

Multilayered Postcolonial Historical Space:
Indonesia, the Netherlands, Japan and East Timor

Goto Ken'ichi

Professor, Graduate school of Asia-Pacific Studies
Waseda University

Introduction

In *The Awakening of the East*, an English work written during his stay in India in 1902 that begins with the line, “Brothers and Sisters of Asia, awake!” Okakura Kakuzo (Tenshin) emphasized that for the down-trodden Orient, “the glory of Europe is the humiliation of Asia.” On the other hand, the fact that an Asian country, Japan, concluded a treaty with Great Britain, the very symbol of “the glory of Europe,” was, together with the leading role that it played in putting down the Boxer uprising the previous year, a turning point clearly indicating that Japan had joined a world very different from that of “down-trodden” Asia.

Let us take a bird’s eye view of what was happening in the world then. In 1902, at a time when colonial regimes were being established throughout the world, the United States declared the subjugation of the Philippines, while in Angola, Portugal, the first colonial empire, had its hands full putting down a major uprising. And with the new century, the Netherlands, along with Great Britain a leading colonial power, proclaimed an “enlightened” colonial policy in its East Indies colony (present day Indonesia). The “ethical course,” as it was called, was described in glowing terms by its leading proponent Van Deventer: “How beautiful is the goal which we have set ourselves to achieve! Thanks to the efforts of the Netherlands, a society is to be built in this far distant land in the East that will give him prosperity and a high culture and that he will acknowledge with gratitude. . .”¹ It was not only the Dutch who cherished the myth of white superiority and the idea that it was the white man’s duty to form an association based on that superiority with the subject peoples of color: these were the beliefs that underpinned the “glory of Europe” in the age of colonial imperialism.

A century later, the political map of the world has completely changed. Indonesia, the first country in Southeast Asia to gain independence after World War II, and for many years a third world leader, now faces the serious challenge of maintaining unity of the state. And on May 20, 2002 “the last colony,” East Timor, came to birth as the first nation state of this century. East Timor’s independence came not from the Europe that “trampled on” Asia, but as the result of a national liberation struggle that pitted it against Indonesia, one of the former “humiliated” of the earth. Indonesia had in effect placed East Timor, with which it shares a

border, under colonial rule through an armed invasion at the end of 1975. And then it sought to justify its annexation of the territory in terms of a theory of civilization, an Indonesian-style ethical policy, by saying that “it is a historical happy ending for East Timorese, as they overcome the backwardness of their civilization and are liberated from the fate of more than four centuries of colonial rule.”²

The leaders of the new Democratic Republic of East Timor have chosen Portuguese as the official language, although only five percent of the 850,000 population understand it. As is seen too in its eagerness to join the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP), East Timor is seeking cultural decolonization through a loose cultural association with its former European colonial master. What would Tenshin, who proclaimed Asia “one” in its “humiliation” vis-à-vis the “glory of Europe,” have felt had he seen Indonesia and East Timor over the past quarter century and seen the new ties being forged today between East Timor and its former master, Portugal?

These preliminary remarks have been a bit long, but this study will examine in outline two points, focusing on Indonesia, a country that went from once being one of the “downtrodden” of Asia to become a country that “trampled” on its own neighbor. The first point is the issue of how Indonesia, the pioneer of decolonization in postwar Asia, views Japanese rule over the archipelago under “the Great East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere.” And in connection with this point, comparing the historical understanding of the Netherlands and Japan on this same period, I would like to establish the fact that this is still a sensitive issue today. The second point will explore the context in which Indonesia, the subject of a “glorious” resistance against Japan (and, of course, the Netherlands), turned into a harsh ruler of East Timor, while making comparisons with Japan’s rule over Indonesia,

Assessing the Japanese Occupation Period in Indonesia

In looking these days at Indonesia’s historical understanding of Japan and the

Netherlands, many interesting things can be seen. One is the very strong reaction to the film, *Merdeka 17805* (*merdeka* is an Indonesian word, meaning freedom or independence), that was released in Japan in 2001. The program notes say that the film is based on the historical fact that after the Japanese defeat “some 2000 Japanese soldiers stayed behind in Indonesia and took part in the independence war against the Dutch.” It also informs us of the fact that the proclamation of independence by Sukarno and Hatta, the country’s first president and vice-president, respectively, was dated “17805,” that is, the 17th of August of the year 2605 of the Imperial Era, shows “the gratitude” which the two leaders felt for Japan, and that this fact “is remembered by Indonesian people to this day.”

Needless to say, the intention of the producer – the same Fuji Yukio who portrayed Tojo Hideki so flatteringly in *Pride* – was to present the Japanese occupation as having played an important role in Indonesia’s (and more widely, Southeast Asia’s) national independence, and by emphasizing this, to restore “Japanese pride.” But contrary to the film maker’s intent, which was rooted in the same thinking as that of the so-called “*Atarashii rekishi kyoukasho wo tsukuru kai* [Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform],” this film based on a Japan-centered view of history ended up offending Indonesian pride. The authoritative Indonesian weekly *Tempo* (June 10, 2001) reported that *Merdeka* angered Indonesians living in Japan because it overplays Japan as a hero.”

Another example is in connection with the 400th anniversary of the establishment of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). For the Netherlands, one of the more successful members of today’s EU, the birth of the VOC in 1602 was at the heart of that country’s “glory,” and all kinds of grand commemorative events were planned. An historical drama lauding the VOC was written for the occasion and broadcast on the state-run television station. In it there is an idyllic scene showing local people in an Asian country (evidently Indonesia) carrying trade goods and gifts to a Dutch VOC official, suggestive of a harmonious relationship between the VOC and Asia. Indonesians studying in Holland were asked to play the part of the “indigenous workers” carrying the goods. However some of the students protested that this not only deeply offended the dignity of Indonesia, but that it represented a Dutch-centric historical view that ignored the relationship between the VOC and the colonial rule that followed. And the Indonesian

Embassy in the Netherlands carried a piece entitled “The Indonesian perspective on the 400th anniversary of the VOC” on its official website on the concept behind the commemoration in general, including the drama, stating that the VOC was, from its conception, dependant on the use of force and that Indonesia was not about to celebrate its founding.³

How then does Indonesia, which to this day shows such a sensitive reaction to its “history of subjugation,” place the Japanese occupation within its national history? (See Table 1.) Since the conclusion of a peace treaty between Indonesia and Japan in 1958, the relationship between the two on the political and economic levels has been “solid.” However the solidity of this political and economic relationship (in other words, of the superstructure) has not necessarily been based on mutual understanding among ordinary people or on a solid substructure of intellectual exchanges in the cultural sphere. Particularly since the beginning of the 1970s, when the economic presence of Japan in Indonesia had expanded to the point where it was “structural,” a pattern repeatedly occurred in which complex feelings toward Japan that had lain dormant in the deep layers of the people’s consciousness – feelings that derive from experiences and memories of the war years – came out in explosive form when triggered by some incident or other. Paradoxically, in the Sukarno era (up until 1965), when Japanese economic penetration was not so noticeable, almost no large anti-Japanese movements occurred, in spite of the fact that memories of the occupation were still fresh.

In looking at the overall trends in how the Japanese occupation period is described in post-independence history textbooks and supplementary readers in Indonesia, the following characteristics can be seen.

(1) The major concern of Indonesian historical scholars up until the first half of the 1960s was, as is clear from the underlying tone of the country’s first national history seminar in 1958, how to construct an “Indonesia-centric” history. With respect to the Japanese occupation, this concern is reflected in the fact that Japan was *a priori* designated a “fascist” and “militarist” state, and the nationalistic view of Indonesia as having resisted harsh Japanese rule and struggled for independence appeared in sharp relief. Not officially acknowledging that some

Japanese (particularly some connected to the Naval Liaison Office) were involved in the process of drawing up the Independence Declaration of August 17, 1945 was an expression of these nationalistic sentiments.

(2) A change in the evaluation of the Japanese occupation within modern history description in Indonesia came about after an Army-centered regime came to power in the wake of the “30th of September incident” of 1965. The leadership group, including General Suharto, who became Indonesia’s second president, was largely composed of people who had come out of the Japanese military-organized PETA (Army for the Defense of the Fatherland) and the Sumatra voluntary army. They called themselves the “New Order” and undertook in earnest a compilation of national history from a military-centered historical perspective. This task later went ahead under the guidance of Director of the Center for the Armed Forces History, Nugroho Notosusanto, who also served as minister of education and culture and rector of the University of Indonesia. In particular, Vol. 6 of the enormous six-tome *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia* (National History of Indonesia) that resulted was for all practical purposes directly supervised by Notosusanto himself. This work became the model for a history education that would fix the unity of the centralized state through the concept of the “dual (military/civil) function” of the military and Pancasila democracy” as official New Order ideology, and it played an important role in history education in the Suharto era.⁴

With this, an interpretation of the occupation period emerged that was distinct from the previous focus on Indonesia-as-victim. There was no fundamental difference on the point of describing the Japanese occupation as “three and a half years of darkness,” but by portraying the Indonesian people as having acquired “national toughness” in their conquering of the “darkness,” the Indonesian peoples’ autonomy and the dualistic nature of the impact of Japanese military rule are emphasized. And PETA becomes the most significant force representing the people in their resistance against the harsh political repression, social and economic exploitation, and cultural coercion under the Japanese, with the PETA rebellion in Blitar, East Java in the last phase of the occupation in Feb. 1945 as the high point of that resistance. Out of this interpretation is drawn the official “New Order” ideology that has the Armed Forces, one important

constituent element of which was PETA (they don't take the view that PETA was the parent organization of the Armed Forces) tasked with leading the Indonesian state and society, as the guardian of the "unity and independence of the nation."

(3) While Indonesia experienced a deepening of political and economic turmoil after the collapse of the Suharto regime in May 1998, it enjoyed a flowering of freedom of expression. The Armed Forces-centered view of modern Indonesian history needed to be greatly revised, and a committee under the direct control of the government is now at work drawing up new guidelines for history education.⁵ But with respect to the Japanese occupation period, even if there is a correction of the overemphasis on PETA and the Blitar revolt, there is not likely to be any great change in the position of drawing out both positive and negative aspects of the Japanese occupation. One reason is that there is a deeply entrenched view in the Indonesian government – and that goes for not only the Suharto regime, but for the three regimes that followed, the Habibbi, Wahid, and Megawati regimes – that it would go against the national interest to damage its relationship with its biggest economic aid donor, Japan, over an "historical issue of the past." But more than that, there is now a well-established consensus that they themselves who endured the harsh Japanese occupation, drew out of it concrete benefits such as the diffusion of the Indonesia language, military training, and the unification of education. The late Nishimura Shigeo, an authority on Indonesian education, points out that, "This issue is often referred to as the good and bad of the Japanese occupation, but if the bad can be said to be emphasized by being put in bold face, then the good could be said to be written in very fine script. Basically, they take the view that Japan did what it did in its own national interest, that of the "Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere," and not particularly for the independence of Indonesia. Indonesia merely learned various things by taking advantage of it."⁶

The Japanese Occupation as Public Memory in Indonesia

In terms of public education, then, compared with neighboring Singapore or the Philippines, Indonesia in recent years uses restrained tones in its evaluation of the

Japanese occupation period. On the other hand, the picture of that period one gets from the historical monuments and the exhibits in historical museums in Jakarta and elsewhere emphasizes in more stark, visual terms the dark side of the war period. In the Museum of National History under the national monument in the heart of Jakarta, built with some of the war reparation funds from Japan, there is a diorama portraying “Indonesia” from prehistoric times to the present, and the single object representing the Japanese occupation is the figure of a “*romusha*” (laborer) working under a formidable-looking Japanese soldier, face distorted in pain. As shown in the entry for “*romusha*” in the *Ensiklopedia Indonesia* — The word “*romusha*” in Indonesia indicates persons requisitioned in the period of Japanese military government for the strengthening of defenses either at home or abroad. Many died, unable to endure the suffering and hunger.” — “*romusha*” is recognized, transcending generations, as a Japanese word that has entered the Indonesian language and as a symbol of the three and a half years of occupation “darkness.”

The social and political nuances of “*romusha*” came out most strikingly in the debate that surrounded the Indonesian movie *Romusha* in the second half of 1973. This was a time when Suharto’s “New Order” was being consolidated, but criticism of its harsh nature was still tolerated within certain bounds; and *Romusha*, the work of Sjumandjaya, a social issue-oriented director who had studied in the Soviet Union, was made against the background of the ever-growing influence of Japan’s economic inroads in the country. But in the end, unable to get a permit from the Department of Information (abolished after the collapse of the Suharto regime), the film was never released. Government officials had decided that this film depicting the Japanese occupation might stimulate latent anti-Japanese sentiments and possibly damage the relationship with Japan, which by that time had replaced the United States as the largest investor and donor of economic aid. It was reported that behind this “self-restraint” on the part of the authorities there had been requests from the Japanese Embassy and the Japan Club, the leading members of which are large trading companies and corporations; and an important task for research in the history of postwar relations between the two countries would be to positively substantiate the facts in the suppression of this film through primary materials from both sides and

interviews with the persons involved.

In any case, with the banning of *Romusha*, debate in Indonesia heated up over the Japanese occupation, with a very critical tone in the mass media predominating. “Why,” it was asked, “does ‘big brother’ (during the war Japan referred to itself as ‘big brother,’ Indonesia as ‘little brother’) still to this day have to butt into our affairs . . . so that to this day *Romusha*, an Indonesian film made for Indonesians, cannot be shown because of protests from the Japanese?” “Our weak point up to now has been our not writing our own national history ourselves. Our national history has always been written by foreigners. If the Japanese don’t like us remembering the *romusha*, they shouldn’t have conscripted *romusha* in the first place.”⁷

Rooted in public memories of the Japanese occupation, the controversy over the film *Romusha* was in fact a manifestation of an economic nationalism that perceived the ever deepening economic penetration of Japan as a new “invasion.” Only a few months later, on the occasion of the (January 1974) visit of Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei to Jakarta, anti-Japanese riots, referred to as the “Malari Affair,” broke out, creating what was to be the greatest political crisis of the Suharto era and what we know now to have been a power struggle over relations with Japan.⁸

At the beginning of the 1990s, a half century after the war, there was growing debate over Japan’s “war responsibility,” and a new and important element of the debate was added in the form of the *ianfu* (comfort women) issue. After the Japanese government, in July 1992, admitted publicly the existence of the comfort women this issue became a major bone of contention between Japan and South Korea, from where the greatest number of women were taken, and other East Asian countries as well.

However in Indonesia, there was a quite different reaction. Among those old enough to have known the Japanese occupation, there was a certain common knowledge, propagated through various media, of the existence of Japanese comfort stations, known by the names “*rumah kuning* (yellow house)” and “*rumah bambu* (bamboo house),” and the women who worked there but otherwise these were not the objects of social interest, to say nothing of academic interest. In 1982 a novel, *Kadarwati: Wanita dengan Lima Nama* (Kadarwati: the woman with five

names) by the popular writer, Pandir Kelana, came out that depicted the checkered fate of a girl who was taken to Singapore as a “comfort woman,” but it did not draw any particular attention from the public at the time. In the summer of 1992, however, after the Japanese government announced that there were also Indonesian comfort women, this novel was reissued in a new paperback edition and became a best seller. But given its close political and economic ties with Japan, the Indonesia government did not depart from its position of treating the issue of comfort women as an extremely minor matter.

The authorities in the former Japanese colonies of South Korea and Taiwan, for example, concerned about the rising anger over the issue among their own people, demanded an apology of Japan for denying that these women, whose existence by this time had been officially admitted, had been *forced* to perform this work (to be later admitted in 1993). In contrast, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs lauded the Japanese government for having made what it considered virtually an official apology because Tokyo had released historical documents on the issue. The ministry further stated:

“Indonesia wants to look to the future and not be tied to the past. This is not to say however that the moral violation of their honor suffered by the Indonesian women who were forced to be ‘comfort women’ for the Japanese army during the last war can be forgotten. No matter what the Japanese government may do, their honor will not be restored. But it is not the intention of the Indonesian government to exaggerate this issue. This government would like to see the Japanese government accurately study the ‘comfort women’ issue and take measures for the honor of the women in keeping with the seriousness of the Japanese army’s violation of their human rights.”⁹

On the other hand, in April 1993 the Indonesian government, probably with its frequent critic, the watch-dog, legal aid organization, LBH, chiefly in mind, expressed its displeasure at the fact that five members of the Human Rights Committee of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations had, without getting permission, interviewed a woman believed to have been a comfort woman with the cooperation of LBH and other human rights NGOs.

The mass media too generally tended to avoid blowing up the issue. Take, for instance, the daily, *Suara Pembaruan*, which at the time of the Emperor's visit in the autumn of the previous year had written in its editorial of October 3 entitled "The wounds are healed, but the scars remain" that "Officially, the sufferings of the Indonesian people under Japanese occupation and militarism have been healed through war reparations. But the suffering and the wounds from cruelty still remain, which is only natural as they are burned into their minds." This paper (April 21), under the headline "Don't wound the women who were victims of the Japanese army any more!" prominently featured the wishy-washy remarks on the issue of the comfort women by the head of the woman's division of the veterans association. And the country's most influential daily, *Kompas* (July 8), while pointing out the fundamental seriousness of the issue, added the comment: "Let us put an end to the past, as past, and deal with present issues in the context of the present. For in the end, it is the future which we are facing and not the past. It is not our intention to exaggerate the comfort women issue."

While the comfort women issue is for many countries of Asia a very controversial point in its diplomatic relations with Japan, the Indonesian reactions, official and unofficial, described above give the impression of being, if anything, too conciliatory. The main reason for this is that although, as mentioned above, the comfort women issue is a part of the pain of the Japanese occupation period, unlike the *romusha*, it is not regarded as having penetrated very deeply into the public memory. In other words, it is regarded as a "special issue" in a sense, rather than as a "universal issue." And in this, there is doubtless at work the cold calculation that does not want to see the very pragmatic relationship with the country's greatest economic aid donor damaged over a "special" issue of the past. At the time, the Indonesian relations with its western allies had turned chilly over the November 1991 Santa Cruz massacre in Dili, the "provincial capital" of East Timor. So Japan, which had consistently supported Jakarta's position on the East Timor issue, even in the wake of Santa Cruz, would have been regarded by Jakarta as a very important pipe that it would not have wanted to weaken.

Reluctance to make waves over the comfort women issue is clear too from remarks by I. Kutut Surajaya, who, as chair of the Indonesian Association of Japanese Studies, was a leading channel for cultural exchange with Japan.

Evidently with the 1974 Malari Affair in mind, Surajaya emphasized that the comfort women issue must not be allowed to be used politically by groups critical of the government and turned into an anti-Japan movement. “Even if,” he said, “there are materials on the women mobilized by the Japanese military, these should be regarded only as historical materials. They must never be used as bargaining materials. Historical materials on the past should be interpreted in the context of that time. Even though they might be related, it would be very troublesome and give rise to much criticism if issues of the past were to be mixed up with political interests today.”¹⁰

In short, because it had an aspect connected to the social and cultural structure of Indonesia itself, an issue “appearing out of the blue” like that of the comfort women presented problems for the Indonesian government and intellectuals with close ties to Japan. Nevertheless, the fact remains that, by becoming a big issue among the public, the problem of the comfort women planted a new aspect into the image of the Japanese occupation in Indonesia.

The Indonesian government (Ministry of Social Affairs) from the very beginning of the emergence of the comfort women issue had made clear that it had no intention of asking Japan for individual compensation for the comfort women. This also applied to the payment of compensation money to the victims by the Asian Women’s Fund (official name: Asian Peace and Friendship Foundation) that was set up in 1995 as a show piece of the Murayama Cabinet. Indonesian policy was that the government “would not allow ‘comfort women’ as individuals to receive money from the fund. The money will be used for providing social welfare facilities such as homes for the elderly.” As this did not quite gibe with the idea upon which the Fund was established, it presented some confusion, but in the end it was agreed between the two governments that ¥380 million would be paid to the ministry over a period of ten years for the construction of fifty social welfare facilities for the aged throughout Indonesia to be completed by the year 2007. Needless to say, these facilities are completely unrelated to the material and psychological compensation that the elderly women who had had their human dignity trampled on were asking the former aggressor country for. Legally speaking, the comfort women issue was stamped “closed” with the finalizing of the impersonal compensation agreement between the two countries’ governments.

Comparison of the Historical Perspectives on Indonesia of Japan and the Netherlands

The author has described in several studies the way in which Japan has come today to conceptualize its rule of Indonesia (Southeast Asia) in the days when it claimed to be setting up the “Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere” for “Asian liberation.”¹¹ Linked to the inward-looking nationalism that spread following the 1990s collapse of the Cold War structure, an historical view has arisen in Japan in recent years that is impossible to reconcile with that of the Japanese occupation held by the countries of Southeast Asia, a view in which the aggressive nature of its rule has faded and the perception of this rule as a liberation — the independence contribution theory — has been enhanced. Political developments at the time precipitated a heightened sense of crisis among conservatives in Japan. These included the admission of the “compulsory” nature of the comfort women system by the Miyazawa Kiichi cabinet (the cabinet that was to be the “last” in the Liberal Democratic Party’s one-party rule), the “war of aggression” statement by Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro, (who headed the coalition cabinet that followed the demise of the “1955 System,” as that decades-long one-party rule was called), and the “no war” resolution adopted by the National Diet at the time when Socialist Party chair, Murayama Tomiichi headed the cabinet. Against this background, a “*Kokumin undo* [National movement]” based on the reactionary nationalism of the above-mentioned the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform was organized, one result of which was publication by Fusosha in 2001 of a revisionist junior high school history textbook. Although the rate of adoption of this textbook for the 2002 school year was only 0.03 percent, it serves as a reminder of how deeply rooted in the historical consciousness of the Japanese is the theory of the occupation contributing to the independence in Southeast Asia. I would also like to point out that, pushed by the momentum of this gung-ho “national movement,” in the summer of 2002 a “Great East Asia Holy War Monument” was erected on the grounds of the Gokoku Shrine (a shrine for the war dead) in the city of Kanazawa, on which are inscribed the names of many wartime

Indonesia-related individuals and organizations.

Another thing to be considered when thinking of perceptions of the Japanese occupation period in Indonesia is the existence of the former colonial ruler, the Netherlands. As the egg-throwing incident that occurred at the time of the Showa emperor's visit to Holland in 1971 symbolizes, at the heart of the public memory in Holland are feelings of humiliation at having had its "beautiful colony" seized by the Asian country, Japan, and deep resentment at the horrific conditions in concentration camps that 135,000 Dutch people were forced to endure and that claimed the lives of some 20 percent of them. Just how strong these feelings – known as "camp syndrome" – were is reflected in the "Protocol on the Resolution of Private Claims with the Netherlands" that Japan signed in 1956, under which it agreed to pay \$10 million to 92,000 Dutch civilians, former internees, as "compensation." This payment of compensation was a form of exceptional, private, compensation outside the framework of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, and it was made against the background of the issue of the release of Japanese war criminals connected with the Dutch East Indies who were being held in Sugamo Prison and whose release was not allowed right up to the end.¹² This was a "trade-off," so to speak, by Japan and the Netherlands, made in view of the two countries' respective national interests. With this, peace between the two countries was at last formally concluded.

Yet today, nearly a half-century since this "political settlement," the fact remains that — as shown in Table 1, and in spite of the various cultural exchange programs recently in connection with the "400th Anniversary of Japan-Holland Friendship"— in a section of Dutch society, anti-Japanese sentiments based on war experiences still run strong.

For instance, in 1999 the Dutch government designated August 15 a day of the same official weight as May 4-5, the anniversary of liberation from Nazism. This is, of course, because August 15 is remembered throughout the Netherlands as the day Japanese rule in its "beautiful colony" ended and as the day that many Dutch people, including women and children, got their freedom back. How does the Netherlands, on the other hand, regard the fact of its colonial rule over Indonesia? The prominent author, Rudy Kausbrugh, spent his youth in a Japanese concentration camp in Sumatra, but in his book, *Het Oostindisch*

Kampsyndroom (the Japanese title, Loss of Colonies of Western Countries and Japan, published by Soshisha), he referred straightforwardly to Holland's own wrongdoings in Indonesia and argued that to be hung up forever on the experience in Japanese camps was a kind of racism. There was such a backlash in the country, however, that he was forced to leave the Netherlands for a while.

The twenty-first century approaching, Prime Minister Wim Kok stated in the spring of 2000 that the Netherlands "should apologize to Indonesia for its past colonial rule." But this statement too evoked a harsh response from the public, and the prime minister was forced to retract it. And seeing the self-assurance of the last English and Portuguese governor-generals at the times of the hand-over of Hong Kong and Macau to China, and the "comeback," to be described below, that Portugal is having in East Timor, one wonders what meaning things like taking "historical responsibility" for, or "apologizing" for the former colonies have for European countries, or if their attitudes might not best be called subconscious orientalism. In connection with this point, I might add that in Dutch history textbooks one is hard put to find any description that reflects an understanding of Holland's colonial rule in Indonesia as assailants. One high school textbook as much as suggests that the Indonesian independence movement was "made in Japan: describing that "The Japanese, with their staunch militarism and prejudice toward the West, pursued a plan of organizing Indonesian youth . . . and after liberation, the *pemuda* (youths) who had been trained under the Japanese continued fighting the western rulers who came back again."¹³

While it is obvious that even today, in the formation of the Japanese and Dutch public memories of Japanese wartime rule in Indonesia, "memories never go out from the borders of the country,"¹⁴ it should be noted that since the 1990s exchanges in research on the Japanese occupation among the three countries concerned, Indonesia included, have developed remarkably. In this process, the vigorous pursuit of research exchanges by the national (formerly royal) Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) and the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) is very significant. In particular, NIOD's proposals for a series of studies contemplate research on the Japanese occupation of Indonesia that would break out of the confines of each country's public memory, the head of research, Peter Romijn, making the point that "Dutch and overseas historians

have squarely faced the challenge of overcoming the national perspective that has always dominated historical research.” And reflecting further on the fact that “Dutch history scholars were concerned (only) with the questions of how Japan was able to so easily defeat the Dutch East Indies, and why it was impossible for their country’s colonial system to continue after the war,” Romijn calls for shedding that parochial perspective and deepening a multifaceted and international comparative perspective that would not confine its focus on change in Indonesia to the war period, but, in the longer time frame of the 1920s to the 1960s, consider it not only from the perspective of political history, but also from that of economy, ethnicity and minorities, religion, culture, concepts of Asia on the part of the Japanese and of Japan on the part of Asia.¹⁵

Indonesia’s Rule over East Timor

Indonesia, a country that had endured the “darkness” of the Japanese occupation and become a pioneer among the colonized of the world in declaring its independence, thirty years later, at the end of 1975, became the first country in Southeast Asia to redraw its border through resort to force of arms. And then the following year, 1976, on its own Independence Day, August 17, held a grandiose celebration in Dili, the capitol of East Timor, which it had just annexed as its 27th province. In his Independence Day speech in Jakarta, President Suharto boasted that “We are now at last welcoming back as brothers to the big family of the Indonesian nation the people of East Timor.”

In 1913 the Indonesian independence movement pioneer Suwardi Surjaningrat (later called Dewantoro) replied to the Dutch colonial government’s invitation to join its centennial anniversary celebration of Holland’s liberation (from Napoleonic rule) by saying: “If I were a Dutch person, I would not celebrate my country’s independence in a country still a colony. First I would give the people we are ruling their independence, and only then would I celebrate our independence.”¹⁶ Although the bitter irony of this statement would have been lost on President Suharto, by replacing “a Dutch person” with “an Indonesian,” the independence movement leader’s words perfectly express the feelings of most East

Timorese in 1976, feelings that were at the root of the Timorese nationalism that was to grow in the years ahead.

The Indonesia that had overthrown Dutch and Japanese rule and had been the Third World standard bearer of anti-colonialism turned into a violent oppressor of national self-determination, but how is this fact being interpreted in Indonesia's historical consciousness? In connection with this point, I would like to compare the Japanese military occupation with the Indonesian occupation of East Timor (See Table 2). Of course there are differences in the two cases. The Japanese occupation was during World War II, while the Indonesian takeover took place against the background of the Cold War. Also, the depth of historical and cultural links between ruler and ruled differed, as did the length of the period of rule. But the following commonalities can be seen in the Japanese military occupation of Indonesia and Indonesia's rule of East Timor.

(1) Both carried out their rule by enforcing strongman values against a background of overwhelming military might. And both share the striking contrast between the "beauty" of their ideologies of rule – (Japan's "Asian liberation" and "Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere," and Indonesia's "civilizing mission" and "union of brothers") – and the actual brutality of that rule. Also, both countries failed to grasp (at least during the period of rule) the huge contradiction between their ideologies and reality.

(2) There is a seven-fold difference in the period of rule — three and a half years in the case of the one, a quarter-century in the case of the other — but both of the peoples ruled strengthened their nationalism through a resistance to their foreign rulers that was both tough and flexible. Particularly East Timor, which had seen almost no rise of nationalist consciousness under Portuguese colonial rule, saw the growth of a national identity as "the people of East Timor," as symbolized in the name of the pivotal organization of the independence struggle, Council of East Timor National Resistance (CNRT), a national identity that overcame the differences between the regional ethnic groups. And in both cases, the lingua franca in the respective regions – Indonesian and Tetum – was an important medium for the expansion of nationalism among the people. At the same time, this

played a certain role in the “modernization” of these languages. In Indonesia, the result was that Indonesian was designated the single national language (Bahasa Nasional) in the independent nation, but in the Democratic Republic of East Timor, Portuguese, which had become the political tool of the political elite, was chosen as the first official language for the time being. Interestingly, the former colonial power, Portugal, is putting a lot of effort into Portuguese language education in East Timor, including sending over many young language teachers. With the cooperation of the Australian linguistics scholar Geoffrey Hull, work is now underway on the systematization of Tetum, but Timorese language scholars themselves say that it will take two generations for Tetum to become a modern language, and that in preparation, a Tetum course will be set up at the University of East Timor from 2005 to train Tetum teachers.¹⁷

(3) Another point in common is that the involvement of the United Nations and the international community as a whole was important in the processes whereby both Indonesia and East Timor achieved final independence. Indonesia fought an independence war against the Dutch for four years, up until the end of 1949, but during that period UN mediation (UN Commission on Indonesia), and other initiatives such as those by India’s Prime Minister Nehru, the Inter-Asian Relations Conference (March 1947) and the Conference of Independent Nations in Asia (January 1947), both in New Delhi, had an important influence on the building of an international consensus supporting Indonesian independence. But that same Indonesia was later, particularly after the Nov. 1991 Santa Cruz massacre, to be inundated with criticism by the international community for its actions in East Timor. The awarding of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize to two men who called for self-determination and were symbols of the East Timorese resistance to Indonesian rule, Bishop Carlos Filipe Belo and Jose Ramos-Horta (East Timor’s first foreign minister), was a manifestation of international criticism of Indonesia.¹⁸

Conclusion

After these considerations, I would like now to touch on the issue of how Indonesia and East Timor each perceive the quarter century of their “unfortunate past.”

As I have said, in Indonesia there is a deeply rooted consciousness of the integration of East Timor as the “civilizing” of a backward neighbor under the name of “Indonesianization.” That is why, even after President Habibí’s acceptance of the independence option in the beginning of 1999, and even today with the advances made in democratization, one almost never hears an interpretation reflecting a spirit of atonement. In fact, President Megawati, who was invited to the East Timor Independence celebration in May 2002, used the occasion (and probably did so because of the very strong opposition from the military to her attending the ceremony at all) to visit the Seroja Heroes Cemetery in Dili where some 3,600 of the many Indonesian soldiers who died in the war are buried (*Seroja* means water lily, but the Indonesian army called the December 1975 military operation of invading East Timor “*Operasi Seroja*.”) Then in early July the foundation stone laying ceremony for a “Seroja Monument” to the soldiers who died in the East Timor war was held in a corner of the military’s sprawling headquarters in Cilangkap, a verdant suburban area south of Jakarta, and this too was attended by the president. The unveiling of the monument is scheduled for November 10 this year (November 10 is commemorated in Indonesia as a “historical” day, in 1945, when the Surabaya struggle that heralded the independence struggle took place).

Furthermore, in the work of reviewing history textbooks referred to above, Indonesia’s rule of East Timor is one of the points being reviewed. A supplementary history book for high school students published in 2002, for instance, objectively describes how, although East Timor progressed socially and economically under Indonesian rule, excessive human rights violations, as exemplified in the Santa Cruz massacre, brought down the heavy censure of the international community, or the fact that the growth of a nationalism demanding national self-determination was reflected in the results of the August 1999 popular referendum. These things are presented quite matter-of-factly, something that would have been unthinkable under Suharto. A lot of space in the same book is also devoted to Indonesia’s democratization movement that brought about the downfall of the Suharto regime. That the waves of reform have reached the pages

of history textbooks is clear too, for instance, in the section on the killing by army troops of Trisakti University students, the incident that became the spark that set off the drama of the regime change, where the names of the four murdered students are recorded, and they are mourned as victims in the democratization movement.¹⁹

How does East Timor, on the other hand, which is believed to have lost one-fifth of its population under Indonesia, view rule by its giant neighbor? Xanana Gusmão, hero of the resistance and East Timor's first president, a man who spent eight years in Indonesian prisons or under house arrest — (whatever may be the complicated feelings in the depths of his heart) — has consistently called for reconciliation and harmony with Indonesia. This attitude was very clearly exhibited during the Independence ceremony in the way that Xanana took much greater pains to honor President Megawati than he did for other distinguished guests such as former President Clinton, Australian Prime Minister Howard, or Portuguese President Sampaio. In fact, this is what Xanana said at a press conference on May 17, just before the ceremony: "I won't allow even a single fly to bother President Megawati when she visits the Seroja Heroes Cemetery. Now that the goal of our struggle has been accomplished, I am determined to build good relations with our neighbors, particularly Indonesia and Australia. We people of East Timor last year welcomed to East Timor former President Wahid. Mutual distrust with Indonesia is not necessary, it is the cultivation of mutual trust that is important. We have reached an agreement to hold frequent talks with officers of the Indonesian armed forces and to build friendly relations."²⁰

This flexible stance of the top leader toward the "former enemy," a stance which outsiders might consider "weakness," no doubt comes from an awareness that for the mini new state of East Timor (area, 14,000 sq km, population, some 850,000), surrounded as it is by giant Indonesia (area. 1,920,000 sq km, population, some 200,000,000), this is the only option for guaranteeing the security of the state, even the very existence of its people. By the same token, the pronouncements by East Timor's top leaders have also been very flexible with respect to Japan, which occupied Timor during WWII and was the sole country among the advanced nations which supported Indonesian policy on East Timor right up to the end. Should government leaders' conciliatory statements be seen as the only option for

an East Timor faced with building a country “from scratch” – statements such as “We do not intend to ask for war compensation,” or “The past is past; we are seeking friendly relations with Japan for the present and the future”? In contrast with this is the statement protesting the dispatch of Self Defense Forces to East Timor and demanding of Japan a clear apology for its wartime rule, a statement issued by the “Working group on justice for victims of Japanese military occupation” composed of twenty East Timor NGOs.

How are we to unravel the interwoven strands of the twentieth century – strands that bound together Japan, Indonesia, East Timor, . . . and those countries with the Netherlands and Portugal, . . . and the international environment that enveloped them all – and as we discover relationships and make comparisons, weave history together as we begin to journey into the twenty-first century?

Notes:

- (1) Siti Sumandari Suroto, *Minzoku ishiki no haha Kartini den* [Biography of Kartini, mother of national consciousness], trans. Funachi Megumi and Matsuda Mayumi, Imura Bunka Jigyousha, 1982, p. 167.
- (2) Indonesia Kyowakoku Gaimusho, Higashi Chimorushu Keizaishakai Kaihatsu, (*Economic and Social Development in East Timor Province*), Chunichi Indonesia Taisikan, 1986, p.1.
- (3) The author is indebted to Ohta Atsushi and Yamada Naoko, two students in the Netherlands, for these insights, and particularly to the useful information in Ohta Atsushi, “Oranda to Indonesia niokeru rekishi ninshiki wo meguru atsureki to taiwa: nisenningen, Oranda Higashi Indogaisha yonhyakushuunen kinengyouji ga shimeshitamono” [Conflicts and dialogues concerning the perception of history in the Netherlands and Indonesia: What was shown the 400th anniversary of the Dutch East Indie Company in 2000], *Ajia Taiheiyo Kokyuu* 5 (Forthcoming)
- (4) Sartono Kartodirjo, Marwati Djoened Poesponegoro, Nugroho Notosusanto, *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia* VI, Jakarta, Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1975.
- (5) On post-Suharto history education, see Gotoh Ken’ichi, “Indonesia: Minshuka

- to gendaishi kenkyuu shinchouryuu” [Indonesia: democratization and new trends in modern history studies], *Gakujutsu Geppou*, April, 2002.
- (6) Nishimura Shigeo, “Indonesia, dokuritsu wo kachitotta to iu hokori [Indonesia: the pride of winning independence],” in *Sekai no rekishi kyookasho* [History textbooks around the world: a comparative study of eleven countries], eds. Ishiwatari Nobuo and Koshida Aya, Akashi Shoten, 2002, p. 123.
- (7) Lembaga Research Kebudayaan Nasional (LRKN-LIPI), *Masalah “Romusha” dalam Pers Ibu Kota*, 1974, p.7.
- (8) See Masuda Atou, Goto Ken’ichi, and Murai Yoshinori, *Gendai Indoneshia no shakai to bunka* [Modern Indonesian society and culture], Gendai Ajia Shuppankai, 1979.
- (9) *Kompas*, July 14, 1982.
- (10) *Angkatan Bersenjata*, July 14, 1982.
- (11) Goto Ken’ichi, “Dai-Toua sensou’ kaihō shikan no kyomousei [The falsity of the liberation view of the ‘Greater East Asia war’],” *Sekai*, May, 1995; idem, “Nihon—Tounanajia senryō to ‘kaiho’ shikan [Japan — occupation of Southeast Asia and the liberation view],” in *Tōnan Ajiaishi no naka no Nihon senryō* [Japanese occupation in Southeast Asian history], ed. Kurasawa Aiko, Waseda Daigaku Shuppanbu, 1997. *Tensions of the Empire: Japan and Southeast Asia in Colonial and Post-colonial World*, Athens, Ohio Univ. Press, forthcoming.
- (12) L. van Poelgeest, “Kōwa jōyaku to hogoshugi—Oranda to Nihon no gaikō kankei [The peace treaty and protectionism — the Netherlands and Japan diplomatic relations], 1945-1971,” in *Nichiran kōryū yonhyakunen no rekishi to tenbō* [Four hundred years of Japanese-Dutch exchange: history and prospects], ed. Leonard Blussé et al., Nichiran Gakkai, 2000, pp. 335-6. For more detail, see the same author’s *Tōkyō saiban to Oranda* [The Tokyo Tribunal and the Netherlands], trans. Mizushima Haruo, Tsukahara Tōgo, Misuzu Shobo, 1997.
- (13) Tomonaga Yasuyo, “Oranda, senmei na kagai/higai no noutan [The Netherlands: vivid aggressor/victim contrasts],” in Ishiwatari et al., *op. cit.*, p. 226.
- (14) Remco Raben, “Sensō no kioku — Indoneshia ni okeru Nihon touchi no

rekishi to sono ninshiki [Memories of war: history of Japanese rule in Indonesia and its perception],” in Leonard Blussé, et al., *op. cit.*, p. 308.

- (15) NIOD 1999-2003 (Outline of NIOD 1999-2003 research project, material provided by Yamazaki Isao). Also, since the protests from Indonesia over the above-mentioned “Four hundredth anniversary of the VOC,” there have been growing moves among Dutch history scholars to restudy in a scholarly way Dutch-centered historical perceptions. Ohta Atsushi, *op. cit.*
- (16) Tsuchiya Kenji, *Indoneshia minzokushugi kenkyuu* [Study of Indonesian nationalism], Soubunsha, 1982, p. 508.
- (17) Interview with Dr. Aderito Guterres Correia, Dili, August 9, 2002. For Hull’s recent work, see Geoffrey Hull, *Tetum Language Manual for East Timor*, Winston Hills NSW, Sebastião Aparicio da Silva Project, 2001.
- (18) For the speeches of the two at the award ceremony, see Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, *East Timor Nobel Peace — Lectures delivered at the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize Awarding Ceremony*, Lisboa, Edicoes Colibri, 1997.
- (19) Neiny Ratmaningsih, ed., *Panduan Pelajar Sejarah 3*, Bandung Ganeca Exact, 2002, pp.47-50 (This material was provided by Aoki Yoko, a student in Jakarta).
- (20) *Lian Maubere*, no. 41, May 20, 2002, p. 15.

Table 1 Three-Country Comparison on Japanese Occupation

	Indonesia	Japan	Netherlands	Remarks
Research (Main viewpoint)	Conquering darkness, duality of military rule impact	Agent of change (Indonesian autonomy), recolonization, not liberation	Result of Japanese expansionism, part of longtime change	3-country research exchange from 1990s, loose agreement
Main int'l symposium output	Taufik Abdullah, ed. <i>The Heartbeat of Indonesian Revolution</i> (Gramedia, 1997)	Kura Sawa Aiko, ed. <i>Tōnan Ajia shi no naka no Nihon senryō</i> [Japanese occupation in Southeast Asian history] (Waseda Univ. Press, 1997)	Peter Post and Elly Touwen-Bouwsma, eds., <i>Japan, Indonesia and War</i> (KITLV Press, 1997)	
Oral history	Start of Oral History section of National Archive (1973)	Nihon senryōki Indoneshiashiryō forumu, ed., <i>Shōgenshū Nihongun senryōka no indoneshia</i> [Testimonies on Indonesia under Japanese military occupation] (Ryūkei Shyōsha, 1991)	Indonesia Oral History Foundation (1998)	
Public Memory	"The wound is healed, but the scars remain," (<i>Suara Pamburuan</i> editorial, Oct. 1991)	Views of recognizing aggression and contribution to liberation, no need for apology to Holland	Humiliation of losing colony and "camp syndrome," PM's withdrawal of "We should apologize to Indonesia for the past" statement (Spring, 2000)	"Memories never go outside of the borders of the country"
Monuments	Romusha figure in Museum of National History in Jakarta	"Greater East Asia Holy War" monument in Gokoku Shrine, Kanazawa City (Summer 2000)	East Indies monument (1988, cabinet decree making Aug. 15, on a par with liberation from Nazis anniversary (1999)	
First visit by "head of state"	1958 Pres. Sukarno's Japan visit, 1970 Pres. Suharto's Holland visit	1971 Emperor's Holland visit, 1991 Emperor's Indonesia visit	1991 Queen Beatrix's Japan visit, 1995 Queen Beatrix's Indonesia visit	
History-related movements	Former Heiho members demand Japanese compensation for "comfort women" (NGO supported)	Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (established 1996)	Regular SJE demonstrations in front of Japanese Embassy by	Contrast of Japan and Indonesia/Holland
Remarks	Research, public memory movement have the same basic direction	Gap between research and public memory movement	Growing gap in research between "revisionism" and public memory movement	

Table 2 Comparison of Japan and Indonesia as Ruler

	Japanese occupation of Indonesia	Indonesian rule of East Timor
Period	WWII (Mar 1942-Aug 1945)	Cold War & Post-Cold War (July 1976-Oct. 1999)
Former suzerain state and their reaction	Netherlands: gov't in exile in London, Melbourne	Portugal: abandons sovereignty works for solution of "conflict"
Ideology of rule	Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere	Uniting of brothers
Objective of rule	Acquisition of resources	Security
Justification of rule	National liberation	Request from the people
Form of rule	Direct rule by military authority	Indonesianization under force of arms
Form of resistance	Passive resistance, sporadic uprising	Guerrillas in mountain areas, urban resistance, international solidarity
Social change	Diffusion of Indonesian, growth of Indonesian nationalism	Diffusion of Tetum and Catholicism, growth of East Timorese nationalism
Occasion of end of rule	Japanese defeat in war	Collapse of Suharto regime
International environment at time of independence	International support	International support
National language at time of independence	Indonesian	Portuguese (Tetum)
Relations after end of rule	Jan. 1958 peace treaty	July 2002 establishment of diplomatic relations
Post-independence view of former ruler	Wounds healed, scars remain	Calls for cooperations and reconciliation
Historical perception by former ruler	Perception of aggression and contribution to liberation theory	Seroja Monument in Jakarta