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CROSS-CURRENTS
EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

Memory: Troublesome, Irrepressible, and (Painfully) Illuminating

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Nakano Satoshi 中野聡. *Tōnan ajia senryō to nihonjin: Teikoku nihon no kaitai* 東南アジア占領と日本人: 帝国・日本の解体 [The occupation of Southeast Asia and the Japanese: Dissolution of the Japanese empire]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2012. ISBN: 430922542X.

Itagaki Ryūta 板垣竜太, Chŏng Chi-yŏng 鄭智永, and Iwasaki Minoru 岩崎稔, eds. *Higashi ajia no kioku no ba* 東アジアの記憶の場 [The site of memories in East Asia]. Tokyo: Kawade Shobō, 2011. ISBN: 4000283758.

The relationship between memory and history is becoming a hot subject in East Asian–language historical studies. Clashes between nationalistic mobilizations of old colonial wounds and rationalizations of the neocolonialist variety—stoked with depressing regularity by the news media and political groups in China, Korea, and Japan—continue unabated in East Asia, while national histories have recently come under increasing scrutiny and criticism. At the same time, discrepancies between memory articulated in the domain of personal experience, in the form of memoirs, documentary interviews, essays, and fictional accounts, on the one hand, and "official" histories represented in textbooks, academic writings, and other types of institutionalized discourse, on the other, have become increasingly problematic (or, seen from a cynical perspective, politically useful). As the generations who directly experienced colonial conditions, even if only as children, are physically passing from the scene, their recorded voices are gaining new status as historical resources. Professionally trained historians like myself are sometimes taken to task for inadequately (or, again put cynically, politically insensitively) addressing media-fueled controversies such as the 2007 public outrage of Koreans and Korean Americans over the selection of Yoko Kawashima Watkins's *So Far from the Bamboo Grove* (1994), a semifictionalized account of her childhood terrors fleeing formerly colonized Korea after Japan's defeat in 1945, as a textbook in some California secondary schools (see Lim 2012). As it turns out, there are now more than a few excellent books in East Asian languages that examine the vexing relationships between memory and history (or "histories"), including the two volumes taken up in this review essay.

Nakano Satoshi's (*Tōnan ajia senryō to nihonjin*) is a publication in Iwanami Shoten's monograph series *Senso no keiken wo tou* (Questioning the war experience), which, along with the publisher's *Iwanami kōza: Higashi ajia kin-gendai tsūshi* (Iwanami lecture series: A comprehensive history of modern and contemporary East Asia) (2011–2012), consciously attempts to expand the scope of Japanese history to enmesh it in the overlapping networks of Asian experiences of modernity in its multicultural, multinational entirety. Nakano, a specialist on modern Philippine history and the history of the U.S. colonial empire, is not interested in worrying the familiar questions that have plagued popular Japanese interpretations of the Asia-Pacific War, such as "Why did Japan plunge into such a risky war?" or "How responsible was Tōjō Hideki in ruining Japan's chances at a victory, or even a graceful exit?" Making use of an astounding number of surviving military documents, bureaucratic records (some top secret, now unclassified), and first-person accounts of soldiers and civilians—including diaries, memoirs, and collections of letters—Nakano instead weaves a hypnotically complex tapestry of the rise and fall of the Japanese empire in Southeast Asia.

Tōnan ajia senryō begins with the on-the-spot reactions of novelists, writers, and journalists—some of whom, such as Ibuse Masuji, Takami Jun, and Kon Hidemi, would eventually gain substantial fame after the war—facing their sudden mobilization and deployment to the Southeast Asian front around late 1941. Their immediate responses consisted mostly of befuddlement and confusion, laced with at least some hope that the Pacific War would open up a new horizon for Japan's war efforts following the successful execution of the Pearl Harbor attack. Delving deeply into the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of these mobilized intellectuals and civilians, as well as military personnel, oscillating between the poles of hopeful idealism—abetted by a certain faith in the rhetoric of the liberation of Asian races from the yoke of Western imperialism and guilt-laden despair, Nakano unspools the larger narrative of how the Japanese encounter with the Southeast Asian "other" actually sped up the collapse of the Japanese empire.

Along the way, he illuminates the fundamental gap between the ideology of liberation from Western imperialism, promoted as the central guiding principle of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, and the practical objective of securing material resources for the continuation of the war efforts. Nakano does not deny the possibility that this rhetoric of "Asian lands for Asians" might have positively stimulated local nationalisms, but he conclusively shows that the "success" of the initial Japanese occupation in the Philippines, Burma (Myanmar), Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia was predicated on maintaining, or even rehabilitating, existing structures of domination by U.S., British, and Dutch colonialists. Japanese propaganda efforts, even when they appeared benign and accommodating, were always backed up by threats of raw violence, which could

explode at any moment into executions without proper trials, sudden confinement in concentration camps, or, worse, massacres of the civilian population. These threats were concretized in the form of the summary execution in May 1942 of José Abad Santos, acting president of Manuel Quezón's Commonwealth government in the Philippines; the wholesale slaughter of anti-Japanese guerrillas and their families in the Panay Island villages; the operational guideline in Singapore to "exterminate" Chinese minorities who refused to cooperate financially with the occupying Japanese; and so on.

Meanwhile, recollections from military officers engaged at the war front, such as Sakakibara Masaharu and Hitomi Junsuke, eloquently testify to the fact that the basic livelihood (*minsei*) of the occupied population never received the attention it deserved. Lieutenant Sakakibara, an intellectual and an imperial relative, was aghast at the behavior of the "ugly Japanese," both military and civilian, who monopolized shoes and textile goods in the market, frequented "comfort stations," or drunkenly solicited impoverished Dutch women in broad daylight. A more telling episode comes from Captain Hitomi, a propaganda unit officer in the Philippines, who lamented that the Japanese could not possibly compete against the "democratic materialism" of U.S. counterpropaganda that promised to pay soldiers' salaries and even retirement benefits to the properly registered anti-Japanese guerrillas (189–204). Drawing upon these instructive, often painful reminiscences, Nakano questions whether these relatively self-aware Japanese occupiers could really engage in a dialogic imagination, ready to truly "listen" to the "native population" (138). His answer is *no*, or, at the very best, *maybe,* but too late in any event for them to bring about meaningful changes in the course of the war.

Finally, Nakano provides clear-eyed, sobering accounts of Japan's efforts to mobilize nationalist movements in Southeast Asia during the latter half of the Pacific War. His narrative restores political agency to the Southeast Asian actors, even those figures generally thought to have been gullibly manipulated by the Japanese. Nakano carefully distinguishes between the limited "independence" of the Burmese, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Indonesians, and other groups promoted as strategic objectives by the Japanese military occupation and "independence" as it was imagined and pursued by Southeast Asians themselves. No matter what their "official" attitude toward the Japanese rhetoric of the Co-Prosperity Sphere might have been, Ba Maw, Manuel Quezón, Sukarno, and other Southeast Asian leaders resisted Japanese efforts to mobilize them in the Pacific War in their own ways. Nakano exposes Japan's inability to let the "independence" envisioned by Southeast Asian actors themselves guide the contour of Japanese policies, notwithstanding Minister of Foreign Affairs Shigemitsu Mamoru's last-ditch attempt between 1943 and 1945 to bring some substance to the rhetoric of "equal partnership" among Asian nations.

Densely packed with vivid descriptions of colorful episodes and insightful observations, *Tōnan ajia senryō* is one of those rare academic books that is rigorously researched and impeccably argued, yet accessible to any Japanese-speaking general reader without a political ax to grind. The book is so detailed and thorough that one cannot help but wish that it had dealt with a couple of subjects that were (intentionally or unintentionally) left out. For instance, Nakano avoids discussing the recruitment of Koreans and Taiwanese for the Southeast Asian occupation, and I am not entirely persuaded by his stated reasons—that he wants to keep the book's scope confined to the Japanese imagery of the Southeast Asian occupation—for ignoring their treatment (31–32). Likewise, the lion's share of the narratives concern the Philippines, perhaps inevitably given Nakano's specialty, and French Indochina is given rather short shrift compared to Indonesia, Malaysia, and Burma, perhaps dictated by the relative availability of first-person accounts. These are hardly serious criticisms, however, in light of the overwhelmingly rich portrait of the Japanese empire—a sprawling vista compared to the scorecard or pie chart approaches found in many books—that Nakano supplies in this highly readable and powerful study.

Higashi ajia kioku no ba is a conference volume featuring essays by members and guests of the East Asian History Forum for Criticism and Solidarity, a group that actively critiques the ways in which nationalist historiography as well as "official" or "textbook" histories of East Asian nations have obscured, marginalized, and sometimes oppressed the subaltern voices and actual life experiences of East Asian populations (see Lim and Yi 2004). *Higashi ajia kioku no ba* is the forum's latest attempt to confront history "outside the institutionalized confines of the existing practice of history-writing" (25) by critically engaging with what French historian Pierre Nora called *lieux de mémoire* (1996–1998). The volume uncovers asymmetrical articulations of memory in China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and "Manchuria," informed by divisions and categories that cut across nation-states, including those based on gender differences, colonialism, racism, and class conflicts. Structurally, the book assumes an omnibus approach: fourteen scholars each take up one topic relevant to modern East Asian experience and analyze the "myths" and "realities" behind their chosen topic in brief essay form (around twenty to thirty pages). Essays range from "Guan Yu," Kim Sŏg-u's unexpectedly beguiling account of how Koreans have maintained shrines worshipping this famous Chinese general of lore right into the twentieth century, to "Rikidōzan," Itagaki Ryūta's exposé-cum-rumination on the cross-cultural imagery of the legendary professional wrestler whose Korean ethnicity was rigorously suppressed in postwar Japan, to Chŏng Chi-yŏng's "Kōjo [K. Hyonyŏ] Simch'ŏng" (Filial daughter Simch'ŏng), a traditional literary character whose archetypal presence as a "daughter sold to strangers by her father" has troubling echoes in the overlapping spaces of Korean and Japanese memories of the modern.

Because the essays are deliberately brief and freeform, all of them are not remarkably original in terms of research or ideas, but most are stimulating in their conscious efforts to actively trespass linguistic and national boundaries. Occasionally the radical heteronomy of the topics discussed across the cultural divides seems to astound or confound the authors themselves, as is the case with Iwasaki Minoru in relation to the pejorative/discriminatory designations *aka* (Japanese) and *ppalgaeng'i* (Korean), both literally meaning "Reds." A few contributions—for instance, "Chōsenjin" by Ch'oe Chin-sŏk and "Sakura" (Cherry blossoms) by Takagi Hiroshi—seem to me too impressionistic, politically self-contained, or densely technical to reach the general reader not well versed in East Asian history. However, even in these cases, I was able to find something refreshing or thought provoking. Not surprisingly, the best essays—including Komagome Takeshi's "Chishanyen," on a Taiwanese site of commemoration for the Japanese educators allegedly victimized by the native aggressors; O Sŏng-ch'ŏl's "Undōkai [K. Undonghoe]" (Athletic meeting), on the mobilization of schoolchildren in the name of athletic cultivation in Japan and Korea; and Itagaki Ryūta's "Shimon" (Fingerprinting), a fresh take on the protest against the compulsory fingerprinting of foreign residents in postwar Japan—endow us with the considerable pleasure of reading cogent, well-argued historical pieces that also contain pithy little nuggets of food for thought.

One impression I am left with after reading *Higashi ajia kioku no ba* is that, even though the editors do not explicitly refer to it, nearly all the topics taken up in the volume are enmeshed in the seductive/abject processes of colonial modernization driven by the Japanese empire. In that sense, *Higashi ajia kioku no ba* can be read as a sort of apocryphal companion volume to Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson's *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (2001) and subsequent Korean- and Japanese-language conference volumes examining the institutional and discursive aspects of colonial modernity in East Asia.

Though the two books reviewed here differ in approach, methodology, and perhaps even political implications, they are nonetheless informed by an even-handed understanding of the corrective power of memory as well as its pitfalls, more often than not pitted against historical narratives. At the very least, they should be able to point an interested reader toward the wealth of sources that can easily be consigned to the periphery from the perspective of "proper academic history writing." Both books are heartily recommended to Japanese-language readers interested in the intersection of memory and history, along with students of modern Japanese and Korean history.

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