

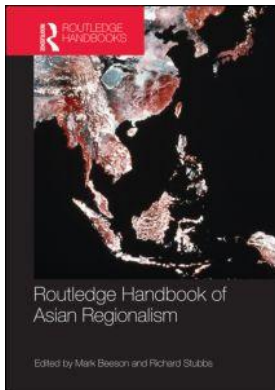
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The shift to the modern world in East Asia

War, memory and regional identity

Peter Preston

East Asia entered the modern world of reason, science and industrial-capitalism via a tangled exchange with extra-regional powers in Europe and North America during which indigenous forms of life were more or less thoroughly remade. Incoming groups sought trade but were not averse to the use of violence or the establishment of settlements, and so indigenous polities were slowly overborne as empire holdings were established. East Asia became a peripheral area within a globe-spanning industrial-capitalist system centred on Europe and North America. But these sprawling multi-ethnic empires were never going to last. Simple demographics ensured their demise, but the manner of their eclipse, the contribution of local agents, and the nature of their political successors were not guaranteed. It was a contingent process; one part of a general crisis of empire systems.

The crisis can be variously dated: in Europe, from 1914 to 1945/89 (war, ruin, occupation and recovery); in East Asia, from 1911 to 1975 (rebellion, war, ruin and development); and in America, from 1941–08/10 (war, dominance and overstretch). The crisis manifested itself in various ways: there were national reform movements in both core and periphery; there were restricted conflicts in peripheral territories; and finally there was a period of general warfare. From the early twentieth century through to the early years of this century there were multiple wars: these wars had various participants, they occurred in various places, they were sustained for various lengths of time, and they inevitably they gave rise to different memories. In the case of East Asia, the slow process of the disintegration of foreign empires was accompanied by general warfare, followed by cold war conflicts plus at the same time multiple local clashes as new states settled issues of borders.

At the present time, East Asia is home to a number of stable, orderly and rich countries. Their histories can be read as comprising a series of layers of experience: pre-contact civilizations, the era of foreign empires, the period of crisis, the independence period, cold war, followed by broad success within the East Asia region. Each layer of experience carries its own stock of memories, which shape the present and point to the future – one crucial aspect of this past is the business of war. The legacies of warfare shape collective memory and the national past, and provide areas of interstate tension, which makes the present seem – at least in this regard – somewhat precarious. The problems in East Asia are subtle, however, as the region is successful and this entails greater integration – so revisiting available truths and confronting the legacies of the past is becoming a common problem.

There are two readily available ways of conceptualizing the importance of memory: first, the idea of collective memory, which looks at the multiplicity of ways in which socially constructed

memories are transmitted down through time within the social world (Halbwachs 1992); and second the idea of the national past, which points more directly to the exchange between the elite and the masses in the production of the collective self-understandings of a political community (Wright 1985). Both lines coincide in stressing the importance of the remembered past in the understandings and actions of agents in the present – and this is true of the routines of everyday life, the work of community and formal organizations and in the machinations of the state (and here, of course, action can be turned either towards domestic or international audiences). This chapter will begin with the widest historical frame through which to consider the enduring role of the past in the present – and move towards a narrower focus on contemporary East Asia.

The shift to the modern world: Europe, East Asia and the United States

All political elites confront the task of managing change. They must read and react to enfolding structural change, plot a route to the future and organize their population accordingly. International relations (IR) theorists have addressed these issues in three main ways: realism (rational state actors must respond to shifting power relations); liberalism (rational actors can respond to mutually beneficial opportunities in the marketplace); and social constructivism (socially embedded actors reflexively grasp their circumstances to inform action in respect of diverse goals). This last noted approach brings IR theorists into contact with scholars from many disciplines within the social sciences: for example, historians, sociologists and cultural critics. This dialogue opens up the issue of identity – and here, in brief, there are two key ideas: collective memory (the multifarious ways in which a community sustains identity); and the national past (the quasi-formal way in which a polity sustains its identity). The latter is of particular relevance: a national past is a provisional contested compromise between the ideas of the official elite and the diverse opinions of the masses; it offers a summary view of the nation – recording its past, detailing its present and sketching out a route to the future.

East Asia has been shaped in complex interchanges with Europe and the United States; the three regions inherit long intermingled histories in common and these feed through into individual national pasts. First, in Europe, the twentieth century saw a series of interlinked wars involving the metropolitan empire powers. The result of these wars was the ruin of the metropolitan heartlands and their loss of the territories of empire. The continent that had ushered in the modern world was politically and culturally eclipsed. The project of the European Union was inaugurated in response to these disasters and in parallel with national welfare state systems has proved to be surprisingly successful. One unexpected consequence of this success is that deepening integration is raising questions of identity, not just various national identities but also a common European identity. Second, in East Asia the twentieth century saw a related sequence of ruinous wars. The overarching effect was the decline of empires, but the local contributions involved aspirations to late-empire, civil war and the manoeuvrings associated with state-making. Despite these wars, East Asia has emerged as one of the world's most powerful regions: first, in Japan, later in the four 'tiger economies' and more recently with China, whose reform programme, following a similar period of conflicts, and looking to the East Asian model, has generated very rapid development. Once again, success creates its own novel demands and the East Asian region's general place within the modern world and the relationships of its component parts are in question. And third, the record of the United States offers a variant upon this theme. The country was formed in a revolutionary war of independence against its metropolitan core. Thereafter there were numerous further wars: civil war, then wars of dispossession against the native peoples of the continent, thereafter late empire wars in Latin America and Southeast Asia, which culminated in

claims to great power status in the declaration of the open door regarding accessing China; later there were wars against Japan, cold wars down the East Asian littoral and from 1989–91 a brief episode of hubristic celebration that culminated in 2008 accompanied by a nascent recognition of relative decline within the tri-polar global system and thus the familiar problems of managing expectations in an era of diminished status.

Seen in this perspective, the relations between Europe, East Asia and the United States are not simply pragmatic – shaped by the immediate demands of political events or economic contracts – but are shaped by a great depth of shared experience. And these experiences have in part shaped the present East Asia – further affected by the tensions of indigenous state-making and cold war. All this prompts several questions: what is the nature of this shared history, what are its legacies for today and how does it shape contemporary thinking?

Shared history: the record of the twentieth century

The process of general crisis spawned a multiplicity of wars: ethnic, class, interstate and between empires. The European and East Asian continents were the sites of extensive military campaigns: the destruction was extensive and the casualties were measured in millions. The USA participated in the later wars but suffered relatively few casualties (Judt 2008b).

Crisis, memory and recovery in Europe

In recent years the European Union has sometimes been presented as a model of social life to which the rest of the world might aspire (Rifkin 2004). However, in contrast to such self-advertisements the early part of the twentieth century involved a long sequence of interlinked wars (Mazower 1998); the conflicts were many, the costs horrendous.

The principal conflicts:

- 1914–18 Great War
- 1917–22 Russian Revolution & Civil War
- 1936–9 Spanish Civil War
- 1938 Austrian *Anschluss* and Munich Agreement
- 1939–45 Second World War
- 1941–5 Invasion of Soviet Union
- 1941–5 Participation of USA
- 1945–51 Occupation of Germany
- 1956 Hungarian Uprising
- 1968 Prague Spring
- 1989 Opening of Berlin Wall

Scale indicated: the resultant death toll¹

- Great War 8,000,000
- Second World War 41,000,000
- Total 49,000,000

The events of the Second World War shaped subsequent European history and shape European memory. National pasts were more or less extensively reworked: the British elite

claimed a moral victory, affirmed a spurious continuity with pre-war arrangements and began the task of making a welfare state (Addison 1995); the French elite accommodated the shocks of military occupation by celebrating resistance whilst reaching back before Vichy collaboration to an earlier ideal of republican democracy (Kedward 2005; Judt 2008a); and the West German elite began processing the material, political and moral catastrophe of the National Socialist years whilst recovering the much broader civilized history of the people of Germany (Evans 1997). The division of Europe saw imported overarching official ideologies deployed, with local elites adjusting as best they could, thus creating the idea of the free West and its Eastern European counterpart in state socialism. In Western Europe the institutional apparatus of the European Union slowly took shape and the end of the Cold War saw its rapid movement to the centre of European politics. At the present time, histories of the continent are available, addressed to national audiences. They are selective, but what is now in prospect is a European national past.

Crisis, memory and recovery in East Asia

In East Asia, the twentieth century saw the collapse of foreign empires, civil wars and a major region-wide war. In China, the historical core of the region, there were numerous conflicts: the 1911 revolution; warlord violence; class-based civil war between the Kuomintang and the Communist party; the Sino-Japanese war; and finally the wider Pacific War itself assimilated to the Second World War (Elleman 2001; Dreyer 1995). After 1945 there were further civil wars, numerous wars of colonial retreat, plus the proxy wars associated with the cold war concerns of the United States. The contemporary pattern of states and nations emerged only recently and at great human cost.

The sequence involved multiple conflicts:

- 1911–26 Chinese Revolution followed by Warlord era
- 1918–41 First-phase anti-colonial movements
- 1927–37 First Chinese Civil War
- 1931–45 Sino-Japanese wars
- 1941–5 Pacific War
- 1945–50 Indonesian Revolution
- 1946–9 Second Chinese Civil War
- 1946–54 First Indo-China War
- 1948–60 Malayan Emergency
- 1950–3 Korean War
- 1954–75 Second Indo-China War
- 1978–91 Third Indo-China War

These wars involved multiple participants; not merely the soldiers of one country fighting those of another, but armies made up of multiple ethnic groups, perhaps fighting in remote places far from their home areas, in armies commanded by leaders from outside the area, and for nominal causes of which they might well be ignorant or indifferent. These wars were typically fought using modern weapons, some of which were recycled from the stocks of colonial powers, others introduced during the Pacific War and later provided by supporters of the various forces. These wars were pursued at great cost to those civilians unlucky enough to be caught up in the fighting, as the modern weaponry was highly destructive and the armies using them generally indifferent to civilian losses.

Scale indicated: the resultant death toll

• Warlords and Civil War 1916–37	4,000,000
• Chinese Civil War 1946–9	2,500,000
• Sino-Japanese wars and Pacific War	12,600,000
• Southeast Asia occupations	5,000,000
• Korean War 1950–3	2,800,000
• First Indo China War 1946–54	600,000
• Second Indo China War 1954–75	2,700,000
• Indonesian regime change 1965	500,000
• Third Indo-China War	1,500,000
• Total	32,200,000

The general crisis, which has shaped contemporary East Asia, has been read into official and popular consciousness in a number of ways. However, these matters are not settled either domestically, where competing memories are readily available, or internationally, as it is possible to point to a number of competing national pasts that have been the occasion for international tensions and popular protests.

As the violence subsided, the newly empowered elites pursued various projects. These had common themes: there was a clear desire to establish clarity in respect of new territorial arrangements, thus where Europeans sought a measure of unity, elites in East Asia sought clarity of difference; thereafter, most elites sought development in the guise of growth and welfare. This took multiple forms: in Japan, an understated economic nationalism; in South Korea, an authoritarian national development; in Taiwan, national development clouded by unresolved civil war; in Hong Kong, a curious re-colonization coupled to accidental outward-directed economic development; in Southeast Asia, there were numerous military dictatorships in Thailand, elite rule in the Philippines, guided democracy and development in Indonesia, corporatism in Malaysia and an energetic state-led development in Singapore. In Indo-China, war continued into the 1990s, thereafter, further variants of the pursuit of national development took shape; and in China the success of the Communist party in liberating the country was tarnished by the utopian excesses of Mao, before the reforms of the later years of the century saw sweeping change and the creation of one more variant form of state-led national development.

Crisis, memory and the present day for the United States

By the turn of the twentieth century American politicians were ready to assert their status as a great power through colonial wars in Latin America and Southeast Asia. In East Asia, America was active from the late nineteenth century and asserted itself against European powers by promulgating the doctrine of the Open Door, claiming a special affinity for China, a matter of missionaries and gunboats (Gong 1996; Cummings 1999). In time, these interests clashed with those of Japan (Iriye 1987, 1997). The Pacific War produced a new political pattern in the region: external foreign empires were dissolved; indigenous elites secured power; and the USA assumed a key role and maintained large armed forces in the region.

America's wars in East Asia²

- 1898–1902 Philippines–American War
- 1941–5 Pacific War
- 1950–3 Korean War

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- 1946–54 Huk Rebellion
- 1965 Indonesian Coup
- 1954–75 Second Indo-China War

Scale indicated: the resultant death toll

- Philippines-American War 220,000
- Pacific War 17,600,000
- Korean War 2,800,000
- Huk Rebellion 35,000
- Indonesian Coup 500,000
- Second Indo-China War 2,700,000
- Total 23,855,000

Postwar American policy focused on Northeast Asia: the elite sought a remodelled Japan; they were ill disposed to their erstwhile Soviet allies; and their population was war-weary. The mix had consequences: the nuclear bombing of Japanese cities (Hasegawa 2005); the reform programmes of SCAP (Supreme Command for Allied Powers); claims for a role in Korea; and support for the Kuomintang. In 1949–50 matters come to a head: the founding of the People's Republic was read as the 'loss of China'; tensions in the Korean peninsula boiled over as the North's invasion precipitated the 1950–3 Korean War; and a region-wide response organized by the USA inaugurated the cold war in Asia. Economic and military aid flowed to allies: the SCAP reversed course; there was support for Taiwan, the British in the Malayan Emergency, the French in Vietnam (and later prosecution of war in Vietnam (plus Laos and Cambodia)), the elite in the Philippines, Sukarno's 1965 coup, and for the Thai military the cold war divided East Asia but support given to its allies helped the region recover (Stubbs 2005). The 2008 Olympics signalled a turning point – East Asian recovery was clear, as was the eclipse of American power in the region.

Shared history reconsidered

The intermingled histories of Europe, East Asia and the United States run back over several centuries and these exchanges have left their marks on polities in all three regions. The general crisis that engulfed Europe and East Asia in the twentieth century wrought dramatic change. The end of empires was followed by the emergence of new states and the rise to global power of the USA.

Legacies: comparing and contrasting these experiences

The interlinked histories of these three regions, together with their contemporary legacies, could be unpacked through their sustaining relationships: the economic relations (colonial trade links, neo-colonial continuities and lately more equitable participation within an increasingly internationalized global system); social relations (flows of people moving around the territories of former empires and more recently the emergence of novel patterns as skilled professionals move around the internationalized system); cultural relations (mutual influences involving languages, religions, arts and letters, plus buildings, foods, sports, popular cultures and the like); and the political relations (the legacies of the period of interlinked unfolding modernity, that is, the laws, the institutions, the party systems, the public spheres and the presently available collection of national pasts). Such comprehensive enquiries would cover a vast range, but three aspects can be

underscored. First, the extraordinary violence experienced by the peoples of Europe and East Asia during the twentieth century. Second, the different ways in which the elites and the masses in Europe and East Asia have dealt with these issues. Third, the nature of the recoveries in Europe, where the elites and the masses have addressed problematic records in the course of pursuing unification; in East Asia, where such issues, until recently, have been set aside as elites pursued differentiation through state-making, nation-building and development; and in the United States, which saw its location within the global system radically upgraded – and whose elites drew the conclusion that war is an available policy option.

Thus, once unpacked, the exchanges between these three regions admit of shifting comparisons across a range of time periods, involving numerous issues and producing a bewildering spread of commonalities and differences, which might be summarily grasped as follows:

- the experiences/memories of the shift to the modern world
- the experiences/memories of the crisis that remade the system
- the concerns respectively for unification, differentiation and hegemony
- the situated logics of contemporary national pasts
- the nature of regional identities

One: complex intertwined histories

The shift to the modern world of science-based industrial capitalism, which was begun by accident in Europe, took political-institutional form in the guise of state-empires. These state-empires embraced large geographical territories and thus were inhabited by multiple ethnic groups. They were ordered in multiple hierarchies: economic (a broad functional division of labour throughout the state/empire sphere); social (a detailed social status hierarchy, perhaps also functional (ethnicity/economic role could be linked)); cultural (an overarching great tradition was affirmed surrounded by local traditions); and political (a hierarchy of control running from metropolitan centres down to the local level peripheries). State-empire ideologies served to discipline populations. Such constructions work in a distinctive fashion. Unlike nationalisms, which can run reductive arguments (rhetorically, nations are removed from the social world and placed in the natural world (race or ethnicity) or the realm of history (in the asocial very long run) or the realms of culture (carried, for example, in discrete languages)), which turn contingent social identities into the nominally given, state-empire ideologies must confront subject populations that are diverse and where claims to common ethnicity or history or culture are manifestly false, and so the empire is distanced from the perhaps messy contemporary social world and its realization is lodged in the future as its elites claim that progress flows from empire membership – material, social, cultural and political – and will be secured in the future.

In East Asia the process of the expansion of the modern world entailed the radical reconstruction of extant patterns of life and political institutions: thus existing economies were reworked in line with the demands of global science-based industrial capitalism. The extent of the reach of modern economic practices varied from place to place. There was no simple process whereby forms of economic life were extinguished in favour of market-based activities, rather the interchange was long drawn out and the interactions formed endless permutations; thus existing social relations were reworked – new forms of economic life entailed revised forms of social life. As a result, cultural practices changed and existing polities were absorbed and recast within states/empires. In all these territories, state-empire ideologies were promulgated and whilst their reach within local populations varied – some groups affirmed the ideas, others ignored them and some bided their time, learned the lessons and in time lodged their own counterclaims (variants on the

ideas on offer) – they shaped the local exchange with the irresistible demands of the modern world and their legacies can be seen in the present.

Overall, the shift to the modern world is an ongoing open-ended process – it was inaugurated in Europe – it expanded – other extant civilizations were variously dissolved, absorbed or remade – it took the institutional form of state-empires. This long period provides the base-line materials of contemporary national pasts.

Two: general crisis – the system reordered – contrasting views

In the early twentieth century competition amongst European powers for advantage precipitated a sequence of interlinked wars. These were paralleled by further conflicts variously located in the peripheral areas of these state-empires as denizens of empire sought ends to foreign rule, projects cast in terms of independent statehood, nation-building and development. In general, these movements failed. However, the decision of the Japanese elite to extend their empire holdings deep into China ensured conflict with the USA and precipitated a general war in East Asia. Ongoing major conflicts in both the core and periphery of the state-empire system ensured its collapse.

The European-centred system of state-empires disappeared: in Europe, nation states appeared, built around the metropolitan cores of the earlier state-empires; in East Asia, nation states appeared, built around the aspirations of replacement elites (more particularly, those who could successfully lay claim to part of disintegrating empires); and the USA attained an unexpected albeit contested international pre-eminence at the heart of a project turned to the creation of a global liberal-market system.

The wars of the crisis era involved diverse locations, they involved multiple participants and they produced multiple memories. There is no simple history to be recorded: that is, there are no direct carry-overs into contemporary national pasts. There are legacies, but these are the result of elaborate and ongoing processes of active forgetting and remembering.

Overall, the period of general crisis resulted in the disintegration of European-centred state-empires. The global system was radically reordered. It was through this process of violent change that the contemporary pattern of nation states emerged. These events were read into national pasts: in Europe, often in terms of shame and regret; in East Asia, often in terms of progressive projects turned to the future; and in the USA, in terms of a putatively universal liberal-market project.

Three: elite concerns for unification, differentiation and hegemony

The Pacific War came to an end in August 1945. State-empires were either gone or un-recoverable, notwithstanding some further wars of colonial withdrawal. Where there had been a number of empires embracing territory in the geographical areas of Europe and East Asia, what now appeared were sets of nation states within areas that became regions within the overall global system. Thus reforms took place across a series of scales: global, regional and national. These process were further inflected by cold war conflicts: in Europe, the continent was divided with the eastern areas looking to the leadership of the Soviet Union whilst the western areas looked to the USA; and in East Asia, the territories were divided into a state socialist core around China and a state capitalist littoral oriented towards the leadership of the USA.

In Europe, elites were disposed to unification or at the very least cooperation; in the USA, elites sought to create an integrated global liberal-trade regime (Kolko 1968; Aron 1973); but in East Asia, elites were disposed to differentiation, for as empire-states dissolved, replacement elites emerged concerned with state-making, nation-building and development. Replacement elites

were concerned to establish their control and their collective identities; thereafter, varieties of international cooperation were not resisted, as with, for example, ASEAN, or the defence linkages of Taiwan, South Korea and Japan to the USA.

In the years following the wars, East Asia and the United States saw dramatic institutional changes in politics as novel states and nations were created and lodged variously within wider regional patterns. The period of intense rapid change fed into contemporary national pasts. Replacement elites were marked by war; the populations of new nations were similarly marked. The episode provides a further set of resources to be invoked and read into contemporary national pasts.

Four: situated logics of contemporary national pasts

In Europe, national pasts embrace the resources of baseline ideas about modernity and thereafter are suffused with reflections upon the period of crisis, collapse and occupation. The necessity of reconstruction is also embraced. The line of travel is towards unification. In significant measure, European national pasts come to revolve around war as something to be acknowledged, an occasion for remembering and mourning the dead, and an episode to be recalled in shame – thus, nationalism flows out of the routine experience of Europeans. However, in contrast, in East Asia, national pasts embrace the resources of baseline ideas dominated by the period of crisis, but it is read differently. The crisis gave aspirant replacement elites their chance and they took it; they seized control of particular parts of the territories of disintegrating state-empires and turned them into states pursuing nation-building. The line of travel is towards differentiation. Notwithstanding the violence and loss, the experience could be read positively – as the achievement of independence and, thereafter, regional cooperation was available in the form of varieties of networks. So nationalism flows into the routine experience of peoples in East Asia. In contrast, in the USA, events are read in terms of ethics (the war was morally virtuous), military campaigns (the war was a technical triumph), diplomacy (the war was a mixture of success, in regard to Europe/Japan, and failure, in respect of the USSR and PRC) and a distinctive route to the future, one in which the country offers a universal and optimistic line for all nations.

National pasts in Europe, East Asia and the United States involve significant elements of remembered war – occasions when action made a difference (Wright 1985). In the case of Europe, the difference made was loss of state-empires and the achievement of nation states disposed to pursue formal unification; in the case of East Asia, the difference made was of the loss of overarching state-empires and the opportunity for independence and network-carried co-operations; in the United States, events were read in terms of a morally laudable victorious war and the embrace of a responsibility to order wider events to the benefit of all.

Five: the idea of regions in East and Southeast Asia

A region is not a natural given, it is a construct; it is the outturn of the interacting projects of diverse national agents. One aspect of all this will be the ways in which these agents tell the story of the region. Turning to regional rhetoric, it is possible to identify a multiplicity of agents offering diverse arguments addressed to a multiplicity of audiences – a shifting mix of agents, arguments, actions, institutional vehicles and explanatory/justificatory commentary (including scholarship). There could be several ways in which the story of a region might be told; different agents make different arguments for different audiences. The elites are, however, the key – and so the ensemble of ideas and activities will revolve around the substantive projects pursued by elite agents.

There are a number of ways in which the discourse might run. The central arena of these discursive constructs is memory, understood as an active social process of the creation of meaning. First, political talk (projects/rhetoric) will involve identifying the players who are involved (co-operators/competitors); it will require constructing the idea of a region; it will need institutional vehicles (the organizations that both carry and embody the project/rhetoric); and it will require popular dissemination (thus, the ASEAN summit photo-opportunities and perhaps, for example, the ASEAN gift shop at Changi airport). Second, state-planning talk (projects/policy rhetoric) will involve interpreting the demands of political masters, in other words turning politics into policy. It requires drawing up plans for what can be done, which will involve drawing lines on maps; preparing schedules/contracts of actions; and statements asserting the value of the planned actions in order to exhort popular support. Third, corporate-planning talk (projects/instrumental rhetoric) will involve selecting a market (for example, the European or American market); thus an audience is identified and advertising and product can thereafter be tailored and delivered. Fourth, popular talk will be both passive – that is, accommodating the demands of political, state or corporate worlds – or active, that is, deploying available popular ideas to identify and characterize a region. In either case, external demands are read in terms of the resources of the local tradition – quite how they will be read is dependent on the particular tradition and the ways in which external demands unpack in practice.

In respect to East Asia, a region can be identified in economic, social and cultural interlinkages. However, political tensions left over from the long episode of the shift to the modern world inhibit moves towards regional organizations or a common regional identity: there are valuable organizations (thus bilateral FTAs or currency-swap agreements) and there is a wealth of talk about East Asia, which in some measure over-rides current political tensions within the region and asserts a macro-cultural identity. In Southeast Asia there are clearer signs of regional integration/identity. Acharya (2000) argues that region-ness can be a part of identity. First, beginning with pre-contact Southeast Asia, region-ness looks somewhat implausible, but then came commerce and colonialism, where the former did act to integrate the region and the latter cut through these patterns, linking discrete parts of the area to their respective metropolitan cores. Second, the period of decolonization saw an intermingling of continuing links to colonial cores, with region-ness understood in terms of pan-Asianism or Third Worldism and the ambiguous impact of cold war. Third, it is with ASEAN that a local project to build a region begins and it turns out to be successful, with its most recent expansion presented as completing the project.

In the case of East and Southeast Asia, the material taken into memory looks to the long experience of colonialism, general crisis and collapse/recovery. It is these patterns of events that provide the materials to be read into a series of national pasts. The national past is a subtle construction that serves to link individuals to the ordered political realm. As such, it is a matter of intense concern to elites, and any revisions to a given national past are likely to have not merely domestic but also regional and global ramifications.

Contemporary East Asia: the past in the present

East Asia's shift to the modern world has been a long, drawn-out process. It evidences all the familiar mix of progress and upheaval, and much of its recent history has been suffused with violence – events that provide a rich stock of experiences that find expression in both collective memory and various national pasts. More recently, the countries of the region have experienced great economic, social and political success. This creates a paradoxical situation: as these communities draw together within a deepening regional context, they must adapt by reconsidering inherited ideas, adjusting mutual self-perceptions and taking the earliest steps towards conceptualizing a regional identity.

Memories of colonial empires and war

In Southeast Asia, memories of French, Dutch and British colonial rule belong to the distant past; these colonial powers are long gone and memories have faded, neither negative nor positive but merely irrelevant. Other issues have supervened: in Indo-China, the American interventions; in Indonesia, the long period of Suharto's rule; in Singapore and Malaysia, long-established mutual unease. Of course, the region has ordered itself via ASEAN, committed amongst other things to consultation and consensus-building (Acharya 2000). Yet in Northeast Asia, memories are stronger and generally negative. In China, the national past invokes 'one hundred years of humiliation', a nationalist perspective that embraces not merely distant foreigners – Europeans and Americans – but also near neighbours, in particular Japan, with its imperial-era aggressions (Zhao 2004; Hughes 2006). In South Korea, the episode of colonial rule from Tokyo is recalled in hostile terms (Cummings 1997; Shin *et al.* 2007). Yet in Taiwan, the recollections of Japanese rule are softer. In China and South Korea, at the present time, these memories are ritually re-affirmed and they inhibit the search for regional cooperation and block the emergence of a collective East Asia identity. However, in general, colonial days are long gone.

In contrast, the period of general crisis continues to shape memories. Certain events, remembered by many, exist as either official ideology or as national past: the Nanjing Massacre; Baton Death March; comfort women; the bombing of Hiroshima. Sometimes the official memorialization is contentious, for instance, the Yasakuni Shrine or (in a different register) the Smithsonian Museum exhibit of the Enola Gay. Some events are remembered but are not part of official memory or national past: the 1941–2 fall of Singapore; the forgotten armies in Burma; the No Gun Ri Massacre; the My Lai Massacre. Other events fade from view: the often violent end to the foreign colonial regimes; the race aspects of the Pacific War; the fates of the combatants who chose the wrong sides (Karens, Ambionese or Thai fascists); the fates of those who chose wrongly in the struggles for statehood; the experiences of the civilians defeated, such as Japanese settlers in Manchuria; and so on.

East Asia comprises a number of independent locally ruled polities. There are no colonies; there are no dependencies. Local elites are more often than not oriented to the pursuit of national development; and whilst the shift to the modern world has been accomplished there are some continuing stresses and strains.

At the present time the region is home to unsettled anxieties about the past:

- Border disputes – matters left over from the general crisis. For example, Japan/Russia over the Northern Territories, four islands to the north of Hokkaido; Japan/China over the Senkoku/Daiyou islands adjacent to the northern coast of Taiwan; Japan/South Korea over islands in the Straits of Tsushima; China/ASEAN members over the resources of the South China Sea.
- Events during the years of warfare – matters left over from the regions' wars. For example, Japan/South Korea over the issue of forced prostitution during the war years, with the former reluctant to officially acknowledge responsibility; Japan/China over the issue of the behaviour of Imperial Japanese forces during the seizure of Nanking, where debate revolves around the extent of a massacre of civilians; Japan/USA over the issue of the systematic area-bombing of Japanese cities in late 1944 and early 1945, where the latter are disinclined to accept any moral responsibility; Japan and its neighbours over the issue of textbooks, where national governments, civil society groups, journalists and scholars all contend over the 'correct' recording of history – a squabble that has attained a ritualized form as victims of

Japanese wartime aggression repeatedly demand expressions of regret in the form of 'apologies'.

- Domestic problems – unresolved domestic matters. For example, the issue of the mass killings that accompanied the 1965 coup in Indonesia; in summer 2008, in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics, the riots amongst ethnic Tibetans and related demonstrations in favour of Tibet, alongside the symbolic journey of the Olympic torch in Europe – all of which provoked much unhappy debate as these episodes marked unresolved conflicts left over from the years immediately following the formation of the People's Republic.
- Contested rituals of mourning the millions of dead – unresolved issues from the regions' wars. For example, the annual Yasakuni Shrine ceremony in remembrance of Japan's war dead has become a contentious issue, where within Japan opinion divides between fervent nationalists and various networks of the loose peace movement. Internationally, opinion is hostile to this annual event as it is read as a refusal to acknowledge the damage caused to the region by the Japanese variant of late-imperialism. Recently, the event has become mixed up with the shifting dynamics of international politics (will the Japanese prime minister attend and if so will it be in a 'private' or 'official' capacity?) and the curious business of apology diplomacy (where the ceremonies are the occasion for demands for further, fuller, more sincere apologies from the Japanese state to the victims of earlier years).
- Intermixing remembrance and contemporary political issues – these are contemporary issues. For example, 4 June 2009 marked the twentieth anniversary of the incidents in Tiananmen Square and in Hong Kong, as usual, there was a large gathering/march and a number of figures from overseas travelled to Hong Kong to participate. The anniversary also saw the publication of memoirs prepared by Zhao Ziyang, which offered an insiders' view of events. However, in mainland China the anniversary was not marked, thus the events remain an unsettled contested memory.
- Some issues point towards the future – in Europe, the 'allied scheme of history' (Davies 1997: 39) offers an explanation of the Second World War that reduces events to the moral victory of the western allies, the heroism of the Soviet armies and the responsibility of the National Socialists, which systematically misrepresents events (eliding the actual confusions of war and postwar) and provides a starting point for Europe-wide reflection, whereas in East Asia there is no simple analogous tale available to shape reflection.

National pasts and the consequences of success

A national past offers a story: it tells a political community where they come from, who they are and where they might expect to be in the future. National pasts are elaborate constructions compounded of elements taken from the historical experiences of the communities in question. National pasts are usually cast in reductive terms: if the nation is grounded in ethnicity or deep history or language, if the nation is a given, if it endures, then acquiescence can be represented as rational. But such claims are false. The strategy is misleading. Nations are constructs and so is the national past. It is one aspect of the elite's continuing task of reading and reacting to the demands of enfolding structural change. As the world changes around a polity, then the elite must respond, and one aspect of that response will be a reordering of the national past the better to order collective action oriented towards the future. The interlinkages between Europe, East Asia and the USA are many and these will be subject to reflection as these regions confront change with its uneven mix of success and relative decline.

Notes

- 1 Data in this paper is given only as a rough guide to the scale of the deaths – it is mostly from *World History at KMLA*, accessed August 2009–10; other material is from Norman Davies (1997) *Europe: A History*, London, Pimlico; and Norman Davies (2006) *Europe at War 1939–1945: No Simple Victory*, London, Macmillan; some data is from Max Hastings 2008 *Retribution: The Battle for Japan 1944–45*, New York, Alfred Knopf. It might be noted that in all these wars direct American losses were only a small part of numbers given, thus in the Pacific War direct losses were around 150,000, but the scale of the wars are indicated by the overall totals. Hastings comments that the Pacific War prompted the American elite to the view that it could fight wars at relatively low cost to itself (see chapter 22 and on this theme see Tony Judt 2008 ‘What Have We Learned If Anything’ in *New York Review of Books* 55.7 May 01 2008).
- 2 This is a very rough list – plus for the USA there were three major domestic wars (War of Independence 1775–1882; the Civil War 1861–5; plus the Indian Wars of the nineteenth century – the list also mixes overt war with some selected cold war interventions, Philippines and Indonesia – but there are many more.