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Collaboration in the Postwar

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Collaboration in War and Memory in East Asia: A Symposium

This article is a contribution to a symposium on collaboration in East Asia during the Asia-Pacific War and its aftermath, which addresses some of the most fraught issues in historiography, historical remembrance, and contemporary politics. It also reflects on occupation states in Europe and postwar East Asia, while casting important light on contemporary issues of collaboration globally. How are we to assess occupation regimes that emerged in each East and Southeast Asian nation during the Pacific War, as well as in postwar nations including those occuped by the United States or other occupiers. Issues of collaboration in a post-colonial world may be equally salient in reflecting on the experiences of newly independent nations? The issues are closely intertwined with dominant nationalist ideologies that have characteristically obfuscated and dismissed collaborationist politics while establishing their own legitimacy, or what Timothy Brook calls their "untouchability". In the post Cold War milieu, and at a time when politicians on both sides of the Taiwan straits, and across the 38th parallel that divides North and South Korea, are redefining their relationships, it becomes possible to revisit the history of war, revolution, occupation and collaboration.

This symposium on war and collaboration in East Asia and globally features contributions by Timothy Brook, Prasenjit Duara, Suk-Jung Han, Heonik Kwon, a response by Brook and a further response to the symposium by Margherita Zanasi. The authors examine war and collaboration in China, Korea, Vietnam, and Manchukuo, in history and memory and in comparative perspective. The symposium includes the following articles:

1. Timothy Brook, Collaboration in the History of Wartime East Asia
2. Prasenjit Duara, Collaboration and the Politics of the Twentieth Century
3. Suk-Jung Han, On the Question of Collaboration in South Korea
4. Heonik Kwon, Excavating the History of Collaboration
5. Timothy Brook, Collaboration in the Postwar
6. Margherita Zanasi, New Perspectives on Chinese Collaboration

Japan Focus anticipates and welcomes responses to the symposium. These will be published in future issues. MS

Henry Rousso, writing in the 1980s about memories of Vichy France, argued that the French experience of having collaborated with the Nazi occupation has "played an essential if not primary role in the difficulties that the people of France have faced in reconciling themselves to their history." [1] To judge from the insights of the three colleagues who have generously responded to my work in this issue of Japan Focus, much the same may be said of the people of East Asian nations. Interestingly, it has taken these people, as well as their historians, far longer to recognize what Rousso observed of France: that collaboration is not

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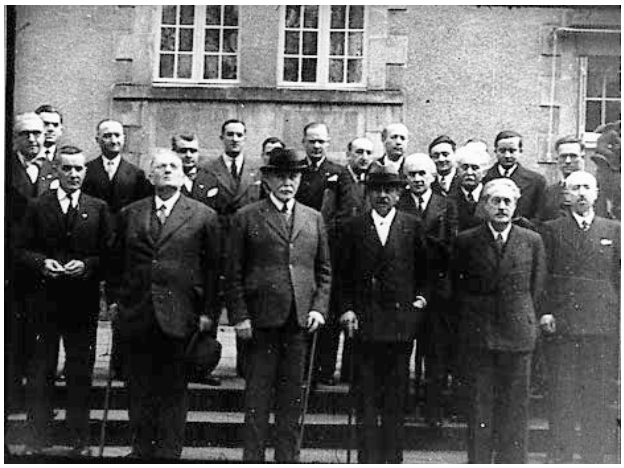
only part of the history of twentieth-century East Asia but an essential feature of the postwar experience. As Suk-Jung Han nicely phrases it in his contribution to this forum, collaboration continues to "haunt" postwar East Asia. Until its legacies are recognized and addressed, East Asia will remain caught in "the postwar."

More than just a period of time, "the postwar" is the condition of suspended animation created by the politics of the Cold War. After the Second World War, the bids of Japan and Germany to attain hegemony over world-regions through military invasion were replaced by the more subtle efforts of other powers to assert postwar hegemony over the entire globe. Hot war and military occupation continued to be strategies in that competition, but they were dwarfed by the use of diplomatic and economic pressure to force support from lesser states. In such a climate, collaboration—so recently condemned as an immoral and unpatriotic response to external pressure—was reconstituted as the modus operandi of leaders obliged to work with superpowers to secure their nations' economic advantage and their own political survival. Dressed in the extravagant moral norms that postwar ideology favored—"liberation," "revolution," "freedom," "the market"—collaboration became almost everywhere the necessary response to external power. In some places, new postwar collaborators arose to take the place of old; in others, former collaborators shifted their allegiances to new hegemons. In neither, however, was collaboration a topic that the history of the war could accommodate. It was a shame best forgotten.



Vichy cabinet with Marshal Pétain and Pierre Laval center

Collaboration's haunting of the postwar world has been particularly strong in Korea, a nation whose fractured modern history has been fundamentally shaped by forced collaboration with China, Japan, the USSR, and the US. Its postwar continues to be utterly entangled by these collaborations. Vietnam, as Heonik Kwon shows, exhibits an equally complicated web of wartime and postwar collaborations, especially in the south, to the point of nearly complete moral incoherence. In China, Prasenjit Duara notes how recent fascination for Zhang Ailing's ambiguous wartime fiction, intensified by Ang Lee's filmic version of her story Lust/Caution, exposes the extent to which "the seething realities that ideologies miss" are now escaping the draconian mechanisms of postwar forgetting. Of course, this is precisely what ideologies are designed to do: to encourage people to miss a great deal; in this case, to forget how people really experienced the war and to simplify the liberationist narratives and nationalist identities on which postwar regimes have rested their claims to legitimacy. This seems especially true in postwar East Asia, where political contests beyond the war exposed what Kwon calls the "bedrock of human collaboration."

Wartime collaboration continues to shape East Asia today. Access to state power, despite the

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unpredictable rupturing and reforming of political landscapes over the past sixty-odd years, has been determined almost exclusively by the outcomes of the war. In China, that access depended vitally on not having collaborated with Japan. In Korea, by contrast, the dependency went quite the other way. As Han observes, Koreans who collaborated with Japan, or their heirs, were returned to power with, as Han notes, "only the slightest change of ideas, plans, institutes, even the very words employed." This insight applies as well to Japan's postwar leadership. Putting Japanese leaders and non-Japanese collaborators on trial (or not, as the case was) did not only end the war, as the victors claimed; it paved the way for the politics of the postwar. By allowing most of Japan's wartime oligarchy to remain intact, the Cold War blocked the possibility that Japan might enter into a healing dialogue with former victims. It also induced Japanese and non-Japanese alike into forgetting that many Japanese opposed the Greater Asian War that the army precipitated.

Hora ShinzÅ is a case in point. A professor at HÅsei University, Hora worked in Dalian and then Tianjin before returning to Japan early in 1939. In March of that year, the Department of the Economy of the Kobe city government invited him to address them on the present situation and future prospects of what was still being euphemized as "the China Incident" (ChÅ«goku jiken). In his presentation, Hora goes utterly against the official rhetoric of the time, politely condemning everything Japan had done or aspired to do in China since 1937. No one had expected that Japan's punitive actions that summer would grow into a full-scale occupation, Hora observes, because no one had anticipated that Chinese would actively resist. They had, and that resistance had turned Japan's intervention into a full-scale war. This spirit of resistance, especially among younger Chinese, was not only uniting China against Japan but tying down three million Japanese troops. The only areas in which war propagandists could broadcast the virtues of what they liked to call "the kingly Way" (ÅdÅ) were those where the Japanese army exerted full military control. And the only Chinese whom the Japanese could induce to cooperate with them were those they could compel to do so. There was no plan to deal with the current situation, nor any strategy to bridge the gulf between occupier and occupied.

Hora observes that Japan had to control its markets in China if it hoped to benefit from the current state of affairs, but that this object could be achieved only by force. Chinese will never accept foreign control of their economy, Hora tells his audience. A wealthy nation might be able to impose an economic solution on "the China problem" (ChÅ«goku mondai), but Japan lacks the financial and logistical capacity to do so. Its only means is violence. His conclusion is that Japan must treat China as an equal and independent sovereign state, and therefore that a political solution, not a military one, is called for. As for the leaders who have come forward to collaborate, Hora points out, they are of no help in such a compromised situation. Wang Jingwei, having so recently defected from the Nationalists, has changed his allegiances too often to enjoy any real esteem among the Chinese. Even should he manage to deploy his charisma to fashion a regime, he will have no successor to take his place. Wang's bid to lead the country can only fail. The fault is not Wang's so much as Japan's. Japan needs cooperation, not collaboration, yet collaboration is precisely what prevents genuine cooperation from arising.

Speaking almost two years after the invasion of China, and more than two before Japan's expansion into the Pacific, Hora could see that Japan's path in China must lead to disaster. He regarded Japan's so-called war of construction as nothing but a war of destruction, and understood as well that its consequences for postwar Japan would be dire. Hora does not phrase his critique in the language of

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"imperialism," though that is the concept framing his analysis, as telltale references to Japan's economy as "capitalist" reveal. For Hora, collaboration is but one of the challenges that a colonizing Japan will never be able to meet or overcome. The postwar has forgotten people such as Hora ShinzÅ. Of him I know nothing beyond what appears in the mimeographed typescript of his talk that I found in the collection of wartime documents in the Economics Research Institute at Kyoto University. [2] I offer his analysis simply to remind us that Japanese were keenly aware of the predicament facing invaders who relied on collaborators to fashion a regime favorable to their interests.

Postwar ideology has discouraged Japanese from remembering that China hands such as Hora ShinzÅ strove to make their voices heard during the war, or that agencies such as the Kobe city government wanted to hear them. So too it has discouraged the rest of us from realizing that not everyone enacted the national virtues or sins retrospectively assigned to them. [3] Recent responses to Lust/Caution indicate, however, that some Chinese are unwilling to let moral ambiguity muddy the once clear waters of the story of virtue's triumph over evil. Wang Qitao, a graduate of Peking University currently pursuing a doctorate in comparative literature in the US, has vigorously denounced the movie for failing to depict collaboration as the political choice of a bourgeois class fraction. Adopting a Maoist critical perspective, Wang goes on to denounce both Frederic Wakeman and me for "energetically reversing the verdict" on collaboration. He darkly suspects that our work is part of an ideological campaign to justify the US government's anti-terrorism program, attack Third World resistance to Western imperialism, build sympathy for Iraqi collaboration with the United States, and "brainwash" Chinese elites to the desires of Western imperialism. [4]

Wang's screed has excited much discussion on the internet, and deservedly so, for it boldly challenges certain comfortable notions about the benign effects of liberalism. His enthusiasm for exposing the nefarious tricks of "American scholarly authorities" (among whom I am mildly dismayed to find myself counted) counts as good entertainment for those of us familiar with the totalizing rhetoric of Maoist denunciation. It does, nonetheless, block him from acknowledging the contemporary context of Chinese state power, in which the judgment against collaboration is securely embedded. Neither Ang Lee nor Fred Wakeman nor I advocate collaboration as a morally positive or politically advisable course. What we argue for is the need to recognize the politics at work at the time of Japan's occupation, but even more so, the politics controlling the memory of that occupation such that certain Chinese state elites were able to legitimize their claim to monopolize state power in the postwar.

From my perspective, Wang's instrumentalist logic is undercut by his quaint fetishization of the "working class" as the analytical category that solves the puzzle of collaboration. Wang's working class is loyally obedient to the interests of a transcendent China and never collaborates with enemies of that transcendental entity. Yet if the historical record of collaboration demonstrates anything, it is that class does not operate as an independent variable within the field of wartime politics; it gains political salience only through alliances to state power. When that state is an occupation state, the concept of class has little capacity to analyze the political terrain or anticipate political outcomes. Occupation, like revolution, overrules class; it cannot be reduced to it. To assume otherwise is to obscure the class interests at play in making sure that history is written in a certain way.

Other Chinese commentators have been less critical of foreigners digging down to the bedrock of collaboration. In a relaxed

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discussion of the need to include collaboration in a non-partisan history of the war, Bai Xian draws heavily on Collaboration to argue for removing modern Chinese history from its old moralizing framework. History as it has been written in China, Bai declares, is nothing but a series of stories designed to cow the people into a servile patriotism. He praises Lust/Caution by regretting that no Chinese movie has previously attempted to show that life under the occupation consisted of more than resistance success stories and maudlin accounts of victims. Bai also draws attention to recent work on collaboration by Chinese historians, appropriately so, as a new scholarly subfield on collaboration is just now producing its first significant yield in China. [5] As Chinese historians begin to publish more independent assessments of collaboration, and as readers encounter their work, the story will change. Still, this new research is unlikely to gain intellectual authority so long as the Communist Party roots its legitimacy in its wartime struggle against Japan. The regime's current perception of threat from ethnic minorities suggests that there will be no digging under those foundations for the foreseeable future—which, among other effects, means that the Chinese translation of Collaboration will remain unpublished for the time being.

The untouchability of collaboration is not purely a political issue, of course. So long as some Chinese invoke Japanese atrocities to imagine for themselves a future as a unified ethnoculture in a globalizing world, it will be a cultural issue. Posthumously indicting collaborators is a way of asking who deserves to be a "good Chinese" and who does not. It is also a way of reinscribing Japanese as the enemies of China's aspiration for hegemony in East Asia. And yet, despite the appeal of simplifying what happened during the war, Chinese themselves are increasingly willing to revisit the war of resistance to an extent that will eventually undermine the old certainties. [6] Bai Xian provocatively ends his essay with Chen Yinke's reminder that history outlasts the states whose history it records. Although some Chinese readers are not yet ready to cast off their cultural legitimacy from state moorings, others sense that a change is needed to allow the stories beneath the surface of public memory to come to light. Now that the postwar may be coming to an end, many are preparing to listen.

Timothy Brook is concurrently Principal of St. John's College, University of British Columbia, and Shaw Professor of Chinese at Oxford University. He is the author of Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China.

Tim Brook wrote this article for Japan Focus. Posted July 4, 2008.

Notes

[1] Henry Rousso, The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France in 1944 (Cambridge, Mass.: University Press, 1991), p. 9.
[2] Hora ShinzÅ, "Shina jiken kaiketsu no shu mondai to Shina ni okeru shÅhin ryÅ«tsÅ«" (Questions concerning the resolution of the China Incident and the circulation of commodities in China), Kobe shi keizaibu sangyÅka (Industry Office of the Department of the Economy of Kobe City), April 1939. I am grateful to Hamashita Takeshi for alerting me to this collection of documents, and to Hori Kazuo for providing access.
[3] A significant attempt in the realm of popular culture to recalibrate the wartime standards of good and evil away from national causes to individual actions is Clint Eastwood's pair of films, Flags of our Fathers and Letters from Iwo Jima.
[4] Wang Qitao, "Renxing lun, jinxiandai zhongguo de lishi yuyan yu guozu jianshe zai tantao" (Further reflections on human nature, historical discourses on modern China, and nation-building), Xueshu zhongguo (Scholarly

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China), January 2008. The book by Frederic Wakeman that Wang singles out is Shanghai Badlands: Wartime Terrorism and Urban Crimes (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[5] Bai Xian, "Ruhe kandai lunxianqu nei de yudi hezuo" (How to look at cooperation with the enemy in the occupied zone), Huaxia kuaidi, posted on 25 December 2007 on China News Digest. Among the significant new scholarly contributions to the rethinking of collaboration is Pan Min's Jiangsu Ri-wei jiceng zhengquan yanjiu (1937-1945) (Studies in the puppet political regime at the local level in Jiangsu, 1937-1945) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2006).

[6] Didi Kirsten Tatlow, "Truth and Reconciliation," South China Morning Post, Online Edition, 30 March 2008.

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