2018

Singapore: Commemoration and Reconciliation

Tze M. Loo
University of Richmond, tloo@richmond.edu

Recommended Citation

Loo, Tze M. "Singapore: Commemoration and Reconciliation." In *Memory, Identity, and Commemorations of World War II: Anniversary Politics in Asia Pacific*, edited by Daqing Yang, Mike Mochizuki, and Akira Iriye, 89-108. Lanham, Maryland: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2018.

Memory, Identity, and Commemorations of World War II

Anniversary Politics in Asia Pacific

Edited by Daqing Yang and Mike Mochizuki
Foreword by Akira Iriye

LEXINGTON BOOKS
Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

Chapter Six

Singapore

Commemoration and Reconciliation

Tze M. Loo

Compared with the commemorative events by some other Asian countries, Singapore's commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII may appear modest in scale.[1] Singapore's National Heritage Board (NHB) announced the addition of 6 new guided tours to the "Battle for Singapore" heritage project aimed at introducing visitors and locals to WWII battle sites around the island and organized an exhibition about the B and C war crimes trials.[2] On August 15—the anniversary of Japan's announcement of surrender—the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry screened a Chinese-language documentary film, "Singapore 1942" on the massacre of Chinese civilians during the occupation and the activities of the Singapore Overseas Chinese Anti-Japanese Volunteer Army.[3] The NHB also organized a commemorative ceremony that was attended by 200 people; several weeks later, a "remembrance ceremony" was held at the Kranji War Cemetery. The absence of large-scale national commemorative events in Singapore may give the impression that the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII was not one of Singapore's priorities in 2015, which may seem a little surprising given that the Japanese invasion and occupation of Singapore was a brutal time during which many of the island's inhabitants suffered.[4] However, this would be a misrecognition of Singapore's substantial and sustained investment in the history of WWII. Singapore's slate of commemorative events, though modest in scale, demonstrates a radical commitment to remembering and representing the Japanese occupation on Singapore's own terms that is marked by an emphasis on reconciliation with its former wartime enemy.

The sense of reconciliation with Japan over issues of the war was especially pronounced in two of Singapore's commemorative events. The NHB-

organized ceremony was held on August 27 at the former Municipal Building where Japan signed the surrender document. In his speech at the event, the minister for community, culture and the youth, Lawrence Wong, held Singapore up as:

> living proof that, with sincerity and largeness of spirit on both sides, it is possible to move on. Singapore and Japan have not let any historical grievances stand in the way of our cooperation to pursue a better quality of life for the peoples of both our nations. We have put the past behind us so that future generations can have a brighter tomorrow. So that they can enjoy peace, understanding and mutual respect—the very values that are needed to preserve harmony between nations and prevent future tragedies of war. We have embraced reconciliation; and we hope to one day see the same healing and reconciliation throughout Asia.[5]

This theme of Singapore's reconciliation with Japan took a different form several weeks later, at the Kranji War Cemetery's hour-long "End of WWII Remembrance Ceremony" on September 12.[6] Attended by representatives from 10 countries involved in the war, a highlight of the ceremony was the presence of the Japanese ambassador to Singapore, Takeuchi Haruhisa, and about 20 members of the Japanese community. The *Straits Times* reported that Takeuchi was the "first of the foreign dignitaries to lay a wreath of poppies at the foot of the Kranji War Memorial." Next to this, representatives of the Japanese community placed 1,500 origami-paper cranes, symbols of peace folded by students of Japanese schools in Singapore. Referring to the Japanese community's participation, the director of the Changi Museum, which organized the event, "called the event a 'world first' in terms of reconciling former combatants," and the guest-of-honor at the ceremony, Walter Woon, echoed this sentiment when "he hoped for a reconciliation in a similar vein for the leaders of Japan, China, and Korea."[7]

Singapore's emphasis on reconciliation with Japan during the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII sets it apart from those Northeast Asian countries and should be situated within the larger and longer context of the city-state's management of the history of WWII and the Japanese occupation. Many scholars have pointed to how Singapore has deployed the history of the Japanese occupation to suit its nation-building aims since the 1990s after years of amnesia, something that sets Singapore apart from its Southeast Asian neighbors.[8] Kevin Blackburn, for instance, has suggested that two patterns can be discerned in how Southeast Asian countries have dealt with the history of Japanese wartime aggression: some countries—like Singapore—deploy the history of Japanese occupation to suit the political agendas of nation-state building, while others practice a national amnesia of the war to avoid the war's overshadowing of national revolutions, or because the history of the war is too divisive for national unity in the

postwar.[9] Much of this scholarship focuses on how Singapore uses the Japanese occupation to produce Singapore's national identity, but what is less noted is how a by-product of the state's strategies for managing the history of WWII emphasizes a high level of reconciliation between Singapore and its former aggressor, and this impacts how Singapore commemorated the end of WWII.

Commemorations are in general highly political acts; in East Asia, the period around the anniversary of Japan's surrender on August 15 has, for some time now, become highly politicized. It is a moment in which postwar Japan performs its attitude toward its war responsibility and aggressive acts—performances that are invariably evaluated for their sincerity, or lack thereof. At the same time, nation states who suffered Japan's wartime aggressions use the period to present *their* understanding of the history of Japan's wartime conduct and, as is often the case, to include a criticism of the perceived inadequacies of Japan's contrition. The end of the war and its commemoration in East Asia are thus, in this sense, a proxy stage on which some nation states fight the history war. Political actors were not unaware of how the commemorations in 2015 had the potential to function as a way to criticize Japan, as suggested by Taiwanese president Ma Ying-Jeou's comments in an interview with Japanese journalists about his confidence that Taiwan's commemoration of the war's end would not hurt the relationship between Taiwan and Japan.[10] Commemorations of the war in East Asia do not necessarily have to take on these meanings, but in 2015 they took on significations that exceeded their meanings for individual countries and became collectively a circuit of "commemoration as critique." Singapore however, has little use for this kind of commemoration for it sees itself as having long since achieved a reconciliation with Japan on the question of Japan's war responsibility in WWII and its conduct in Singapore, and this paper traces the history of this condition.

***

Singapore achieved independence in 1965 but the city state did not pay much attention to its history—including its history of Japan's brutal 3½ year occupation of Singapore—for almost two decades after that, considering it too divisive to be useful for producing a sense of unity and common purpose that the country needed at the time.[11] There was a concern that the separate histories of Chinese, Indian, and Malay migration that came to populate Singapore would provide little basis for their rootedness in the island. There was also the worry that these disparate histories would exacerbate communal tensions that had carried over from the period of British and Japanese rule into the postwar. The newly independent nation state had good reason to be wary: riots between Chinese and Malays had in fact broken out in 1964 and

1969 and were potent reminders of the explosiveness of issues of race in Singapore at the time.

The result was what Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang call a "structural amnesia" about the island's past, but beginning in the mid-1980s, Singapore turned to history as a tool to strengthen Singaporean national identity, motivated by several anxieties that emerged and reinforced each other at that time.[12] The first was an apprehension that Singapore's rapid modernization had resulted in a level of "Westernization" that threatened its "traditional values" and "Asian roots."[13] The second was a concern with whether Singapore could continue to grow economically and remain competitive.[14] A third source of dis-ease was an anxiety about whether the younger generation of Singaporeans, who had been born into the country's relative economic prosperity and who knew little of the hardship of the early years of independence, would have the mettle to meet and overcome the challenges that Singapore now faced.

A speech by the second deputy prime minister at the time, S. Rajaratnam, offers an indication of the state's thinking of the usability of its past. Titled "The Uses and Abuses of the Past," Rajaratnam held up Poland's successful deployment of its long history that predated the twentieth-century introduction of Communism in the service of its national identity in the present as a proper use of history.[15] Regarding Singapore's own history, he signaled an expansive and accepting sense of the island's past by talking about how the city-state, in a move that "completely mystified" "many of our third world friends," declared the British colonial official, Sir Stamford Raffles, the official founder of Singapore.[16] Rajaratnam explained that this decision was simply proper history because it was a fact that Singapore was founded as a British colony and that "to pretend otherwise is to falsify history."[17] For him, Singapore's approach was not one of imperial nostalgia, nor did it allow for a whitewashing of British colonialism's excesses. Instead, it would rigorously evaluate its colonial past, discern its positive dimensions, consolidate its strengths while jettisoning its negative elements, and move on to a future that was entirely its own. While Rajaratnam did not discuss the Japanese occupation directly, his speech gave an indication of the state's highly pragmatic approach to its history. Embracing the usability of the past for its current needs allowed Singapore to master *all* aspects of its histories—even the ones imposed upon it—on its own terms for the present and future good of the nation.[18]

In November 1988, a government committee outlined which parts of the island's past would be useful for its present.[19] It recommended that Singapore "remember the lessons of our history and transmit this to new generations of Singaporeans so that they fully appreciate the factors that made for Singapore's success," and called for the opportunity to "learn from the pioneering enterprise of those who came before us so that we constantly renew

work values and maintain the adaptiveness which underlies our economic success today."[20] The committee identified five different kinds of heritage that were useful for this endeavor, the first of which it called "nation building heritage" that was:

> derived from the historical events and experiences we have lived through and which have shaped our lives. Our experience of living under British colonial administration; the Japanese Occupation, the post-war struggle for independence and the struggle against Communism are some of the key events and experiences which have made us what we are today.[21]

Of the key moments in Singapore's history outlined here, the committee singled out the Japanese occupation for further elaboration. It noted that "as the trauma fades away, the lessons of the War are a valuable source of experience for Singaporeans. . . . The time may now be right for an objective account of the War to be presented to young Singaporeans who have no personal memories of the traumas and who can therefore be entirely objective."[22] In so doing, the committee effectively elevated the Japanese invasion and occupation to a central role in the cultivation of Singaporean national identity.

The use of Singapore's history took clear shape in 1997 with the introduction of "National Education" into school curriculums as a way "to develop national cohesion, cultivate the instinct for survival as a nation and instill in our students confidence in our nation's future . . . [and] a sense of belonging and emotional rootedness to Singapore."[23] At the center of National Education was an official narrative of Singapore's formation, "The Singapore Story," whose primary message was "how Singapore succeeded against the odds to become a nation."[24] Lee Hsien Loong, who was deputy prime minister of Singapore at the time, outlined the contours of this historical narrative when he launched National Education:

> As a British colony, from 1942 to 1945 for three and a half years of the Japanese Occupation we suffered a traumatic experience of cruelty, brutality, hunger, and deprivation. We lived through the post-war years of Communist-inspired unrest and upheaval. We then joined with the Federation of Malaya to form Malaysia. Despite pressure and intimidation we stood firm in Malaysia against the communalists. . . . As a result we suddenly found ourselves out on our own as an independent country, with few means to make a living or defend ourselves. Yet we developed our economy, built up the [Singapore Armed Forces], educated and housed our people, got them to work together, and gradually became one nation. Year by year we transformed Singapore into what it is today.[25]

The narrative centers on how Singapore's existence in the present is possible only because of how the island's inhabitants and its leaders overcame the

repeated challenges presented to them in which the Japanese occupation is cast as the first moment of crises that impacted the island's inhabitants in two important ways. First, they acquired a resilience from having suffered and survived the Japanese occupation which formed the basis of a later Singaporean nationalism; second, they experienced the pitfalls of depending on others/foreign powers for the island's defense and security.

Almost a decade after the launch of National Education, the National Archives of Singapore opened a new museum in 2006. Called Memories of Old Ford Factory (MOFF), it was dedicated to the history of everyday life during the Japanese occupation of Singapore and was a clear articulation of the role that it played in Singapore's national history.[26] The museum's coverage of the period of the Japanese occupation left no question about the brutality of Japan's occupation of Singapore. Beginning with an account of the "Sook Ching" massacre, MOFF's narrative emphasized the brutality of the *kempeitai* (military police), highlighting the surveillance, arrest, and torture of anti-Japanese elements within the local community. It also documented the less dramatic—but no less violent—quotidian cruelties and indignities that the island's inhabitants were subjected to.[27] Importantly, while acknowledging that occupation policy to divide the island along communal lines and that the varying treatment of different ethnic groups produced the notion that the non-Chinese community enjoyed better treatment from the Japanese, MOFF's narrative emphasized that *all* communities suffered.[28] Nor were the exactions limited to bodily or psychological ones: occupation authorities' demand that Chinese communities in Singapore and Malaya "donate" $50 million to "atone" for their support of the British and mainland Chinese government's fight against Japan featured prominently.

However, Japanese brutality was only one part of MOFF's narrative. The exhibition's primary focus was on everyday life during the Japanese occupation and emphasized the canny and creative skills that *all* people who lived under Japanese rule in Singapore—local, migrant, European—used to survive, and celebrated their resilience and courage under conditions of terrible brutality and brutalization. The museum noted the relative quickness with which everyday life in Singapore reacquired a semblance of rhythm and routine as occupation authorities attempted to impose a level of stability. Two months after the cessation of hostilities, shops and businesses reopened, and banks and the postal service resumed operations. By April, primary schools throughout Malaya resumed classes; the judicial system reopened in May. But hardship and suffering were constant, and MOFF underscored the various ways that people coped, whether by growing more food in vegetable plots, finding ways to acquire necessities on the black market, or improvising with substitutes for soap, cooking oil, and flour, or turning to traditional medicines for illnesses. Woven into the narratives of resilience are also moments of joy and leisure. People celebrated marriages and holidays, restau-

rants continued to serve meals (granted the best restaurants were off limits to locals), and there were gatherings at teahouses for storytelling and at amusement parks for gambling.

While constantly present, Japanese brutality and the hardship of the period forms the backdrop against which the primary aspect of MOFF's narrative—the experience of living in occupied Singapore for the island's inhabitants—dominated. Indeed, the exhibition catalogue introduced its material this way:

> In [this] volume, the story continues from the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942, focusing on daily life during the 44 months of Japanese rule. Through the realism of the story and accompanying visuals, open your eyes to life under Japanese rule and take away valuable lessons of resilience, hope, creativity and adaptability taught by our forefathers.[29]

For example, in dealing with the issue of death from malnutrition, rather than focus on Japanese mismanagement of resources or people's plight during food rationing, MOFF's narrative turns the issue into one of resilience and adaptability, as demonstrated in the museum's use of oral history from Mohinder Singh, who credited the Sikh community's ability to adapt to harsh conditions for saving many in that community from malnutrition.[30] MOFF's narrative strategy of radical localization of memory to focus on *Singapore's* experience of the war that apprehends the occupation from the perspective of the island's inhabitants rather than that of the invading Japanese had important—if unintended—effects. It takes the focus off Japanese actions and the period of the Japanese occupation is important for what the people of Singapore got out of the experience. In a sense, MOFF is an example of a mastery of the history of the war which produces an interpretation that empowers Singapore in the present.

The radical localization of the history of war was also evident in the lesson of never depending on a foreign power for the island's defense and this featured prominently in the first section of the museum. Detailing the experience of Allied Prisoners-of-War (POWs), its most arresting feature were two life-sized statues of gaunt POWs, bare from the waist up to reveal their emaciated torsos, placed on either side of a wall of stained glass panels featuring the artwork of William Haxworth, who captured the everyday life of POWs while himself a prisoner in Changi Prison. The display highlights how POWs had to "exercise considerable ingenuity to survive" the brutal conditions of their captivity, and suggests that Europeans in Singapore—both those who called it home and who fought for its defense—suffered no less than local communities during the occupation. At the same time, however, the display can also be read as having less laudatory meanings: while celebrating their courage, this presentation not only emphasized the failure of

British military power, it also stripped away any semblance of British superiority in explicit, unequivocal ways. The figures of half-naked, emaciated POWs were especially powerful in this regard. If the fallibility of British power and its agents is taken as a framing device, then the narrative of everyday life for local communities under occupation that followed can be read as a story of how life in Singapore could continue to function without British rule, even under the most brutal of conditions.

This changed attitude toward the British was crucial to the island's political future. In his memoirs, Singapore's first prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, was unequivocal about his "disillusionment" after realizing that Japanese occupation authorities were "more cruel, more brutal, more unjust and more vicious than the British." But he also wrote eloquently of the impact that the Japanese invasion had on his thinking about British colonials, whose cowardly behavior in the face of the advancing Japanese forces lay waste to British claims to superiority.[31] This was important, as Lee goes on to note, because "the British had built up the myth of their inherent superiority so convincingly that most Asiatics thought it hopeless to challenge them. But now one Asiatic race had dared to defy them and smashed that myth." That this was one of MOFF's key messages was reflected in remarks by Singapore's then president, S.R. Nathan, in MOFF's exhibition catalogue and resource guide in which he noted that:

> Singapore paid a high price during the occupation, but arguably there were some compensations. The eclipse of our colonial masters, previously assumed to be all-powerful, meant that the journey to independence was shorter than it would have been otherwise. As a result of shared experiences, our people began to identify with Singapore, rather than seeing themselves as Chinese, Indians, or Malays owing prime allegiance to the place of their ancestors.[32]

MOFF's narrative put the war and Japanese occupation into the service of overcoming and criticizing British colonialism, casting it as a period that enabled the island's inhabitants to make the epistemological shift to a post-colonial imagination that could envision life without the British as colonial masters.

***

In MOFF's narrative, the Japanese occupation of Singapore was represented not as an open wound for the city state nor an unresolved issue between Singapore and Japan today. There was a strong sense that while deeply committed to remembering the Japanese occupation, Singapore had moved on, having achieved reconciliation of a kind with this difficult past and its former wartime enemy. Indeed, Singapore's politicians have embraced a forward-looking position when it comes to Japan's wartime aggressions in

Singapore. As early as 1969 Lee Kuan Yew noted that "my generation and that of my elders cannot forget [the Japanese occupation] as long as we live. We can forgive, but we are unlikely ever to forget. . . . Our population is by and large a hardheaded one. The policy of the government is not to allow the unhappy experiences of the past to inhibit us from a policy which can enhance our growth rates by Japanese participation in our industry," which Chin Kin Wah frames as a clear reflection of "a general tendency [in Southeast Asia] not to allow negative historical memories to cloud overall relationships."[33] Similarly in 2006, then prime minister Goh Chok Tong, in comments about the difficulties facing Sino-Japanese relations stemming from Japanese politicians' visits to the Yasukuni Shrine and the history of WWII, said that:

> Singapore too suffered under Japanese occupation during World War II. We have not forgotten the past, but we have moved on. For we believe in building a better future than be forever weighed down by the bad memories of the past.[34]

In 2015, Lee Hsien Loong commented on the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII by recognizing that war-related issues continued to reverberate throughout Asia and affected Japan's relationships with China and Korea, but suggested that it "is past the time to put this history behind us properly, just like the Europeans have done."[35] This is also reflected in how Singaporeans in general do not see Japan's wartime conduct as posing a problem for relations between Singapore and Japan today, with a majority of Singaporeans regarding Japan as a "trustworthy friend."[36] Even as Singaporeans remember the occupation's brutality and suffering, the period seems to be safely in the past and sentiments of revenge are largely absent, as is any sense that Japan still needs to do more to compensate Singapore for its aggression in WWII.

But Japan and its wartime conduct have not always enjoyed such an untroubled place in Singapore. In March 1962, the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce (SCCC) called on the Singapore government to demand an apology and compensation from Japan after mass graves of Chinese victims of Japanese wartime atrocities were discovered in the eastern part of the island, and Japan remained silent on the issue.[37] On June 23, 1963—more than a year later—the UPI reported that Japan was considering offering 600 million yen as "condolence money" but Tokyo denied this. The SCCC immediately condemned Japan's "shrewd, insincere, and evasive attitude." Several days later, SCCC members met with the Japanese counsel-general, Tanaka Hirota, in what the latter described as an informal meeting, but that meeting produced no agreement.[38]

During a meeting between then prime minister Lee Kuan Yew and Tanaka on August 7, 1962, Japan proposed "technical and scientific projects and education and scientific equipment" for Singapore's four institutions of higher learning.[39] The SCCC again rejected these proposals as "insincere" and announced plans to organize a rally of 100,000 to press the issue. The Japanese government's next salvo was a warning from Tanaka not to jeopardize the increasing economic cooperation between Japan and Singapore with this demand for compensation. He went on to state that Japan was not legally obligated to meet any demand for reparations because it had settled all such claims with Great Britain with the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty. Tanaka further noted that Japan's offer of equipment and the establishment of a cancer research center was "a gesture of atonement . . . made on moral grounds" and even chastised Singapore for being "improper" in its attempt to "negotiate the terms."[40]

If Tanaka hoped that this hard line would bring about Singapore's acquiescence, he was gravely mistaken. The SCCC expressed its "dissatisfaction of the highest degree" with Tanaka's statements, with its president, Ko Teck Kin—in a gesture to the multiple dimensions of accountability and blame—pointing out that Singapore was "demanding a settlement of a 'blood debt,' not a war debt."[41] Furthermore, Ko noted that gestures of atonement were meaningless unless they had specific monetary value and made a claim for $50 million.[42] He countered that Japan's offer—which Tanaka did not specify the value for—could be well below that amount, and this was all the more egregious because Japan had amassed a surplus in its trade with Singapore. Ko also announced that the SCCC was calling for a mass rally to "press for a reasonable settlement" and hinted at a boycott of Japanese goods if Japan did not meet Singapore's demands.

The rally took place on August 25 and was attended by more than 100,000 people. Speaking to the crowd, Ko cast Singapore's demands as "a struggle between justice and foul play," and that "horrors of the Japanese occupation endure" for the island's inhabitants "which could not be erased without atonement."[43] Noting that "without malice we have allowed the Japanese to come among us to trade," he pointed out that Singapore was not seeking revenge but only wanted justice for past wrongs. As a demonstration of the SCCC's "peaceful but insistent demand," the rally adopted three resolutions: that the people of all races in Malaya and Singapore unite to press Japan for compensation for the atrocities against the civilian populations during WWII; a campaign of "non-cooperation" against Japan should it fail to settle the matter satisfactorily; and that Singapore's government not issue any new visas to Japanese people if the issue is not settled.[44] These resolutions were not empty statements because the Singapore government threw its full weight behind the rally in support, with Lee Kuan Yew touching on this in his speech at the rally:

> For after tonight, once the resolutions have been passed and adopted, the Government's attitude to the Japanese Government must alter. A stand once taken cannot be abandoned until a satisfactory settlement has been reached. Once these resolutions calling for non-cooperation have been passed, at all levels, amongst the people and in the Government, there must be non-cooperation, until a fair and just solution is found.[45]

To that end, Lee announced that while Japanese projects already underway in Singapore could continue, no additional visas would be issued for new Japanese commercial or industrial projects. For Singapore, which was dependent on technical and managerial skills from Japan for its industrialization, this was not a decision that the government made lightly.

The response of Japan's Foreign Office to the rally was the announcement of Japan's refusal to negotiate with Singapore as long as it "assumes a threatening attitude."[46] It added that while Singapore lacked standing to make such claims, Japan was "ready to show its 'gesture' of atonement" but it would not comply with any demand for a large amount of money.[47] On September 6, the SCCC delivered an ultimatum to Japan to settle the issue within ten days, or face economic non-cooperation. The boycott of Japanese goods and the cessation of exports to Japan began on September 16 but was suspended on September 28 after Tokyo gave assurances to a Japanese business delegation from Singapore that it would address the issue and Tengku Abdul Rahman, the prime minister of Malaysia—to which Singapore was then a part of—agreed to take up the issue with Japan. Japan and Malaysia discussed the issue several times in the next two years but saw no resolution.

However, following Singapore's full independence on August 9, 1965, after being ejected from Malaysia, the issue moved quickly toward resolution. On October 26, 1966, Singapore and Japan issued a joint communique announcing a settlement: Japan would provide $25 million in grants and another $25 million in loans to Singapore. The SCCC accepted this settlement on November 30, and the Singapore government considered the issue of Singapore's "blood debt" to be resolved.[48] With the issue behind it, Singapore welcome a new era of relations with Tokyo, which Lee Kuan Yew reflected in comments on his subsequent visit to Tokyo in 1968 this way:

> My visit demonstrates officially that we are friends. The past is the past and it is the future we are interested in. I was able to pay a call on the Japanese Emperor and the Empress and I think it's a symbolic desire on both sides to begin anew.[49]

Singapore and Japan, it seemed, had successfully navigated the issue of compensation and achieved reconciliation about Japan's wartime responsibilities.

***

The process of historical reconciliation in Asia is often compared to the process in Europe, and the state of Japan's postwar relations with its neighbors compared to Germany's. However, as Gi-Wook Shin reminds us in his discussion of historical reconciliation in East Asia of the need to "continue to search for an East Asian model, while using the European experiences as a reference," Asia has "specific histories, memories, and perhaps even different cultural modes of reconciliation" that make it unreasonable to expect that Asia will simply replicate Europe's process.[50] The process by which nation states reach historical reconciliation is a highly situated one that is influenced by the specificities of place and time, and there is likely more than one path to its achievement. Shin's reminder also raises the possibility of there being more than one understanding of what reconciliation should, can, or ought to comprise of. This should not be taken to mean that, the people of Singapore for instance, have a culturally relative sense of historical wrong or a conception of redress that is different from more universally held ones; as Singapore's demand for compensation for the "blood debt" demonstrates, it had a clear anger about Japanese atrocities and a strong certainty about its right to demand that Tokyo compensate them for those wrongs.

But Singapore's example also demonstrates that the settlement of claims between nation states depends not only on the moral legitimacy of the individuals who have suffered injustice or the force of their claims, but also in large part on the national governments who undertake negotiations and who—in the final analysis—make the decision about the resolution of those claims. Kevin Blackburn and Karl Hack, who show that Singapore deftly managed this demand for compensation by moving it away from a focus on the suffering of the Chinese community toward a sense of the collective victimization of the people of Singapore as a whole during the Japanese occupation, note that:

> There was no Japanese apology, but the Singapore government chose to view the matter as closed. Lee privately slapped down Chinese Chamber of Commerce demands for more. The latter were angry that the settlement only included $25 million as a grant, not the $50 million targeted, and had been accepted without consultation with them. But they were told not to pursue the issue as it would harm much needed Japanese investment at a time when the country badly needed to accelerate economic development.[51]

Indeed, Lee sent a letter—the contents of which were not made public—to the SCCC after the latter remained undecided on the settlement, and it accepted the terms a month later.[52] While the Singapore and Japanese governments resolved the issue at the diplomatic level, it raises the question of what happens in negotiations when a state, with its own agendas and exigencies,

reaches an agreement that diverges from what local or otherwise vested parties—who must depend on the state to represent them in these international negotiations—would prefer.

Blackburn and Hack's analysis raises another related issue: does the lack of an apology from Japan render the reconciliation that Singapore underscores somehow "less authentic" or "less genuine"?[53] The answer to this is inflected, at least in part, on what the political realities of the moment were thought to allow, as well as what actors considered to be the desired result of reconciliation. At the time that it was searching for a solution to the "blood debt" issue, Singapore faced serious political instability and an uncertain economic future. In a time when Singapore's political and economic survival was at stake, its leaders privileged solutions that would most benefit the country in the moment. Furthermore, Singapore was trying to seek redress from a Japan that was not only much stronger economically despite suffering devastation in the war, it was also a Japan that had shown itself to be most unwilling to address Singapore's claim for compensation, and did so only most grudgingly when it did. In remarks the day before Singapore and Japan announced the settlement, Singapore's foreign minister, S. Rajaratnam, told the visiting Japanese foreign minister Shiina Etsusaburo that, "we cannot shape a bright future in Asia solely in terms of old and unpleasant memories . . . it is good to have a long memory, but what we dig out of the past should be such as to help us advance toward a brighter and happier future," an indication of the political calculation that went into accepting Japan's offer of loans and grants, over the $50 million compensation that the SCCC originally demanded.[54]

Lee Kuan Yew elaborated on this position in a speech to the SCCC several months earlier that also casts the settlement that Singapore eventually reached with Japan in a different light. Underscoring Singapore's vulnerable political and economic situation at the time, Lee called on his audience to have the courage and "a determination to do what is fair and right by ourselves and by our neighbors, and to ensure our future in Southeast Asia."[55] This required Singaporeans not only to learn how to adapt quickly to the new situation, it also demanded that they act with caution. Without the "safety net" provided by inclusion into the British Empire or Malaysia, Singapore would have to take responsibility for each decision that it made henceforth. As such, Lee counselled that "every act—either doing or 'non-doing'—must be carefully weighed" and that in some instances, "an abstention from an act is more meaningful than the commission of an act." Lee used the "blood debt" issue to develop this point. He said:

> Let us sit back and think. What is this worth? Fifty million dollars! What percentage is this of the revenue collected last year which was $450 million? One-ninth, one-tenth. For one-tenth of the revenue, you will wash away all the

> sins of the past and all is forgiven and forgotten? Is it worth the pursuing at this time? *Let us take a deep breath and re-calculate.* What is at stake in our relationship between our neighbors and ourselves—and that includes Japan—is worth more than $50 million. *And I would myself prefer to have that $50 million unpaid—unless the gesture of atonement is one accompanied by a deep and sincere regret for what has happened.* Not a cash payment to wipe off an evil they perpetrated. But I think these bones and all the sadness of the past should make us think of something even more important than a blood debt: can you be sure that this will never happen again?[56]

While Lee urged his audience to consider whether or not it was in Singapore's best interest to pursue the issue, he was also laying out a position about reconciliation with Japan. Lee was unequivocal about what he considered a proper resolution: compensation had to be "accompanied by a deep and sincere regret for what has happened" and that compensation should not be a way for Japan to escape responsibility and remorse. In the context of these remarks, the settlement reached between Singapore and Japan on the "blood debt" may have produced reconciliation at the level of diplomatic relations between the two countries, but as Lee's remarks suggest, Singapore's notion of reconciliation was much more complicated than its acceptance of the settlement with Japan would indicate at first.

Indeed, despite the sense of having been reconciled with its former wartime occupier, Singapore remains critical of Japan's current conduct and the history of Japan's past aggressions can still evoke strong animosity. Singapore's leaders have frequently called on Japan to be more forthcoming and clearer with admissions of culpability for its wartime aggressions and to rein in revisionist histories.[57] Singaporeans also continue to exhibit deep sensitivity about the Japanese occupation as a period of brutality and are critical of any attempts that might sanitize it. In February 2017, the Memories of Ford Factory (MOFF) exhibition was scheduled to be replaced by a new permanent gallery similarly dedicated to the everyday experience of the Japanese occupation and it was be named "Syonan Gallery: War and its Legacies." The gallery, however, was renamed after many Singaporeans voiced their objections to the use of the name that was imposed on Singapore by its Japanese occupiers, and cited the deep hurt to survivors of the war and their families that its use evoked.[58] Thus while Singapore's commemorations of the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII may have contained a strong sense of diplomatic reconciliation with Japan, beneath it is a deep memory of the Japanese occupation which informs the people of Singapore about what is acceptable in their nation state's quest to "move on"—and what is not.

NOTES

1. For instance, China's commemoration event on September 3, 2015, marking the end of the "Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War" included a parade through Tian'anmen Square attended by world leaders which the Xinhua news agency hailed as "a glorious event that has been 70 years in the making." Taiwan's events were on a smaller scale, but its commemoration of "the 70th anniversary of the end of the War of Resistance Against Japan and the retrocession of Taiwan" was no less pronounced and deliberate. They consisted of 16 events over a 3-month period organized by Taiwan's Executive Yuan. In Great Britain, ceremonies to commemorate "Victory over Japan" Day (VJ Day) were attended by Queen Elizabeth, members of the royal family, and then prime minister David Cameron.

2. The National Heritage Board is a statutory board under the Ministry of Culture, Community, and Youth and is "responsible for telling the Singapore story, sharing the Singaporean experience and imparting our Singapore spirit." (https://www.nhb.gov.sg/about-us/overview) These new additions included a bunker in the former British naval base in Woodlands which had previously been off limits to the public. National Heritage Board, "Media Release: New World War II Tours and Exhibition on War Crimes Tribunal to Commemorate 70th Anniversary of the Liberation of Singapore," 28 January 2015. http://www.nhb.gov.sg/~/media/nhb/files/media/releases/ new%20releases/ 2015–19.pdf.

3. The film was produced by a civic group known as the WWII History Research Association and was followed by a forum, during which participants spoke of their experiences during the occupation. "Session at SCCCI auditorium tomorrow to mark end of World War II 70 years ago," *Straits Times*, 15 August 2015.

4. To be sure, Singapore's national energies were largely focused on year-long celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the island's independence. The city-state's emotional energies were also consumed by the passing of its first prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, in March of 2015.

5. "Commemorating the 70th Anniversary of the end of World War II." Speech by Lawrence Wong, 27 August 2015. https://www.mccy.gov.sg/en/news/speeches/2015/Aug/WWII_Commemorative_Event.aspx.

6. The cemetery is the resting place for Allied military service people who lost their lives during the invasion and occupation of Singapore and is managed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

7. "Marking 70th Year of End of WWII," *Straits Times*, September 13, 2015.

8. Diana Wong calls Singapore's "elaborate program of commemoration" in 1995 "one exception to the pattern of official indifference [in other parts of Southeast Asia]." Diana Wong, "Memory Suppression, Memory Production: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore," in *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 219.

9. Kevin Blackburn, "War memory and nation-building in South East Asia," *South East Asia Research* 18: 1 (2010), 5. For an eloquent discussion of Indonesia's privileging of memories of the struggle for liberation over memories of the Japanese invasion and occupation, see Anthony Reid, "Remembering and Forgetting War and Revolution," in *Beginning to Remember: The Past in the Indonesia Present* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005).

10. "Taiwan says remembering end of WWII won't hurt ties with Japan," Kyodo News, 15 April 2015. The Japanese government is also similarly aware of the power of commemorations of the war's end, with the cabinet secretary criticizing Ban Ki-moon's participation in Beijing's commemorative ceremony as contradicting the expectation of the U.N.'s neutrality in world affairs. "China Blasts Japanese Criticism of Ban's Attendance of WWII Event," *Japan Times Online*, September 1, 2015, http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/09/01/national/politics-diplomacy/china-blasts-japanese-criticism-bans-attendance-wwii-event/.

11. The island's inhabitants suffered a great deal under Japanese rule as victims of atrocities and everyday brutalities. The most well-known of the Japanese atrocities in Singapore was the massacre of Chinese in the early days of the occupation, during which some estimate 50,000 people were murdered. See "Transcript of Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew's interview with Mark Jacobson from National Geographic on 6 July 2009 (for National Geographic magazine Jan 2010 edition)," National Archives of Singapore, document number 20100104007. For a

discussion of the different numbers of casualties, see Hayashi Hirofumi, "The Battle of Singapore, the Massacre of Chinese and Understanding of the Issue in Postwar Japan," *Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 28–4–09, July 13, 2009. Local communities were not the only victims; Japanese brutality toward European POWs in Singapore is also well-documented.

12. Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang, "Strengthening the Nation's Roots? Heritage Policies in Singapore," in *Social Policy in Post-Industrial Singapore* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 201.

13. Ibid., 202.

14. Following independence, Singapore pursued a labor-intensive economic model as a way to address the high levels of unemployment and by the 1970s had become a manufacturing hub with a highly skilled workforce. With no natural resources of its own and a limited population, Singapore's economy aimed in the 1980s to move toward service and high technology sectors. Singapore's high wage policies in the early 80s to attract highly qualified labor contributed to the country's first recession in 1985–86, and resulted in deep anxieties about Singapore's competitiveness. See *Report of the Economic Committee: The Singapore Economy: New Directions*, February 1986. Ministry of Trade and Industry, http://www.mti.gov.sg/ ResearchRoom/ Documents/ app.mti.gov.sg/data/pages/885/doc/econ.pdf.

15. S. Rajaratnam, "The Uses and Abuses of the Past," vol. 8 (Singapore: Ministry of Culture, 1984), 1–9. I also refer to Rajaratnam's speech in "Historical Reconciliation in Southeast Asia: Notes from Singapore" in Jun-Hyeok Kwak and Melissa Nobles, *Inherited Responsibility and Historical Reconciliation in East Asia* (London: Routledge, 2013).

16. Rajaratnam, "The Uses and Abuses of the Past," 5–6.

17. Rajaratnam, "The Uses and Abuses of the Past," 6. Importantly, Rajaratnam dispelled any notion that recognizing Raffles as the country's founder was something that betrayed Singapore's credentials as an independent, post-colonial state; instead this was an example of a "balanced assessment of imperialism" which, regardless of what one's personal feelings toward British colonialism might be, recognized that imperial rule had both "positive and negative aspects."

18. Rajaratnam's pragmatism echoes the guiding principle of Lee Kuan Yew's vision for Singapore during his long leadership of Singapore, a notion that continues to guide Singapore's government today. See "Keep pragmatism as guiding principle," *Straits Times*, 30 March 2015.

19. The Committee on Heritage, formed by the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts and tasked to make "recommendations to encourage Singaporeans to be more widely informed, creative, refined in taste, gracious in lifestyle and appreciative of our collective heritage." Committee on Heritage, "The Committee on Heritage Report, November 1988," 1988, 1.

20. Ibid., 8.

21. "The Committee on Heritage Report," 27.

22. "The Committee on Heritage Report," 31.

23. Ministry of Education National Education website: http://ne.moe.edu.sg/ne/slot/u223/ne/index.html (accessed 10 June 2015). See also Yeow Tong Chia, "History education for nation building and state formation: The case of Singapore," *Citizenship Teaching & Learning* (7:2), 191–207.

24. "Speech by B.G. Lee Hsien Loong, Deputy Prime Minister at the launch of National Education," 17 May 1997. http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/speeches/1997/170597.htm.

25. "Speech by B.G. Lee Hsien Loong, Deputy Prime Minister at the launch of National Education." National Education was not intended as a separate subject of instruction, but was rather to function as a set of ideas that infused all levels of instruction. See, Steven Tan Kwang Sen and Goh Chor Boon (eds.), *Securing Our Future: Sourcebook for Infusing National Education into the Primary School Curriculum* (Singapore: Prentice Hall, 2003).

26. The museum is located on the premises of the former Ford motor factory, which was the first motor car assembly plant in Southeast Asia and was completed only months before Japan began its invasion of Southeast Asia. Japanese imperial forces used the factory during the occupation first as their headquarters and then to manufacture trucks, but the factory is most well known as the site of the British surrender to Japan on 15 February, 1942. I also discuss MOFF in my essay, "Historical Reconciliation in Southeast Asia: Notes from Singapore." MOFF was replaced in 2017 by a new exhibition. See n. 24.

27. These issues are more fully developed in the accompanying exhibition catalogue and resource guide, Lee Geok Boi, *The Syonan Years: Singapore under Japanese Rule 1942–1945* (Singapore: National Archives of Singapore & Epigram, 2005). It documents the threat of torture at every turn (for example, for not surrendering radio sets to be set only to the occupation's Syonan Radio, 117), censorship of information (110), cultural control through things like Japanese language education and a Japanese calendar of celebrations and festivals, dire economic conditions of food rationing and shortages, and murder of the very sick (236).

28. "[I]t soon became clear to the local population that on the whole, Syonan residents suffered the same fate under Japanese rulers. No one community was completely safe from the horrors of rape, looting of assets, and beheading." Ibid., 50.

29. Ibid., 9.

30. MOFF's narrative included Mohinder Singh's words: "Why was it [referring to the relatively fewer Sikh deaths] so? It was not that we were the favorite sons of the Japanese that were given anything. No! The same rations were issued to the Sikhs, why the Indian community died so much? Why not the Sikhs? That is the real question. According to the situation we have seen, (the answer is) adaptability. We are big eaters, basically we are wheat eaters, ghee eaters . . . so immediately changed ourselves to (eat) maize, rice . . . We couldn't get any butter or ghee, we used the red palm oil. Immediately adapted . . . We told so many friends, 'Why don't you use it' [they replied that] 'it's not tasty.' Don't look after taste now. See the situation. Adapt yourself to the situation." Ibid., 235.

31. Lee wrote: "In 70 days of surprises, upsets, and stupidities [during the Japanese invasion], British colonial society was shattered, and with it all the assumptions of the Englishman's superiority. The Asiatics were supposed to panic when the firing started, yet they were the stoical ones who took the casualties and died without hysteria. It was the white civilian bosses who ducked under tables when the bombs and shells fell. It was the white civilians and government officers in Penang who, on 16 December 1941, in the quiet of the night, fled the island for the 'safety' of Singapore, abandoning the Asiatics to their fate. . . . The white in charge had gone. Stories of their scramble to save their skins led the Asiatics to see them as selfish and cowardly. . . . The whites had proved as frightened and at a loss as to what to do as the Asiatics, if not more so. The Asiatics had looked to them for leadership and they had failed them." Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Prentice-Hall, 1998), 52–53.

32. National Archives, *Battle for Singapore: Fall of the Impregnable Fortress* (Singapore: National Archives of Singapore, 2011), 6.

33. Chin Kin Wah, "Regional Perceptions of China and Japan," in *China, India, Japan and the Security of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), 11.

34. Goh Chok Tong, "Towards an East Asian Renaissance" (4th Asia-Pacific Round Table, Singapore, February 6, 2006).

35. Lee Hsien Loong, "Keynote Address" (14th Asia Security Summit, Singapore, May 29, 2015).

36. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "2008 Opinion Poll on Japan in Six ASEAN Countries," http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/asean/survey/index.html.

37. "Mass War Graves," *Straits Times*, February 24, 1962; "Discovery of 40 More Mass Graves," *Straits Times*, February 27, 1962; "War Massacre of Civilians: Compensation Demand," *Straits Times*, March 1, 1962. For a history of the Chinese community's early postwar agitation for compensation, see Kevin Blackburn and Karl Hack, *War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore* (NUS Press, 2012), 146–55.

38. "Atonement Talks No Agreement," *Straits Times*, July 6, 1963.

39. "War Compensation Talks Progress," *Straits Times*, August 7, 1963.

40. "Tanaka: Don't Hurt Trade Ties," *Straits Times*, August 9, 1963.

41. "Atonement Will Cost $50 Million," *Straits Times*, August 10, 1963.

42. Ko did not give a reason for this figure, but another member of the SCCC had previously noted that claims for compensation were based on "the unwarranted killing of people and the extortion of $50 million from the Chinese community." "Memorial to Jap (sic) Victims to Be Built with Our Own Money," *Straits Times*, March 15, 1963.

43. "The 'Blood Debt' Rally," *Straits Times*, September 26, 1963. Leaders of the Malay, Eurasian, Ceylonese, Sikh, and Indian communities also voiced their support for the SCCC's claims. Representing the Indian community, D.T. Assomull pointed out that while the people of Singapore had borne the past silently, "it is time the Japanese atone for their past misdeeds and become once again our brothers in Asia." Theo Leijssius affirmed that "it was proper that the memory of those who suffered under the Japanese be perpetuated by some form of atonement." "Community Leaders All Back the Demand for Proper Atonement," *Straits Times*, August 28, 1963.

44. "Government Backing for Giant 'Blood Debt' Rally on Padang," *Straits Times*, August 22, 1963.

45. Lee Kuan Yew, "Speech at the Mass Rally on the Padang" (Singapore, August 25, 1963).

46. "Japan's Reply to 'Blood Debt' Rally," *Straits Times*, August 27, 1963.

47. In August 1963, Singapore was on the cusp of merging with Malaysia to end British colonial rule and the authority to negotiate the island's foreign affairs would lie with the Malaysian federal government.

48. When asked by journalists in October 1968 at a news conference as he was about to leave for a trip that included Japan if he would "stress the need for direct war reparations to Singapore," Lee replied that, "I've just told our two correspondents from Kyodo and Jiji [news services] who asked me about the war reparations. I told them it is over and done with. It is all settled, finished, out of the way. We have to look forward to the next 25 years, not the last 25." "Transcript Of Press Conference At Singapore Airport Before The Prime Minister's Departure For Hong Kong, Japan, Canada And U.S.A.—12 October, 1968." National Archives of Singapore. lky\1968\lky1012A.doc.

49. "Transcript Of General Press Conference Given By The Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, At TV Centre on Saturday, 21st December, 1968." National Archives of Singapore. lky\1968\lky1221C.doc.

50. Gi-Wook Shin, "Divided Memories and Historical Reconciliation in East Asia," in *Routledge Handbook of Memory and Reconciliation in East Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 412.

51. Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore*, 164.

52. The SCCC was initially surprised with the settlement, complaining that the Singapore government had not consulted them before accepting Japan's offer, and it was undecided on whether to accept it. The Appeal Committee for Singapore Chinese Massacred by the Japanese went even further in its criticism. Its secretary stated that "The Singapore government has no right to not accept anything less than the $50 million which was the amount decided" upon at the 1963 mass rally. "$25m Grant $25m Loans Settle Singapore's Blood Debt," *Straits Times*, October 26, 1966. On the appeal committee, see Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore*, 149–50.

53. The literature on historical reconciliation and apology is extensive, and many scholars emphasize the centrality of apology to the process. See Lily Gardner Feldman, "The Principle and Practice of 'Reconciliation' in German Foreign Policy: Relations with France, Israel, Poland and the Czech Republic," *International Affairs* 75, no. 2 (April 1, 1999): 333–56; David A. Crocker, "Reckoning with Past Wrongs: A Normative Framework," *Ethics and International Affairs* 13, no. 1 (1999): 43–64; Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Elazar Barkan and Alexander Karn, eds., *Taking Wrongs Seriously: Apologies and Reconciliation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006). Some scholars, however, call into question the meaning, and even the very possibility, of apology. See Elizabeth A. Cole, *Teaching the Violent Past: History Education and Reconciliation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 24–25, note 23; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Abortive Rituals: Historical Apologies in the Global Era," *Interventions* 2, no. 2 (January 1, 2000): 171–86.

54. "Shiina Flies in for a Two-Day Goodwill Visit," *Straits Times*, October 25, 1966.

55. Lee Kuan Yew, "Transcript of a Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Juan Yew, at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce on 4th July, 1966," July 4, 1966, lky/1966/lky0704.doc, National Archives of Singapore.

56. Ibid. Emphasis mine.

57. In 2006, Goh Chok Tong counselled that Japanese leaders should give up visits to the Yasukuni Shrine and find some other way to honor the war dead without appearing to endorse the political message of the Yasukuni Shrine. Goh Chok Tong, "Towards an East Asian Renaissance." In 2015, Lee Hsien Loong called on Japan to give more explicit acknowledgment of its past aggressions and clearer rejection of "outrageous interpretations of history by its right wing academics and politicians." Lee Hsien Loong, "Keynote Address."

58. Not everyone agreed that the name should be changed. Singaporeans also supported the gallery's original name, citing the need to not avoid difficult parts of the country's history. "World War II Exhibition to Reopen on Feb 16 at Former Ford Factory," *Straits Times*, February 9, 2017; "The Syonan Gallery Name Change Saga: A Timeline," *Straits Times*, February 18, 2017. This is not the first time Singaporeans have spoken out on representations of the Japanese occupation. Kevin Blackburn and Edmund Lim describe how in 1989, the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board was forced to abandon plans to turn the Chureitō, a Japanese memorial to their war dead built during the occupation, into a tourist attraction after protests from Singaporeans. Kevin Blackburn and Edmund Lim, "The Japanese War Memorials of Singapore: Monuments of Commemoration and Symbols of Japanese Imperial Ideology," *South East Asia Research* 7, no. 3 (1999): 339–40.