



**Gi-Wook Shin, Daniel Sneider.** *Divergent Memories: Opinion Leaders and the Asia-Pacific War.* Studies of the Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center Series. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016. 376 pp. \$26.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8047-9970-6.

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In Asia, the legacy of the Second World War is substantially disputed in academic and popular opinion. From the 1930s to 1945, the empire of Japan committed several crimes against humanity; other countries, from China to South Korea, remember these painful atrocities. However, even contemporary Japan has claimed a victimhood identity, emphasizing the American atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This discourse of memory and wartime trauma has spawned various historical narratives in books, films, etc. Taking this dispute on the legacy of war into account, Gi-Wook Shin and Daniel Sneider analyze how historical memory has shaped regional diplomacy and national identity.

*Divergent Memories: Opinion Leaders and the Asia-Pacific War* explores the national narratives of China, South Korea, Japan, and the United States that affect the greater social collective remembrance. The authors argue that the perspectives of historians, activists, journalists, and politicians have critically shaped wartime memory. The study is structured into four major sections—"Introduction," "National Memories," "Divided Memories: The Major Controversies," and "Conclusion"—focusing on national memories and contested controversies with the input of leading historians. This wartime trauma has created four dis-

tinctive national narratives. The 1937 Rape of Nanking dominates China's textbooks, while South Korea emphasizes sexual slavery of "comfort women." Japan recalls the suffering from enduring two atomic weapons, while the United States focuses on combating a fanatical enemy during its island-hopping campaigns. Finally, the authors discuss the process of historical reconciliation.

Part 2, "National Memories," comprising chapters 2-5, details the four nations' mainstream narratives. In China, from 1937 to 1945, an estimated ten million died during the Second-Sino Japanese War (p. 23). Such historians as Bu Ping have extensively studied Japan's war crimes against the Chinese people, including Unit 731's human experimentation and the Rape of Nanking. China's emeritus historian Zhang Zhenkun, born in 1926, has personal experience with the conflict. He admits that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) politically pressured China to criticize Japan for their "war of aggression" and invasion of China (p. 60). In Zhang's words, "Everyone wrote in accordance with the CCP's view" (p. 61). Overall, China stresses its sacrifices and its role in inflicting heavy losses on the Imperial Japanese Army yet downplays the role of the United States.

In the discussion on South Korea, the narrative focusing on the Seodaemum Prison Museum

highlights a foreign invasion and struggle for independence. Yet the symbol of South Korea's animosity against Japan stems from the legacy of "comfort women," forced prostitution for the Japanese military (p. 66). The nationalist activist and writer Cho Jeong Rae emphasizes Korea's "history of suffering," claiming that Japan murdered three to four million Koreans under thirty-six years of colonialism from 1910 to 1945 (pp. 75, 76, 98). Cho also acknowledges Korea's lack of confronting *chinilipa*, Koreans who collaborated with Japanese rule. In short, Koreans have created a narrative of victimization yet hardly mention Korean collaboration with the Japanese during the conflict.

For the Japanese, the war marked a wide array of memories and narratives. For example, the Yasukuni Shrine and its nearby museum have become a symbol of national heroism against the encroachment of Western imperialism. Meanwhile, the Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum is dedicated to civilians who committed suicide rather than surrender to American forces. Additionally, the film *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988), directed by Takahata Isao, showcases a story of two children suffering during wartime under American bombers. These memory constructions have created Japan's "victimhood identity" and continue to bring historical controversy to the region.

The Pacific War for Americans is remembered as a savage war. It conjures images of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the American flag on Iwo Jima, and the use of atomic weapons at the end of the conflict. Historian John Dower describes "why it was merciless, and how much hatred there was" (p. 166). For Lester Tenny, the war brings old memories of being a prisoner of war (POW) captured from the Philippines in 1942 and being forced into laboring in a coal mine on Japanese home islands. An estimated 27 percent of Allied POWs died in Japanese captivity (pp. 189). For Americans, the war is remembered as a "good war" that combated tyranny.

In part 3, "Divided Memories: The Major Controversies," comprising chapters 6-10, the authors discuss the multiple controversies of war. These contested memories include the legacy of war crimes, the atomic bombs, and postwar settlements. The authors emphasize the International Military Tribunal for the Far East in Tokyo and its historical impact. Unlike the Nuremberg trials in Europe, the trials in Tokyo focused on "crimes against peace" and ignored "crimes against humanity" (pp. 268). Notably, sixteen of the convicted did not serve their complete life sentences but were pardoned in 1958. Furthermore, the trials, primarily led by Americans, failed to represent the suffering of Korean and Chinese victims. These trials contributed to the creation of historical animosity in the region and a lack of reconciliation.

*Divergent Memories* shares similar themes with Viet Thanh Nguyen's *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (2016) on the legacy and animosity created by war. However, it ignores the memories of other Asian nations involved in the Pacific War. For example, the Philippines acknowledge Japan's atrocities but have never developed great animosity. According to a 2015 Pew Research Center study, 81 percent of Filipinos have positive views of Japan. In the same study, only 25 percent of Koreans and 12 percent of Chinese have positive views of Japan.[1] For Filipinos, in 1953, the former president of the Philippines, Elpidio Quirino, pardoned 105 Japanese war criminals. President Quirino stated, "I do not want my children and my people to inherit from me hate." [2] However, the book, a well-written investigation on the legacy of World War II in Asia, greatly contributes to the field of cultural and military history.

#### Notes

[1]. Bruce Stokes, "How Asia-Pacific Publics See Each Other and Their National Leaders: Japan Viewed Most Favorably, No Leader Enjoys Majority Support," Pew Research Center, September 2, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/>

2015/09/02/how-asia-pacific-publics-see-each-other-and-their-national-leaders/.

[2]. Geronimo Suliguin, "A Tale of Two Presidents: Normalization of Relations with Japan," Philippine News Agency, May 22, 2018, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1036022>.

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