for the Burma campaign.

To impose law and order and to subdue the local population during the crucial early days of the occupation, Japanese soldiers of the 25th Army terrorized locals at will with slaps, kicks, arbitrary detention, rape, and torture, and meted out summary executions of looters – their decapitated heads impaled publicly on spikes as a warning. The overt use of terror to intimidate the local population abated only after the establishment of civil administration, although the pervasive presence and brutal tactics of the *Kempeitai*, the notorious military police, continued to strike fear in the local populations throughout the occupation years.

In dealing with Malaya's diverse communities, the Japanese adopted a varied approach. Their attitude towards the Chinese community was initially hostile and reflected their extreme distrust of the Malayan Chinese, many of whom had supported China's cause by participating in anti-Japanese activities before the invasion. Many of the soldiers of the 25th Army had a deep-seated dislike for the Chinese in Malaya as a result of their prior involvement in the protracted war against China. Eager to bring the Chinese population quickly to heel and to weed out hostile elements from within its midst so as to consolidate Japan's occupation and free up its army for combat operations elsewhere, a systematic

campaign of public 'mass screening' of the adult male Chinese population, conducted with the help of hooded local informers, was undertaken in Singapore shortly after the occupation in February, and extended throughout Malaya in March. The notorious *sook ching* or so-called 'purification through elimination' campaigns targeted all Chinese men aged between 18 and 50 years, and especially those involved in any form of anti-Japanese activity, secret societies and those who had actively supported the British or Chongqing (Chungking) government. The Japanese took away thousands of Chinese men suspected of hostility towards them for summary execution. The victims included many who had no association with anti-Japanese activities. The number of Chinese who perished in the purge cannot be accurately ascertained but it was estimated that between 6000 and 40,000 could have been killed. The brutal Japanese assault on the Chinese community no doubt weakened open resistance to their rule but it also left an undercurrent of distrust and hatred towards the new masters.

After the initial purge of the Chinese, the Japanese regime – recognizing the value of Chinese wealth and enterprise for overcoming wartime shortages and restructuring the Malayan economy – adopted a more conciliatory policy towards them. An Overseas Chinese Association (OCA) with branches throughout Malaya was created for dealing with the Chinese. Chaired by a respected but reluctant Straits Chinese elder, Dr Lim Boon Keng, the OCA was given the task of raising MD 50 million from the Chinese community as a 'voluntary contribution' to the military administration to atone for their pre-war opposition to Japan. Despite strong Japanese pressure, the Chinese community managed to raise only MD 28 million and the OCA had to take a loan of the remaining MD 22 million from the Yokohama Specie Bank, to be repaid within a year at 6 percent interest. Overall, the large Chinese population in Malaya cooperated outwardly because they valued their lives and wanted to gain profits.

More radical elements among the Chinese refused to cooperate and joined the underground anti-Japanese resistance movement that became the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), the armed wing of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). British agents from Force 136, a unit of the British covert Special Operations Executive Far East, supplied them with arms and training. The MPAJA conducted raids behind enemy lines and, by the time the occupation ended, had units throughout the country and was then able to gain effective control of Malaya within days.

In contrast to the harsh treatment meted out to the Chinese, the Malays enjoyed generally favorable treatment from the Japanese. Prior to their invasion, the Japanese had cultivated ties with radical non-aristocratic Malay activists belonging to the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (KMM, Young Malay Union) whose aim was to achieve independence through a political union of the Malay peoples of Malaya and Indonesia. During the invasion of Malaya, KMM collaborators were involved in fifth-column activities as guides and interpreters for the Japanese army, and contributed to the mistaken perception in British Malaya Command that Malays as a community were actively collaborating with the Japanese.

As the Japanese distrusted the pro-British traditional Malay leadership, they favored and relied initially on the KMM activists to help them establish rapport with the Malay community during the immediate aftermath of their conquest. But five months into the occupation, the Japanese had doubts about encouraging the premature development of radical indigenous nationalist objectives and banned the KMM – just as they had disbanded the BIA in Burma. They thus politically marginalized the KMM. Its leader, Ibrahim Yaacob, however, was given the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and put in charge, under Japanese supervision, of a newly created Volunteer Army (*Giyugun*), also known in Malay as *Pembela Tanah Air* (PETA, Defenders of the Fatherland) – the same terms used for such organizations in Indonesia. The large-scale mobilization and militarization of young Malays were also carried out through other volunteer units like the *Heiho* (Auxiliary Servicemen) and *Giyutai* (Volunteer Corps). The use of such largely Malay units to assist the Japanese in supporting anti-MPAJA operations contributed in no small measure to the worsening of inter-ethnic relations between Malays and Chinese.

With the marginalization of the KMM, and given Japanese distrust of the pro-British Malay rulers, the way was open for the pre-war aristocratic elite and civil servants to assume the leadership of Malay communities. Upon the appointment of Japanese governors to run the Malay states, the status of the traditional Malay Sultans who headed the political and social order before the war was reduced from that of legal sovereigns to being subordinate officials. Confined to their palaces and cut off from their subjects, the rulers were not in a position to help or protect them as in pre-war days. The indigenous aristocratic elite and civil servants were now given the opportunity to rise to higher positions than had been possible under the British. By treating them well and promoting them, the Japanese also ensured their compliance and cooperation. The experience gained by these elites during the war years strengthened their political self-confidence and enabled them to have a head start in asserting the leadership of their communities when the British returned.

Like Malays, the Indians also enjoyed generally favorable treatment under Japanese rule. To encourage Indian nationalist activity aimed at overthrowing British rule in India, the Japanese supported organizations like the Indian Independence League (IIL) whose leadership included Indian nationalists like S. C. Goho, K. P. K. Menon, and Mohan Singh. In a series of mass rallies, Indian prisoners-of-war from the British army were invited to join the Indian National Army (INA) and large numbers did so. But friction with the Japanese over Indian nationalist objectives resulted in the replacement of the leadership and the appointment of the pro-Japanese Subhas Chandra Bose, a charismatic former President of the Indian National Congress, as the new leader of the IIL and INA in July 1943. Bose's call for the forceful liberation of India from British rule through cooperation with Japan and his organization of the Free India Army and the Free Indian Provisional Government aroused strong support among the Indian community. But his death in a plane crash at the end of the war deprived the IIL of its leader.

In Malaya, the shock of British defeat at the hands of Japanese forces left an indelible imprint on indigenous minds that the British were vulnerable rulers.

This set the stage for a simmering anti-colonial nationalism among the more radical elements. But this nascent territorial nationalism was still unable to transcend the ethnic divides that had become even deeper as a result of both Japan's uneven handling of the various communities and the increased ethnic competition and insecurity brought by wartime conditions. Heightened ethno-nationalism was played out violently after the Japanese surrender as Chinese and Malays clashed in parts of Malaya. The communal vendetta and bloodletting that ensued sorely tested inter-ethnic peace and threatened Malaya's increasingly fragile social stability.

French Indochina

The Japanese 'semi-occupation' of Indochina and the continuation of French rule until March 1945 produced a peculiar mixture of continuity and change. For much of the war, the colonial power remained in place and there was only slightly more space for nationalist activity than had been the case in the 1930s. The Japanese gave moral support and inspiration to some anti-colonial elements among the Vietnamese, while in Cambodia and Laos the French encouraged mild cultural nationalism. It was only after the Japanese *coup de force* of March 1945 that the situation changed dramatically, enabling new leaders and forces to emerge during the final months of the war. Most significant was the power vacuum following Japan's surrender, which provided an opportunity for the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) to launch its revolution in Vietnam, just as it offered an opportunity for Indonesian nationalists to declare their Republic.

Japanese ambivalence towards Vietnamese nationalist aspirations has already been mentioned, but some contacts were established. Shortly before the war, a few Vietnamese nationalists had begun to look to Japan for inspiration and possible assistance, as an earlier generation had done several decades before. There was hope for the return of Prince Cuong De, who was still in exile in Tokyo. In particular, the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects developed a strong pro-Japanese orientation and began to disseminate alleged prophetic messages about the eventual defeat of the French and the return of Cuong De, 'the true king'. Japan also found allies among disaffected intellectuals, notably the Confucian scholar Tran Trong Kim and the former mandarin Ngo Dinh Diem, and did take some measures to protect them from French harassment.

Cambodia and Laos were of comparatively less significance and wartime developments in those colonies had little to do with Japanese influence until March 1945. The main threat to French rule came from across the Mekong, where Phibun's pan-Thai policies had revived psychological and cultural connections with Laos and, to a lesser extent, Cambodia. The Buddhist Institutes established by the French for the specific purpose of weakening these links now became gathering places for small groups of nationalist elites. Particularly in Cambodia, the small core of intellectuals associated with the Buddhist Institute and *Nagara Vatta* newspaper began to assert themselves more vocally.

In July 1942 there was an outbreak of anti-French sentiment in Cambodia

centered on a prominent monk named Hem Chieu, who became involved in a plot against the colonial regime. He was arrested and forced to defrock without the proper religious ceremonies, which was a grave offence in many Cambodians' eyes. Laymen affiliated with *Nagara Vatta* joined with a number of monks to organize a large-scale protest in Phnom Penh, which was quickly suppressed by the authorities. This event became known as the 'Umbrella War' because so many Buddhist monks carry umbrellas to protect themselves from the sun. Hem Chieu and several other nationalist figures were packed off to prison, where the ex-monk died the following year.

The wartime period saw the appearance of two figures who would dominate the Cambodian scene for the next few decades, often as bitter rivals. King Norodom Sihanouk (r. 1941-55, 1993-2004) was the last 'protected monarch' under colonial rule, while Son Ngoc Thanh, the ethnic Khmer from Cochinchina, was among the group of intellectuals linked to the Buddhist Institute. He emerged as a vocal nationalist after the outbreak of the war and was involved with the protests in July 1942. Thanh escaped to Thailand and ended up in Tokyo, one of the few Cambodians to have openly established links with Japan. There is some evidence of Japanese support for the protests, but the nature and degree of this support are not clear.

After the Japanese coup of March 1945, Cambodia was granted nominal independence and King Sihanouk assumed a more active and prominent role in his country's affairs. Son Ngoc Thanh returned and briefly served as Prime Minister in Sihanouk's government. But the two men had different agendas and, for Sihanouk, Thanh soon became a threat rather than an ally. When the Japanese surrender brought first British occupation and then the return of the French, Thanh's efforts to organize resistance were overruled by Sihanouk. In October 1945, Thanh was arrested and sent off to exile in France, temporarily removing an obstacle to the King's ambitions.

Although wartime Laos experienced nothing comparable to the Umbrella War, nationalist sentiments were quietly fermenting just the same. The French were generally more successful at promoting a kind of 'loyalist nationalism' among Lao intellectuals than they were in Cambodia. *Lao Nhai* ('Great Laos' or 'Greater Laos'), the counterpart to the *Nagara Vatta* newspaper, lent its name to a movement - carefully directed by the French - which aimed at a cultural renaissance among the elite. While *Lao Nhai* did discuss nationalist themes, it was generally more critical of Vietnamese immigration into Laos than of the colonial regime. Meanwhile, another group of nationalists took refuge across the Mekong and forged links with prominent Thai figures. These exiles were to appear on the scene in March 1945 as the *Lao Issara* (Independent Lao). The most important figure, however, was Phetsarath, the French-educated prince who had become the highest-ranking Lao in the colonial government. He had often expressed criticism of certain policies, particularly regarding the immigration issue, and had both the popularity and the ambition to play an even greater role. The opportunity came in March 1945. Phetsarath, who had held the newly created post of Prime Minister since 1941, cooperated with the Japanese while strengthening his hand against his cousins the king and crown prince, who remained loyal to the now-disempowered French.

The Japanese surrender in August 1945 left a power vacuum with competing factions of Lao jockeying for power. Although some of the elite refused to be associated with an anti-French movement, Phetsarath was able to cobble together a provisional government with returnees from Thailand and his half-brother Souphanouvong, who had a more radical political orientation and close connections to revolutionaries in Vietnam. King Sisavangvong (r. 1904–59) attempted to restore the protectorate in anticipation of a French return, but he was overruled and forced to abdicate. In October 1945 a full-fledged 'Lao Issara' government was proclaimed in Vientiane. Although Phetsarath declined to head the new government, his personal prestige was to a large extent the glue holding it together. The Lao Issara regime was fragile, however, and its control over more remote parts of the country tenuous. More crucially, it lacked the firepower to oppose the French forces which began to infiltrate across the Mekong in late 1945. After several months of resistance, the Vientiane government (including Phetsarath) fled to Thailand and the king ruled once more from Luang Phabang under French authority.

March 1945 also gave birth to an 'independent' government in Vietnam, as the 'Empire of Annam' re-emerged under Emperor Bao Dai, seconded by Tran Trong Kim as Prime Minister. While the Japanese remained the power behind the throne, the imperial government did exercise more authority than it had under the French – although only in Tonkin and Annam, since Japan retained control over Cochin China. Kim and a newly assembled cabinet made valiant attempts to deal with the country's problems, the most serious being a major famine which had broken out in the northern provinces. This crisis, which was due to a combination of Japanese requisition of grain and the disruption of supplies from the south caused by Allied bombings, caused an estimated two million deaths, and it proved to be more than the regime could manage. Equally serious, however, was the threat from the ICP-led revolutionary movement, which had been building up its strength throughout the war.

In February 1941, Nguyen Ai Quoc – now calling himself Ho Chi Minh, the name he would bear until his death – slipped over the border from China into the homeland he had left nearly three decades before. The ICP held a Party conference at Pac Bo in the northern province of Cao Bang in May 1941 and established a Party-led popular front, usually known as the Viet Minh. Ho and his comrades judged correctly that the French-Japanese coexistence would not last forever, so they concentrated on expanding their rural base of support while avoiding clashes with either foreign occupier as much as possible. Toward the end of the war, Ho was able to build ties with American forces operating out of China. Meanwhile, the famine provided an opportunity to strengthen support for the Viet Minh by confiscating and distributing stocks of grain. The imperial government was able to make some headway in the towns and cities, but increasingly large patches of the countryside belonged to the Viet Minh. When the Japanese surrendered, Ho issued a general call to arms and a series of localized seizures of power ensued throughout the three regions of colonial Vietnam. Although this 'August Revolution' was less organized and more fragmented than Party histories have acknowledged, the Viet Minh was able to seize power. On 2 September 1945, Ho proclaimed the Democratic Republic of

Vietnam to cheering crowds in Hanoi. The euphoria was short-lived, however, as the Vietnamese were soon confronted by British and Chinese occupying forces as well as the threat of an imminent French return.

American Philippines

In January 1942, having secured Manila, the Japanese proclaimed the end of American occupation. Tens of thousands of foreign nationals, including Jews who had escaped Nazi persecution in Europe and fled to the Philippines only to be imprisoned by the Japanese, were interned at the University of Santo Tomas. Filipinos were ordered to sever relations with Americans in any capacity, while fulfilling the needs of the Japanese military. But Filipinos dragged their feet. Only a few obeyed the Japanese order to turn in their arms, for they expected the USAFFE to return, at which time their weapons would prove invaluable. Those caught by the military police (*Kempeitai*) were imprisoned, beaten, decapitated, or shot.

To maintain the order that was needed to extract the country's resources, the Japanese relied on national figures. General Masami Maeda authorized the establishment of the Philippine Executive Commission, staffed by Commonwealth leaders who were left behind by the fleeing Quezon. They included Jorge Vargas, Quintin Paredes, Benigno Aquino, Jose Laurel, Antonio de las Alas, and Jose Yulo. Conceived as an advisory commission, over time it obtained limited powers in administrative and executive matters. For purposes of social control and surveillance, the Japanese created neighborhood associations of five to ten families across the archipelago, as they did in other occupied areas. The associations ensured attendance at public events, functioned as small-scale administrative units, and distributed the meagre provisions the Japanese provided for the populace at large. In a remarkably short time, the Japanese administration had seemingly reached the lives of millions of ordinary Filipinos.

Having banned political parties, the Japanese instituted the supposedly apolitical public service organization known as *Kapisanan sa Paglilingod sa Bagong Pilipinas* (KALIBAPI, Association for Service to the New Philippines). Only members of KALIBAPI could work for the administration (or in a related capacity). Headed by Japanophile Benigno S. Ramos, KALIBAPI's mass drive for membership produced mixed results. By July 1943, it tallied only 350,000 members.

Japanese wartime policy was characterized by repression and co-optation. To build a new Philippines, Filipinos were encouraged to celebrate their Asian nature by shedding the 'degenerate' influence of American culture based on individualism, liberalism, and democracy. Strict censorship was also imposed. The *Kempeitai* closed newspapers, and put all other forms of mass media and publication under the eventual control of the Japanese-run agency *Manila Shinbun-sha*. Of particular concern was preventing Filipinos from listening to foreign radio broadcasts; in their stead, the airways were filled with Japanese propaganda.

In their attempts to de-Americanize Filipinos and celebrate their own putatively indigenous culture, the Japanese banned the use of English, making

Japanese and Tagalog official languages. Streets, for instance, were renamed in one of those two languages. The Japanese also reconstituted public education, which included the rewriting of textbooks. With Japanese as the language of instruction, pedagogy emphasized the role of Filipinos in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, discouraged materialism, and promoted vocational education. Results did not, however, conform to Japanese plans. Teachers creatively distorted official lesson plans, while the number of enrolled students during this difficult time dropped precipitously.

Leaders in Tokyo ensured the collaboration of the Filipino elite by promising independence before December 1943. In June, KALIBAPI was permitted to form the Preparatory Commission for Philippine Independence. The constitution it drafted stressed the duties and obligations of the country's citizens in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. The Japanese administration congratulated the commission on its work. Delegates to the National Assembly were thereafter elected. Benigno S. Aquino was chosen as Speaker of the Assembly and Jose P. Laurel as President of the new Republic. On 14 October 1943, the Japanese-sponsored Republic of the Philippines was officially declared. Veteran of the 1896 Revolution General Emilio Aguinaldo and Japanophile Artemio Ricarte hoisted the Philippines flag as the national anthem played, displays of nationalism formerly banned under the Japanese. Only Japan and its occupied territories recognized the new Republic, whose treaty of alliance with Tokyo provided for close collaboration on political, economic, and military matters. The agreement struck fear among Filipinos, as mandatory conscription beckoned. Laurel tried to assuage their fear by announcing that Filipinos would be deployed only within the Philippines.

In an attempt to demonstrate his authority, Laurel successfully lobbied the Japanese to grant amnesty to citizens convicted of political crimes of sedition, illicit association, engaging in guerrilla activity, rumor-mongering, and the like. As a result, according to the Japanese-controlled daily, *The Tribune*, thousands of guerrillas surrendered. Rehabilitation funds were disbursed to dozens of governors. The exercise was farcical. Under pressure, governors randomly gathered people who 'surrendered' multiple times. Locally, this became a badge of honor.

Meanwhile, food shortages devastated society. By November 1943, the shortfall of rice in Manila reached alarming levels; the starving and dying littered the streets. To alleviate pressure upon resources, the Laurel government transferred civil servants to the provinces. Despite rationing, attempts by the National Rice and Corn Corporation (NARIC) to procure rice were unsuccessful. Dealers hoarded supplies and traded only with the Japanese Army and Japanese companies, who controlled the currency, or with black marketeers. The last paid two to three times government prices, which caused the price of rice in the open market to soar.

In January 1944, the Bigasang Bayan (BIBA, People's Rice Granary) replaced the ineffectual NARIC. This new body – less crippled by corruption than the NARIC – for a short time rather successfully acquired rice and other cereals from Central Luzon. This enabled the government to ration rice at 120 grams per day per person in Manila. Later this was lowered to 60 grams,

supplemented with an equal amount of sweet potatoes. But as conditions deteriorated, the rations dried up altogether.

To alleviate the crisis, Laurel created special courts to try profiteers and hoarders but only a few cases were filed. He also mandated governors and mayors to meet rice quotas and expand areas planted with food crops. Filipinos aged 16 to 60 were drafted to labor in the fields for one eight-hour day per week. The lack of transportation, robbery, and frequent attacks by Japanese soldiers and Filipino guerrillas hindered the program. In a measure of last resort, Laurel authorized the Constabulary to confiscate rice from hoarders. Dealers bribed the constabulary, however, and the confiscated rice rarely reached its intended destination. The *Kempeitai* took matters into their own hands, forcibly seizing rice from hoarders and producers without informing the Filipino administration. Laurel demanded that the stocks be returned. Rice only trickled in and its price remained high. Abandoning its resolve to be independent of the Japanese, the government replaced BIBA with a joint Filipino-Japanese Rice and Corn Administration. Most of the produce it obtained was consumed by the Japanese Army.

The worsening economic and social conditions further damaged the standing of the Japanese. Stories of the horrific Bataan Death March demonized them in the eyes of Filipinos, who longed for the fulfillment of General MacArthur's promise to return. Filipinos associated the pre-war American presence with prosperity and contentment. Men were angered by the Japanese officers' penchant for publicly slapping them in the face for small infractions, while rape and the forced sexual slavery of Filipino women further alienated the populace at large. Anger began to solidify into resistance.

In simplified terms, Filipino resistance was divided between the *Hukbong Mapagpalaya Laban sa mga Hapon* (Hukbalahap, United Army Against the Japanese), a left-leaning organization based in Central Luzon that championed independence, and an archipelago-wide network of guerrillas loyal to the Americans and the USAFFE. The former, whose members became known as Huks, espoused equal distribution of land for Central Luzon's peasants. The Huks found ample support among other leftist organizations, including the pre-war CCP and the newly established Squadron 48 (*Wa Chi*). The latter was a China-backed organization consisting of Chinese trade unionists, teachers, clerks, and newspapermen from Manila. The Huks regularly ambushed Japanese troops and confiscated their weapons and foodstuffs. They saw themselves as the people's army. To keep their organization corruption-free, they would punish anyone – even decorated soldiers – who abused his authority.

USAFFE guerrilla units provided MacArthur with intelligence on Japanese troop movements and installations. Many units were led by American or Filipino USAFFE officers who had refused to surrender or escaped from imprisonment. Guerrillas distributed underground newspapers and, by keeping some areas free of Japanese control, they brought about a semblance of stability during the occupation. They were also riddled with infighting and abuse of authority. One infamous case in Rizal pitted two groups, known as Hunters and Markings, against each other, a conflict that ended in significant bloodshed. Other bands instilled fear and hatred among communities by sequestering

goods, molesting citizens, and raping women. For their unique assistance to the Americans, guerrillas evaded punishment and even enjoyed post-war rewards while others were subjected to accusations and indictments for collaboration with the Japanese.

In September 1944, in response to American bombing of Japanese installations in and around Manila, the newly appointed General Yamashita assigned his best commanders to defend Leyte, where he rightly assumed the Americans would concentrate their attack. But the American naval onslaught overwhelmed Japanese forces, destroying defense facilities and supply dumps. On 20 October 1944, MacArthur returned to the Philippines as he had promised. American forces and Filipino resistance groups relentlessly pursued the Japanese. By February 1945, they had secured Manila. The Japanese-installed puppet government was forced into exile and the Japanese empire collapsed on its southeastern front.

Conclusion

The Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia produced a wide variety of consequences, but there were some striking parallels across the region. With colonial authority destroyed, urban nationalists sought an opportunity to strengthen their ties with rural communities and to espouse notions of an independent nation – ideas that under European authorities were often considered seditious or criminal. Within limits, the Japanese occupiers allowed student leaders, politicians, and local activists to articulate such ideas. Japanese brutality meanwhile widened the constituency of those who sought to be rid of all foreign overlords. Older generations of politicians who had worked within the colonial system were often marginalized or even imprisoned on suspicion that they remained loyal to the colonial power. With younger, more outspoken local leaders at the helm, it even appeared at first that the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere might be achieved alongside local aspirations for independence. But Japanese oppression and then the defeat of Japan closed that door and opened other possibilities and opportunities for activists to grasp.

Crucially, the Japanese developed and nurtured national armies in the former colonial states. Such indigenous military forces contributed to the mobilization of the countryside and the spread of nationalist ideals. They offered local (and often competing) political, economic, and social interests a common cause worth fighting for. Pre-existing rivalries that stemmed from class, ethnic, religious, and patron-client loyalties were often – but not always – de-emphasized as long as a common enemy and interests were maintained. In British Burma and Dutch Indonesia, the nationalist armed forces tended to diminish the influence of Communist groups by incorporating them into their ranks, although in French Indochina the Communists continued to operate independently and were able to dominate anti-colonial action. The intimate association of national armed forces and the struggle for independence in Burma and Indonesia would help to shape the nature of post-independence politics in those two countries, while the absence of a Japanese-sponsored national army in Vietnam facilitated the growth and popularity of the Communist Party.

At the point when the Japanese surrendered in August 1945, key elements shaping the contested post-war period were already identifiable. The Western colonial powers were poised to attempt to return to their former colonies but – with the exception of the Americans – they had little understanding of how profound the changes during the Japanese occupation had been. Many leaders in British Burma and Malaya, French Indochina, and Dutch Indonesia expected some form of political independence in recognition for their role in opposing the Japanese, but few could reach a consensus on what form their new national community might take. Even in the Philippines – where independence was already scheduled – conflicting elites had wildly different expectations of the political future. The Vietnam War(s), the Indonesian Revolution, the Burmese threat of revolution, the conflicting movements of Laos and Cambodia, and the violence that took place in Malaya and the Philippines after the war were due in part to varying visions of what should constitute the new national community, who should lead it, and what sort of country should emerge. In some cases, claims of legitimacy were drawn from the war experience, but in other cases long-standing patron-client rivalries, ethnic tensions and religious differences re-emerged onto the political scene. A difficult, often violent, road to independence lay ahead.