A Holistic View of the Japanese Occupation of Southeast Asia

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[*Abstract*]

The paper examined Southeast Asia as a whole and focused on similarities among countries composing what is now known as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In order to determine these similarities, the analysis focused on the fact that during World War II the whole of Southeast Asia was occupied by one political power: Japan. The policies the Japanese implemented in the region were to a degree very similar in terms of pressures and tensions that occurred in the different countries. The paper argues that these pressures and the responses of the various peoples of Southeast Asia instilled a nucleus of common identity in Southeast Asia as a whole. Basically, the policies that the Japanese implemented all over Southeast Asia were the following: the setting up regional administrations; the extraction of resources and emphasis on local self-sufficiency; the implementation of cultural Japanization; and local indigenization policies. The Southeast Asian responses that crystalized this joint Southeast Asian identity may be described as: accommodating and resisting the Japanese;

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commemorating portraying; and collectively remembering the era. The process of action and reaction between Japan and Southeast Asia was formative of this joint Southeast Asian identity.

Keywords: Japanese Occupation, Southeast Asia in World War II, Identity, Policies, Commemoration

Ⅰ. Introduction

Southeast Asia is a region of more than 600 million people. The region now sees cooperation developing under the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) flag, where the nations in the region strive for closer socio-cultural and economic cooperation. Creation of a regional identity is a major aspect of these activities. It remains very clear to most observers that despite these efforts of integration, there is one aspect that is clearly lacking. The member countries of Southeast Asia are simply very different and very politically diverse. National interests of the various countries remain paramount in determining the degree of cooperation in Southeast Asia.

It needs very little explanation that historically, Southeast Asia has been subjected to a tremendous influx of cultural, social, economic and political influences that through the centuries came to the area and shaped the identity of the region. Southeast Asia only became a clearly distinct region during World War II, where strategists began to see the region as this body of countries distinct from Oceania, South Asia, and East Asia. But who was it that forced the hand of the strategists to re-conceptualize the region? This paper will argue very straightforwardly that the only time in history that Southeast Asia was under one political leadership ever in long centuries of history was during the Japanese era of 1941-1945. This created a nucleus of joint identity in Southeast Asia. In about three and a half years, one political system created a great impact to the whole of the region. Various local degrees of indigenous self-rule or colonial control remained in place during some stages of the Pacific War as the whole Southeast Asia was under placed under the

leadership of the emperor and his imperial administrators. Even in prevailing nationalist histories which focus on the struggle against colonialism, the extent of how the three-year occupation tipped of the accepted balance of power in Southeast Asia between colonized and colonizer was not summarily dismissed. What were the impacts of such an era on the identity formation process of the region?

Japan had expanded its colonial territory since modernization had gripped the country in the late 19th Century. At the outbreak of World War II in Asia, Japan already obtained decades of experience in colonial administration and rule through its prolonged control of what is now Korea, Taiwan, as well as various island nations in the Pacific obtained after World War I. Large areas in China were also under the Japanese government for many years. After the Pacific War, nation-states emerged in Southeast Asia, giving rise to dominant political forms of government in the region today. It is recognized in various historiography of Southeast Asia that Western colonial powers shaped the political identities of Southeast Asian countries by way of colonialism in the 19th and 20th Centuries. The Netherlands was instrumental in shaping Indonesia. Great Britain governed Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, and Myanmar. The French created Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos. The United States ruled the Philippines, and even Spain and Portugal were considered important in the shaping of regional identity. The only independent country of the region, Thailand, found itself heavily influenced by France and Great Britain in the 19th and 20th Centuries.

All this is amply represented and recognized in the historiography of the nations that now constitute ASEAN. National historiography that dominated history writing in the 20th Century also emphasized the struggle against colonialism. Southeast Asian historiography however consistently ignored the importance of this joint colonial experience of occupation shared by these countries during the one and only time ever in history that Southeast Asia was governed by one political power. The end of the war saw the liberation of many of the Southeast Asian nations. Myanmar/Burma became independent in 1948, while Indonesia and Laos in 1945. Cambodia declared independence in 1953, and the Philippines in 1946. Thailand was basically independent through and through. Vietnam was engulfed

in the Cold War struggle that lasted for decades, which began in 1945. Only East Timor, Brunei, Singapore, and Malaysia took many more years to become nations. In general, the war years greatly shaped the fate of Southeast Asia to such an extent that colonial dynamics was changed in the 10 years that followed.

Nation-state historiography may be old-fashioned or not considered paramount anymore in the shift to transnational and regional government, yet nationalism does remain at the heart of decision making for many societies. As one expands to a global scope, it may even be argued that nation-states recently jeopardized by external military interventions shown difficulty in replacing their governments. The nation-state and nationalism seem to be losing their ground but remain valuable in adapting stable forms of inclusive government in a world where borders cannot be dismantled from our conceptualization of the world.

The argument for a more holistic view of Southeast Asia as an extra layer of identity for inhabitants of this region is in no sense negated here. The thesis presented here is that if colonialism and the struggle of the local population against colonialism were important in the formation of national identity, it then makes sense that the uniform policies emphasized by one colonial power and the response by the Southeast population in the short but intense years of the Second World War somehow crystalized a Southeast Asian political identity that complements the various nodes of Southeast Asian identity. Put more simply: as the people of Southeast Asia assumed similar imperial policies of localized government during the war years, their responses must have indirectly created a shared identity. This assumption shapes this paper's initial analysis of the Japanese Occupation of Southeast Asia from a holistic viewpoint. The fact that Southeast Asia was quickly re-dominated by diverse local forces because of the bottled-up national influences that made them reassert themselves and become politically victorious is also acknowledged as mitigating this Southeast Asian layer of political identity emerging in the shadow of so much nationalist post-war fervor.

The degree of similarities of Southeast Asian political identity

remains difficult to gauge especially considering the political dominance of the elements of national political identity reaffirming themselves after the Japanese occupation where an attempt at Southeast Asian nation-building and identity construction was undertaken. Specific questions may shed light on this political communality of Southeast Asia. Since the Japanese found themselves in control of the whole of Southeast Asia, what were the policies that they implemented in the area? To what degree did the stress of war require a "one size, fits al"' concept for the Japanese as they administered the different areas of Southeast Asia? To what extent did this Japanese element play a role in the local yet general anti-colonial struggle emerging all over Southeast Asia? How many of these experiences were shared by the people of Southeast Asia during the years predating national independence? In the decade after the Japanese Occupation, most countries of Southeast Asia quickly proclaimed independence. Other countries in Southeast Asia which experienced more prolonged struggles found themselves with local leaders formed and trained during and emerging from the Japanese war years. Is this a coincidence?

Ⅱ. Japanese policies in Southeast Asia during World War II

2.1. Setting up regional administrations

World War II arguably began with the German invasion of Poland in 1939. In Asia, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in China in 1937 brought Japan into a conflict that would end only in 1945. By May 1940, the German forces quickly overran the Low Countries and France, inflicting a painful defeat on Britain. Southeast Asia was indirectly affected by the worldwide conflict. Struggling against the Chinese forces of Chiang Kai-shek in Chungking, Japan demanded France and Great Britain in June 1940 to close the borders of Vietnam (Indochina) and Myanmar (Burma), respectively. The British sought for American intervention, but because this did not happen, the Anglo-Japanese Agreement of July 18, 1940 led to the closure of Burma Road to force Chiang Kai-shek to negotiate table (Carr 1985: 105). Aware of the fact that the colonial position of the Dutch and

French in Southeast Asia was weakened because of the German occupation of the Netherlands and France, the Japanese decided to pressure the said colonial administrations to provide Japan with various concessions. Japan pressured the Dutch into providing quantities of raw commodities and the French into allowing the imperial forces in Vietnam to monitor the closed border Vietnam-China border (Iriye 1987: 100-101).

In September 1940, the French allowed Japan to station soldiers in Tonkin. However, it was only in July 1941, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, that Japan moved into the South of Vietnam. In response, the US froze all Japanese assets and implemented an oil embargo. It was only a matter of time for Japan to declare war as it found itself in a position where it must make its stand. Japan has been negotiating with the Dutch in Indonesia to obtain oil since September 1940, but they were held off until talks finally failed in late June 1941 (Goto 1997: 120). The diplomatic sabre rattling had not impressed the Dutch, and one month later, the Americans also cut off access to other raw commodities. Japan was in a very difficult position fighting a prolonged war in China, as it was alos outmaneuvered in Southeast Asia. On the December 8, 1941 the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Japan captured the whole Southeast Asia by May 1942, its imperial occupation lasting until 1945.

A 3 to 3.5-year timeframe was given to the Japanese colonizing power to implement various policies in Southeast Asia. Japan prepared in advance and did not have to wait until it conquered Southeast Asia. Many documents were destroyed but enough remained, enabling the reconstruction of these Japanese policies. Japanese policies for Burma and Indonesia reconstruct for us the general policies of Japan for the rest of Southeast Asia.

The Japanese adopted the *Principles Governing the Administration of Occupied Southern Areas* on November 20, 1941. In this document, military governments as to be installed in all the areas which must have three priorities: restoration of public order, acquisition of vital resources for the war, and local economic self-sufficiency (Benda, Irikura & Kishi 1965: 1). The Japanese

decided to do the following: make use of existing governmental organizations wherever possible; acquire and ship back resources for the economic planning of Tokyo; make the indigenous population comply with these burdens and as they are also to trust the Japanese forces (Benda, Irikura & Kishi 1965: 2). In Burma, there is a large measure of success in working with the local population. In December 1941, Colonel Keiji Suzuki drew up a plan to use locals to support the Japanese military attack on Burma. The Minami Kikan under his watch armed the Burmese and implemented uprisings. Leaders of the Burma Independence Party coordinated with the Japanese attack on Moulmein (Trager 1971: 27-28). Suzuki proposed a provisional government that took control of Burma (Trager 1971: 29). A plan drawn by the Southern Forces dated February 6, 1942 was more cautious and decided to place the voluntary army under the Japanese operational commander, with the promise of a new regime in the future (Trager 1971: 32).

In November 1941, the Japanese also divided the locality between the Army and the Navy (Benda, Irikura & Kishi 1965: 4). It was agreed that both would be in close contact with Tokyo and provide regular updates (Benda, Irikura & Kishi 1965: 4). General administrative matters, public peace and order, acquisition and development of resources, finance and economic matters, infrastructure matters, propaganda and intelligence matters, and then finally, control of enemy property and facilities, would all fall under their joint responsibility (Benda, Irikura & Kishi 1965: 4-5). A division of administrative areas in Southeast Asia was also agreed upon. The Navy was assigned all of Eastern Indonesia and Dutch Borneo. The Army was in charge of Burma, Malaya, British Borneo, Java and Sumatra, and the Philippines (Benda, Irikura & Kishi 1965: 5). This Army administrations were further streamlined in Burma, Malaya including Sumatra, Java, North Borneo (amalgamating various administrations of Labuan, Sarawak, Brunei, and the North Borneo Company), and finally the Philippines (Benda, Irikura & Kishi 1965: 53). In the case of North Borneo, four different British colonial administrative areas were restructured into one, five provinces which included Brunei were lumped with Miri to form one province, and Labuan was reassigned to be part of another province (Reece 1998:

54). In April 1943, Sumatra and Malaya were put under different Army administrations (Benda, Irikura & Kishi 1965: 53). The Navy gained control of Eastern Indonesia and had a more simplified structure, having only one command structure for the area.

The French colonies remained under Vichy France and were regarded by the Japanese as foreign until the re-conquest of the French homeland in Europe by the Free French forces in 1945. In fact, after the Vichy regime took over, Japan opened an embassy in Indochina in October 1941 (Hata 1998: 47). This changed in 1945 when the Japanese 38th Army came in and took over the administration from the French (Hata 1998: 47). Thailand was also seen as an independent country by the Japanese and they did not to set up any military administration in the country. Also, an agreement between Japan and Thailand was formalized on December 21, 1941, where Thailand is to be allowed to regain previously lost territory (Numnonda 1997: 5). Thailand was pragmatic in working with Japan. Despite sending Japanese troops in the country, the imperial army respected the Thai government (Numnonda 1997: 46). East Timor was a colony of Portugal, and Portugal remained neutral in World War II. Japan occupied the area but did not implement any specific independent administration. All these were undertaken to implement the first order of the day: that the military administration restore public order.

2.2. Extraction of Resources and Local Self-sufficiency

The main goal for setting up of local administrations and the organization of the Japanese in each region was obviously the extraction of resources for the war effort. This was implemented in a very general way for all the colonies/areas, but also very specifically, depending on the area's resources. It was the most important goal of the Japanese at war effort. A plan was drawn up to facilitate and coordinate this extraction in November 20, 1941. It clearly stipulated that "great emphasis must be placed upon the procurement of resources" (Trager 1971: 38). Complementing this was local self-sufficiency, where Japanese and local populations were to live on locally available resources. Thailand's alliance with

Japan allowed right of passage and the extraction of economic resources without having to wage war (Numnonda 1997: 46). In this way Thailand managed to largely accommodate the Japanese.

Basically, Japan managed to pass through Thailand without having to expend many resources to subdue the country. Other countries would be overrun by the Japanese forces looking for resources. The most important resource the Japanese sought to obtain was oil. This oil came largely from Borneo and was used by the Japanese as a substitute for the oil lost when the Americans implemented the embargo of 1941. The petroleum industry was controlled by the military (Trager 1971: 40). The second important resource the Japanese exploited was labor. Men and women were sent to become laborers. In Indonesia, many came from very densely populated Java and were exported all over the region. Japan assigned men to heavy labor. In many instances, women were turned to sex slaves. Shigeru Sato showed how rice and labor were ruthlessly exploited and extracted by the Japanese in Java (1994). Also, many in Burma worked in this case on the Thai-Burma Railroad. Yet local situations and political factors also varied. Filipinos were not sent abroad to work under these conditions. In the case of Malaya, rubber and minerals became important commodities (Trager 1971: 40). In Myanmar, forestry and mining products were considered prime resources (Trager 1971: 66). Java supplied labor, which was divided over larger areas for use by the administrations. When the Thai-Burma railroad was envisioned, around 2,000 men from each of the districts of Burma were said to be needed to compose the labor service corps (Trager 1971: 232-233). It would later be estimated that the Burmese comprised the largest labor force on the Thai-Burma railroad project, with around 175,000 drafted. Half of them deserted the project, which left some 90,000 to carry on the work. Still unknown today are the number of people who deserted the project. 44% died in the process (Beattie 2005: 52). Providing the second largest contingent of workers was Malaya. No Thai worked were involved in the project (Beattie 2005: 52).

Important commodities like rice and other foodstuffs were increasingly extracted from local populations. Harvests were

confiscated in Borneo and Indonesia. The Japanese exported or extracted what they needed but did not import what the local population needed; "each area must make efforts to maintain its self-sufficiency in food resources (Trager 1971: 41)." This was in line with the self-sustenance policy Japan applied to all localities, which proved to be challenging for some areas where new crops were introduced and failed to yield harvest. Accounts of scarcity, for instance, the lack of clothes, were very common.

2.3. Cultural Japanization and local indigenization Policies

Aside from extracting resources, the imperial administration also implemented Japanization policies. Indigenous populations, as well as Orientals living in the region and Indo-Europeans, were taught to accept affinity with the Japanese. The Chinese meanwhile were represented as anti-Japanese, and thus were considered enemies (Trager 1971: 50). Looking for support, the Japanese began with recruiting locals to assist them in propaganda efforts in favor of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. This development also gave rise to Japanese language schools, training better low-level workers for Japanese administration. It was recognized as a slow process of acculturation (Trager 1971: 51). In Burma, 50 language schools were established (Trager 1971: 195). The Japanese tried to reorient the local population into an Asian social hierarchy—Asian but with Japan on top. Effectively this replaced one colonial situation with another and the indigenous population was not blind to this. In order to achieve this policy, the Japanese also implemented Japanese schooling and forced the local population to submit to Japanization. They also forced the local population to adapt Japanese customs such as bowing. All of these were implemented in such a brutal way. Locals had to bow to Japanese guards and punishments were meted out to those who disobey. This led some locals to hate the Japanese. The Japanese were also posted in key administrative positions and some orders specifically state the need for them to introduce their own power structure while technically being under indigenous administrators (Trager 1971: 123). In the case of Burma, the Japanese proceeded to gradually assign tasks to this body of indigenous administrators (Trager 1971: 140-144). A

similar situation can be seen in Indonesia and other regions in Southeast Asia. The goal of language teaching was partly to help spread the ideas of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, as was to make local population cooperate better with the Japanese (Trager 1971: 197). It also produced more educated laborers.

The propaganda department had its share of successes and failures. The fact that so many Southeast Asians grandparents today can sing Japanese songs they learned as children testifies to this. Worthy of mention too was how the Japanese training programs instilled a work ethic in the local population. If previous colonial powers approached enforcement using less forceful means, the Japanese did not hesitate to mete out corporal or verbal punishment when locals underperform. The Japanese were consequently disliked for their harshness, but the people had adapted to their policies to some degree. The local populations may have resented the enforcement of Japanese policies, but the young benefited greatly and their generation educated under the Japanese acquired a worldview and skillset large enough to use in later life, enabling them to rise in society after the Japanese occupation. The Japanese also put premium on local indigenous population in business over Chinese immigrants (Trager 1971: 48).

Children went to school were trained not only to pick up useful skills but also to dislike colonial power. The instances of torture and rape carried out by the Japanese were however not lost on the indigenous population. They were smart enough to realize that the Japanese were not any better. Japan gave Southeast Asia indigenous learning options and populations in some countries like Indonesia largely went along with Japanese schemes. The Pembela Tanah Air or National Volunteer Army of Indonesia was a showcase of this aforementioned phenomenon. It still has an impact today, being formative of the core of the Indonesian army, and synthesizing earlier structures of the former colonial, militia, and auxiliary armies. This illustration shows how Japanese policies also empowered the local population as they also pursued imperial goals. Officials worked in the various administrative branches set up by the Japanese. Experiences they obtained became very valuable in the future. Other elements in society refused to collaborate and joined

the resistance, especially when they were supplemented with outside help. In the Philippines, resistance was very pronounced.

Ⅲ. Indigenous reactions of identity construction

3.1 Accommodation and Resistance

This was the most important factor that shaped the Southeast Asian identity marker. As people and nations were subjugated, they responded to pressures imposed on them by Japan. In the oscillation between accommodation and resistance, indigenous Southeast Asian identity was being shaped. Some countries were allowed to obtain a degree of independence, and this required indigenous administration. The Thai were able to retain a certain degree of power and avoided exploitation. Despite the project named Thai-Burma railroad, no Thai labored and died in the construction. In a way, this was consistent with Japanese policy to leave indigenous populations under its own institutions as much as possible. However, the pressure on the population and the deterioration of the economic and social conditions caused increasing resentment and dislike of the Japanese (Sabihah Osman, Muhammad Hadi Abdullah & Sabullah Hj Hakip 1995: 106). Accommodation and resistance both carried in them the germ of Southeast Asian self-awareness and the obligation to master one's own destiny.

In 1943, some Thai began to organize and work on the Free Siamese movement, inspired by the Free French movement by De Gaulle in France and supported by the American OSS and the British Force 136 who sent in agents (Bunyaket 2009: 94). Others were not as lucky as support was absent. The failure of the Albert Kwok rebellion in what is now Sabah was a painful case (Hall 2009: 94). The Allied power was just too far away for the rebellion to succeed. History might have taken another turn had support been closer. Where Allied power was close, there resistance succeeded. Yet, everywhere in Southeast Asia, accommodation was also important. In Manila, President Quezon personally explained to Jose P. Laurel that he should cooperate with the Japanese if needed. Quezon also asked Laurel to preserve the unity of the country and

protect its population (Jose 2006: 111). Somehow, those administrators left behind after the displacement of colonial power dealt with the Japanese and had to juggle between accommodation and resistance.

Aung San is an example. In Myanmar, the Japanese created the Burmese Defense Army and appointed Aung San as commander (Trager 1971: 105). These troops were drawn from the Brunei Independence Army (Trager 1971: 106). Heavily controlled by Japan, these troops later rebelled against the empire. Other locals were brought up in the spirit of resistance. The importance of these elements on the future of Southeast Asian identity and even of national history was not sufficiently been investigated and researched in the region. Some level of gratitude was visible, but largely people felt used and abused believing in a dream of brotherhood and independence that Japan did not fulfill. Even independence in Indonesia was not given but only promised until after the war ended. Indonesians had to take their freedom on their own. In Thailand, the local strong man Phibun negotiated from a position of some strength with the Japanese and this resulted in territorial gains for the country and massive popular support. However, after the war, these territorial gains were lost after the Japanese defeat. Thailand gave back the territories it gained in exchange for its entry into the United Nations.

The Japanese tried to appoint capable Japanese personnel in key positions of the administration, but allowed local population to work as administrators in the local regions (Trager 1971: 47). There also seemed to have been little choice. There just weren't enough Japanese administrators around in the war years. In the case of the Philippines, the degree of accommodation was far lower as resistance was mainly adopted. Logistically supported by the USA, the Philippine army continued to resist and the struggle provided legitimacy to some political figures decades after the Japanese occupation. In certain areas, the population and leadership changed sides after the Japanese were defeated or began to look defeated. Opportunism was also key. The local population was largely unskilled and the Japanese brought skill through their schools and even labor projects. The colonial powers supporting resistance also

brought in skills development to those willing to learn, and this indicated that the indigenous population was consequently trained. The balance therefore between accommodation and resistance was quite complex. For instance, Thailand was an ally of Japan, but after the war, Phibun adapted the Thai policy of Westernization and veered away from eating with hands as a way of avoiding Japanese customs (Stowe 1991: 232).

Resistance was an issue. The British set up Force 136 set to operate in Malaya, Siam, Burma and areas of Indochina where it directed pockets of resistance. The British worked with both the Burmese and the Karen. However, the Christian Karen were pro-British but anti-Burmese and anti-Japanese (Allen 1984: 575). British or American organized interventions meshed with indigenous counter-elite or elite resistance yielded smooth take-overs. This was not the case in North Borneo where Tom Harrisson and the Australian Services Reconnaissance Department mobilized the Dayak tribes and where there was said to be more fragmentation of identity. *Agas* and *Semut* were the military operations mounted by Australian and British secret troops in 1944 to more professionally organize and take up the resistance against the Japanese (Harrisson 1959: 140-141). The Japanese were disliked by most of the Dayak tribes while the Malays took a more subdued attitude (Gin 1999: 70). This did not last. The promises of the Japanese turned out to be just that: hollow promises that had no real importance and were used to facilitate the exploitation of Southeast Asia for the Japanese war effort. Even the Malay who were initially accommodating to the Japanese ended up feeling neglected (Barber 2012: 141). Yet in all these, one thing was clear. Southeast Asians all resisted against the Japanese when the opportunity presented itself. Opportunism and realization of self-interest, as well as political awareness, pervaded across Southeast Asia in the harsh years of the war.

3.2. Commemoration, Portrayal and Collective Remembrance

The hardships brought about by the extraction of resources for purposes of war and the infliction of self-sufficiency policy, as well as the suffering, abuse, and torture dragged on. Increasingly desperate, the Japanese often vented out their frustrations on the Southeast

Asians. The extraction of foodstuffs from the local population to Japanese soldiers increased during the later years of the war. This fueled the hatred and struggle against the Japanese, replacing initial accommodation from the public. Not all of the Southeast Asians wanted this policy but many did. The defeat of the Japanese in 1945 lead to the outburst of resentment against Japan. Had after all Japan not promised development but given only extraction and defeat?

The Japanese occupation is generally remembered for the cruelty of the Japanese, the extraction of resources. Memorials show this element of local suffering. There is also however a smattering of positivity as many states show reluctance in knowing that what they learned during the occupation served them well against the returning colonial powers. Many years have gone by and World War II is increasingly fading from personal and national memory. The state collectivity used the war as a nation building monument and largely ignored the Japanese when accommodation might be seen as collaboration. The Japanese of course had to be portrayed as an evil power as they also contributed to this through their ruthlessness. All these events instilled a form of remembrance of the Japanese era. There is also some irony in the remembrance of the era. Many feel that the struggle was hard to avoid and Japan broke the status quo that kept the colonized in the clutches of colonial powers. The war era remains however as a time where nations determined themselves as they were either collaborating or resisting the imperial power. Ironically all these were made possible by a joint experience of occupation.

Ⅳ. Conclusion

The paper started out with a very basic assumption that wartime years imprinted a similar image of Japanese colonialism that would have triggered similar reactive processes all over Southeast Asia. This may be traced in various Southeast Asian societies at least to a minor but yet discernable level. The Japanese policies issued for the whole of Southeast Asia were identified: administration, extraction of resources and imposition of self-sufficiency, and adaption of

cultural Japanization. The paper also showed how the Southeast Asian populace reacted against these policies either through accommodation or resistance. Finally, the paper explained how these responses formed national identities in relation to the commemoration of the war. The paper showed that these Japanese policies indeed had a lingering effect on Southeast Asian societies. It also pointed out that more research is needed to identify specific effects such as the degree to which pro-Japanese training or how anti-Japanese resistance catalyzed young Southeast Asians to respond and later become local leaders in politics or the army.

From a holistic viewpoint, this ambivalent attitude in Southeast Asia towards Japan is very prevalent. Japan shaped Southeast Asia during these war years through Japanese extraction policies and the indigenous responses were triggered because of this. The militarism of Japan was perceived negatively but its policies also opened up industrial or economic activities. In countries where colonial administration was largely continued after the war, or where colonial experience was not viewed as entirely negative, the Japanese were negatively perceived as having displaced the former colonial power.

The reaction of the local population against the Japanese formed the elites that Southeast Asia had for many decades that followed. In certain countries, some were accommodating and in others, resisting. Clearly, there was a strain of opportunism and a pragmatic taking advantage of furthering the national interests. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia forced the Southeast Asian colonized nations to view their individual colonial experiences in perspective and to make a decisive choices of either going for or against the Japanese. Either way, the choice benefited them positively as rational leaders in developing societies. To an extent, lessons learned during the Japanese occupation became the seed in beginning the modernization of Southeast Asian governmental procedures. In this process, the Japanese cannot be considered to have developed Southeast Asia, but they did bring something different to Southeast Asia in providing the region an alternative model of government besides from the colonial. This then allowed the local population to think critically about the colonial repressive system.

Finally, the Japanese occupation changed the balance of power in Southeast Asia. This ended the colonial era through the import of opportunities for self-development of Southeast Asian, either in accommodating or resisting the Japanese. In doing so, pride and self-reliance, however frail, were infused in Southeast Asia as it evolved a nucleus of regional identity. The Japanese occupation was a collective, Southeast Asian experience. That occupation ended abruptly with the announcement of the Japanese surrender. The end of the Japanese occupation triggered the race of developing Southeast Asian nations to progress and modernity. In that race, some may be leading while others may be lagging behind, but they are all running toward the same goal, increasingly resembling each other more and more toward a joint identity of Southeast Asians in ASEAN.

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