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CHAPTER

1

SOUTHEAST ASIA IN WAR AND PEACE: THE END OF EUROPEAN COLONIAL EMPIRES

So marked is the diversity of Southeast Asia that even the recent history of each country, indeed of each community, possesses its own periodization and invites examination as a more or less autonomous entity. Nonetheless, the separate territories and societies do have sufficient shared experiences to allow a level of generalization for the area as a whole. The developments which provide a degree of regional coherence are not themselves, however, necessarily unique to the region. On the contrary, the outstanding landmarks in the closing chapter of Southeast Asia's colonial period are also features of the broader terrain of world history, notably the rise and fall of the Japanese empire, the postwar restoration of European colonialism and the achievement of national independence during the Cold War. Indeed, given that the focus of this chapter is upon the end of European empires in Southeast Asia, it is only to be expected that the momentous events and key decisions which are both the determinants and the symbols of its periodization are of major significance for, since they partly emanated from, the world beyond Southeast Asia.

WORLD WAR II AND JAPANESE OCCUPATION

World War in Southeast Asia, 1941–1945

Few historical events in the history of Southeast Asia appear so definitive as the Japanese invasion in December 1941.¹ By a stroke more compelling than the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese in 1511, the balance of power between Europe and Asia seemed to have been immediately and permanently transformed. The reasons for this invasion are to be found largely,

¹ A selection of titles on the outbreak of World War II in Asia and on other topics covered in this chapter is to be found in the bibliographical essay.

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[More information](#)

but not entirely, in events outside the region; in, for example, the growth of militarism in Japanese society during the 1930s, in the imperialist expansion of Japan and the course of the war in China, and in Japan's economic needs and the ideology of Co-prosperity. One must also take into account the weaknesses of European powers which, despite the apparent confidence and stability displayed by their governments in the colonies during the late 1930s, were at home distracted, and in the case of France and the Netherlands overwhelmed, by the war in the West. An additional dimension to any explanation of Japanese success and European failure in 1941–2 is that of the 'imperial periphery'. Amongst its more noteworthy features were, first, the raw materials which the region itself offered to the Japanese; second, the realities of the colonial position which, in contrast to appearances of virtual omnipotence, was marked in all instances by a fundamentally rickety network of collaborative ties with local peoples; and, third, the absence of any co-ordinated resistance to the Japanese advance.

In May–June 1940, when first the Netherlands and then France fell to Germany, Japan signed an agreement with Phibun Songkhrum's government in Siam and also began to demand special privileges whereby it might land forces in French Indochina. In August the new régime of Vichy France permitted the Japanese the use of ports in Indochina and in September Japan joined the Axis in a ten-year tripartite pact, although this would not prevent it from upholding a neutrality agreement with Moscow (concluded in April 1941) when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. Early in 1941 Japan acted as 'mediator' between France and Siam in Indochina. One result of these negotiations was the convention in March whereby Siam regained territory on the west bank of the Mekong which it had lost to France in the Paknam incident of 1893. A second consequence was the further extension of Japan's territorial position in the region and the consolidation of its position for another leap forward, since it had succeeded in obtaining supplies of rice, rubber, coal and other minerals from Indochina, and also had won the formal confirmation of its military occupation of French territory. By the end of July Japan had effectively occupied Indochina, and the army and navy were preparing for operations in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Japan nonetheless held back from military hostilities while at the same time Western powers, and especially the USA, attempted to block its advance with a combination of negotiations and embargoes.

The period of expansion through diplomatic means ended soon after mid-October when Prince Fumimaro Konoye was replaced as premier by General Hideki Tojo, the Minister of War, who had previously served as chief of staff with the occupation force in China. Feeling the pressure of the economic blockade, particularly as regards oil supplies, determined not to lose international status and mindful that the US would be likely to assist Britain and the Netherlands in the defence of their colonies, Tojo's government decided at the start of November on an early military strike. During the night of 7–8 December Pearl Harbor, Malaya, the Philippines and Hong Kong were attacked, and on 8–9 December the United States, Britain and the Netherlands declared war on Japan. But the US Pacific Fleet had

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

been crippled in Pearl Harbor, half the American air force in the Far East was destroyed at Clark airfield, and British naval power in Asia was wiped out when HMS *Repulse* and HMS *Prince of Wales* were sunk off the coast of Pahang on 10 December. Japan had achieved supremacy in the air and at sea.

The military advance continued remorselessly and in several directions at the same time. On 2 January Japanese troops captured Manila and Cavite, though the island-fort of Corregidor at the entrance to Manila Bay held out some months longer. British and Commonwealth troops were unable to make an effective stand in the Malayan peninsula; Kuala Lumpur was captured by troops of General Yamashita's Twenty-fifth Army on 11 January, and 'fortress Singapore' came under siege on 31 January when the causeway between Johor Bahru and the island was blown up by departing Commonwealth forces. The Japanese had for a time hoped to occupy the Netherlands East Indies in the same manner that they had taken over French Indochina, that is without a military campaign which would waste Japanese resources and endanger the most valued of Indonesia's assets, namely the oil industry. Dutch stubbornness, however, forced Japan in January to launch a campaign for the occupation of the Netherlands East Indies. Towards the end of the same month a two-pronged invasion of Burma was mounted from Thailand which, having revised its relationship with Japan in the form of a ten-year alliance on 21 December, declared war on the Allies on 25 January.

The climax of the blitzkrieg came with the fall of Singapore on 15 February. Secure in the air, at sea and on land, controlling the major strategic point in the region, divested of effective enemies, Japan could now proceed to mop up residual colonial resistance. The battle of the Java Sea (27 February—1 March) opened up the Netherlands East Indies to the Japanese who, having captured Batavia on 6 March, virtually completed their occupation of Dutch possessions by early May. Meanwhile the British had evacuated Rangoon on 7 March, and the conquest of Burma culminated with the seizure of Mandalay on 2 May; the campaign in the Philippines ended with the fall of Corregidor on 6 May. This was the furthest extent of the Japanese conquests.

Surprise is said to have been a key reason for Japan's military successes. Tokyo recognized the need to avoid at all costs a war of attrition which would have allowed its enemies, and particularly the USA, a breathing space during which they could have blocked the Japanese advance upon the prime targets of Southeast Asian mineral supplies and the region's defensible strategic points. Second, though some of Japan's triumphs were close-run things—even the victory in Singapore was one of these—we must not underestimate what so many purblind decision-makers in Western governments did at the time, namely Japan's real strengths. During the months before armed conflict, Japanese diplomats displayed immense skill in obtaining Russian neutrality in the Far East, in exploiting American isolationism for as long as possible and in taking advantage of Thai territorial revanchism. Preparations for war were thorough, military morale was high, and the conduct of the campaigns themselves benefited from knowledge of local conditions. Conversely, and here is a third factor

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in Japan's success, Europeans were insufficiently mindful of the threat of war in the East and their response was further weakened by the lack of co-ordinated resistance on the part of colonial governments in Southeast Asia. More important still in determining the outcome of events in the East was the impact of the war in the West: the gathering storm in Europe from the late 1930s onwards distracted Europeans from forearming themselves in Southeast Asia, while Hitler's military success in 1940–1 prevented an adequate response to Japan from Britain, France and Holland. In the end, revelations of the fragility of the power and the superficiality of the support which Europeans enjoyed in Southeast Asia provoked an outcry at home. In addition to military scapegoats, 'effete' colonial rulers and 'treacherous' colonial subjects were blamed in turn, although in fact fifth-columnists made an insignificant contribution to the outcome of the campaigns of 1941–2.²

Almost as soon as it had reached its greatest extent, the Japanese empire was forced on to the defensive and soon afterwards into retreat. The day after the fall of Corregidor, Japan's advance was arrested at the Battle of the Coral Sea (7 May 1942). A month later came the turning-point of the Pacific War when, by their victory at Midway (4–7 June), the United States established ascendancy at sea and in the air. Cutting two swathes across the Pacific, the Americans launched the Allied counter-offensive. General MacArthur, at the head of the Southwest Pacific Command, advanced through the Solomon Islands (August–November 1942) and the eastern archipelago (1943–4) to land on Leyte in October 1944, while the Central Pacific Command under Admiral Nimitz pursued a similar 'island-hopping' course through the Marshall Islands, Guam and the Carolines. Both forces converged on Okinawa and the home islands in the spring of 1945.

On the Burma front the campaign was at first more sluggish. In the summer of 1942 General Wavell proposed Operation Anakin to retake Rangoon. This came to nothing. Although Orde Wingate's First Chindits demonstrated in early 1943 the possibility of survival behind Japanese lines, albeit at enormous human cost, the Allies were dogged by disease, low morale and poor liaison between the British, American and Chinese contingents. The appointment of Louis Mountbatten as Supreme Allied Commander Southeast Asia (SACSEA) in August 1943 breathed new life into this theatre. Although Plan Culverin for the reconquest of Sumatra in 1944 was not proceeded with owing to Anglo-American disagreements, General Slim's Fourteenth Army withstood Japanese offensives at Imphal

² Major Iwaichi Fujiwara was, for example, the leader of a special agency (the *F Kikan*) set up to recruit overseas Indians to the Japanese side, but its contribution to the 1941–2 campaign was negligible. As regards Malaya, an enquiry by the non-official Association of British Malaya concluded that there was little evidence of fifth-column activity: see Sir George Maxwell, ed., *The Civil Defence of Malaya*, London, 1944. It appears that the only significant outbreaks of local armed opposition to Europeans in Southeast Asia during the Japanese invasion were the activities of Aung San's Burma Independence Army and the Muslim rebellion in Aceh in Feb.–Mar. 1942: Jan Pluvier, *South-East Asia from Colonialism to Independence*, Kuala Lumpur, 1974, 195. See also Eric Robertson, *The Japanese File: Pre-war Japanese Penetration in Southeast Asia*, Hong Kong, 1979.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

and Kohima in March–June 1944. Then, destroying the resistance of the Japanese Fifteenth, Twenty-eighth and Thirty-third Armies, and expecting support from Aung San's Anti-Fascist Organization, Allied troops swept south and entered Rangoon early in May 1945. Southeast Asia Command (SEAC), whose headquarters had moved from New Delhi to Kandy in April 1944, now set about preparing Operation Zipper, the seaborne invasion of Malaya which was to be assisted from within the peninsula by Force 136 in liaison with the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA).

The war came to an end, however, before Operation Zipper got under way. Air-raids upon Japan from November 1944 onwards reached a crescendo in the massive offensive on Tokyo and other cities in May–August 1945. On 6 August the first atomic bomb was dropped upon Hiroshima, and this was followed by the second on 9 August. On 8 August 1945, the USSR declared war on Japan and swept into Manchuria. On 10 August Kuniaki Koiso's government offered to surrender provided the emperor kept his throne. Four days later the Japanese accepted the Allied terms of capitulation and on 15 August the emperor announced his surrender. Territorial expansion had brought them military burdens without commensurate economic gains, and the Japanese were in the end worn down by the economic, military and technological power of the Allies, who turned their full might upon the Pacific theatre after victory in Europe.

The Japanese Occupation

A decade of expansion had resulted in the creation of the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere' embracing Japan itself, Manchuria, Korea, and territories of China and Southeast Asia. 'Asia for the Asians' was the avowed objective of Japan's mission to eradicate Western influence over, and bring freedom and prosperity to, all races living in the Sphere, and many Southeast Asians at first hailed the Japanese as liberators. This ideology was intended both to inspire front-line troops and to win local support. In fact it meant the subjection of Southeast Asian communities to the Japanese way, including the veneration of the emperor, mass celebrations of anniversaries in the imperial calendar and compulsory language classes in *nippon-go*, as well as the subordination of their interests to Japanese military and material requirements.

Directing affairs on behalf of Emperor Hirohito, Premier Tojo was the architect of imperial policy until July 1944. Conquered territories in Southeast Asia immediately came under military control. The commander of the Southern Army, Field Marshal Terauchi, established his headquarters at Saigon. Java, Sumatra and Malaya were in the charge of the army (Sumatra and Malaya being united under the Twenty-fifth Army until 1943) while the rest of the Dutch East Indies was placed under the navy. Although it was their intention, and well within their capacity, to retain as a colony the strategically vital island of Singapore (renamed Syonan or Light of the South), the Japanese clearly lacked the manpower to rule all their

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Volume Four

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

dependencies directly. As regards Siam, attempts were made to subordinate the country's economy to Japanese needs—which were resented by the Thais—but the Japanese made no move to intervene in the internal government of the country. Elsewhere the pragmatic adaptation of the institutional structures and administrative methods of the previous colonial régimes was a feature of the new colonialism. In each state vacated by Europeans, the Japanese inherited and utilized institutions and instruments that came to hand, though their task was made difficult by wartime damage to administrative fabric and the lack of experienced personnel.

Former Dutch and British territories, where Europeans were interned, were bereft of senior administrators; but in Indochina the Japanese retained French officials until March 1945, Governor-General Decoux arguing that in this way France saved its colonies. In the Philippines, where Filipinos had managed affairs since the inauguration of the Commonwealth in 1935, the local élite continued in post, and in other parts of the region where Southeast Asians had occupied junior echelons of government, local officials were advanced to fill gaps at higher levels. So, too, were former critics of colonialism and nationalist politicians who previously had either been imprisoned by Europeans or fled from them. Sukarno and the Malay radical Ibrahim Yaacob, for example, were released from detention and each was active in the mobilization of grassroots support for the military objectives and economic policies of the Co-prosperity Sphere in Indonesia and Malaya respectively, while Aung San, having returned to Burma from exile as one of the Thirty Comrades, placed the Burma Independence Army at Japan's disposal. The younger generation was also groomed for public duties. In Malaya, for example, some of the more able young men were sent for training at the *Kunrensho* colleges at Melaka and Singapore, or participated in paramilitary organizations such as *Giyu Gun* and PETA (a Malay acronym for Defenders of the Fatherland), or were even sent for further education in Japan itself.³

In June 1943, as the Japanese took the strain of a war on several fronts and anticipated Allied counter-offensives, Tojo declared his intention to delegate civil administration. Consequently on 1 August Burma became 'independent' under Ba Maw as 'Adipadi' (or Fuehrer); in September the Central Advisory Council was set up in Java under Sukarno; a Malayan Consultative Council was established in Singapore; and on 15 October José P. Laurel became head of an 'independent' régime in the Philippines. At the same time Japan rewarded Siam with the restoration of land: in July 1943 the four northern Malay states (Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu) were added to the territory of two Shan states and parts of Cambodia and Laos which Siam had already regained thanks to Japan. In 1944 continuing military reverses led to further political changes: in July Tojo was replaced as prime minister by General Koiso and in the same month Phibun Songkhrum was forced to resign as Thai premier; he was replaced by Khuang Aphaiwong who served until September 1945 more or less under the direction of Nai Pridi Phanomyong and the anti-Japanese and

³ See Yoji Akashi, 'The Japanese Occupation of Malaya' in Alfred W. McCoy, ed., *Southeast Asia under Japanese Occupation: Transition and Transformation*, New Haven, 1980.

Cambridge University Press

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Volume Four

Edited by Nicholas Tarling

Excerpt

[More information](#)

American-sponsored Free Thai. In September 1944 Koiso promised, though he was never to have the time to grant, independence for Indonesia. In the following March the administration of Indochina was removed from French hands, and a nominally independent government was set up in Vietnam under Emperor Bao Dai.

Although these changes reflected Japanese needs rather than any sympathy for the aspirations of nationalist movements or, indeed, any acknowledgement of the latter's strength, the Japanese accepted that they risked damaging their own position by the gratuitous alienation of communities upon whose co-operation day-to-day rule depended. After all, the imposition of Japanese culture and insistence on emperor-worship were affronts to local customs and beliefs, particularly of the Buddhist and Moslem communities. With respect to the latter, the Japanese, like the Dutch and British before them, took account of these feelings by institutionalizing consultative processes. Towards the end of 1943 they sponsored the formation in Java of the *Majlis Sjuru Muslimin Indonesia* or *Masjumi* (Consultative Council of Indonesian Muslims).⁴ Similarly the régime expressed respect for Islam in Malaya: the sultanates were left intact and a convention of religious councils was held at Kuala Kangsar in December 1944. The religious movement in Malaya, however, was anodyne compared with that in Java, which, having been legitimized by the régime, came to compete for the soul of the Indonesian nation with *priyayi* administrators, politicians such as Sukarno and Hatta, and the militant youth of PETA.

The primary objective of the military occupation of Southeast Asia had been economic, but the systematic exploitation of the region's assets was baulked from the outset by the wartime disruption of communications and devastation of shipping. The invasion and, more particularly, the scorched-earth tactics of the retreating Allies had destroyed or badly damaged much of the infrastructure of colonial states and wrought considerable havoc in the estates and mines of the colonial economy. The basis of the former colonial economies of Southeast Asia was further undermined by the different demands which the new colonial power made of the region. According to Japan's Commodity Materialization Plan the value of Malaya, for example, lay in its coal and iron rather than its rubber and tin, while the intention was to extract oil, nickel and bauxite from Indonesia. The effectiveness of Japan's command economy, however, rested on command of the sea and air; yet this was shortlived, being rolled back day by day after the US victory at Midway in June 1942. The consequent collapse of trade in turn resulted, as far as Southeast Asian countries were concerned, in a surfeit of traditional exports and a dearth of vital imports. There were gluts of rice in Burma and Thailand but dire food shortages elsewhere, especially in those areas which had become dependent upon food imports during the prewar period. Insufficient goods led to rationing, hoarding, a rampant black market and galloping inflation. This economic upheaval meant that, except for the small minority who won contracts

⁴ See H. J. Benda, *The Crescent and the Rising Sun: Indonesian Islam under the Japanese Occupation*, The Hague, 1953.

Cambridge University Press

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Volume Four

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

with the forces of occupation, Southeast Asians in general suffered unemployment, poverty and the loss of basic necessities. In desperation government dragooned people into agricultural schemes, while former plantations were given over to food programmes.

The social consequences of war and occupation cannot be quantified with any degree of accuracy, though the loss of life was on a scale unknown in the region since the beginning of modern government records, and the atrocities committed by occupying forces upon Southeast Asians verged on genocide in the case of Singapore's Chinese.⁵ Subsequent food shortages reached starvation proportions in some areas and diseases (particularly malaria) were on an epidemic scale throughout the region by the time of the Allied reoccupation. In addition, communities were uprooted. Families fled the towns to escape direct contact with the régime and squatted on forest fringes to scrape together a livelihood from subsistence cultivation. Labour was forcibly recruited from, for example, the Burmese, the overseas Indian community and amongst Indonesians in order to build such projects as the Burma railway or military defences. In addition, men were conscripted for military or paramilitary service or for the Indian National Army.⁶ Furthermore, the occupation aggravated the latent hostility between ethnic communities (between, for example, Malays and Chinese or Burmans and Karens) and also provoked struggles between competitors for power within individual communities. Communal conflict was less the result of deliberate policy or totalitarian manipulation on the part of the Japanese—on the contrary, the Japanese practice of divide-and-rule was grossly exaggerated by their enemies. Conflict was far more the outcome of economic hardships, changes in political patronage, the erosion of local government, and the sheer mutual mistrust of those unaccustomed to indigence. These were the conditions which would spawn violent conflict whenever Japanese rule was relaxed or after it had finally disintegrated.

Southeast Asian Nationalism, 1941–1945

Violence and oppression, the ideology of liberation and the taste of opportunity, the experience of arbitrary rule in some parts of the region and the collapse of government in others, all these features of 1941–5 sharpened political perceptions and stimulated nationalist activities in Southeast Asia.⁷ War and the Japanese occupation, however, contributed as much to the dissipation of political energy as to its generation, and as

⁵ See C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819–1975*, Singapore, 1985, 190–4, though see also Yoji Akashi, 'Japanese policy towards the Malayan Chinese 1941–1945', *JSEAS*, 1, 2 (1970).

⁶ For an account of this army recruited from amongst the Indians of Southeast Asia see J. C. Lebra, *Japanese-trained Armies in Southeast Asia*, Hong Kong, 1977, and K. K. Ghosh, *The Indian National Army: Second Front of the Indian Independence Movement*, Meerut, 1969.

⁷ The young Ahmad Boestamam in Malaya, for example, later recalled the exciting challenges of these years whereas the experience of 'Co-prosperity' taught the older U Nu in Burma to 'beware of Pied Pipers!'. See Ahmad Boestamam, trans. W. R. Roff, *Carving the Path to the Summit*, Athens, Ohio, 1979, and Thakin Nu, *Burma under the Japanese. Pictures and Portraits*, London, 1954.

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0521663725 - The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: From World War II to the Present,
Volume Four

Edited by Nicholas Tarling

Excerpt

[More information](#)

much to the fragmentation of nationalist movements as to their consolidation. Rather than square up directly to alien control, the nationalists' priority was the cultivation of local support; this they often pursued in competition with each other. Since at this time none possessed the strength to achieve power unaided, most accepted the need to seek outside assistance; the result was that the calculations of nationalist leaders and their capacity to act largely hinged on the outcome of the war and the fates of their respective sponsors.

Although they may not have assessed their long-term interests and those of the communities they aspired to lead purely or even primarily in terms of the aims of the principal combatants in World War II, Southeast Asian political activists nonetheless faced up to the questions as to whether they stood to gain or lose by supporting the Axis or the Allies, and whether their fortunes would be further advanced through painstaking negotiation or armed struggle. Such issues caused debate, frequent divisions and long-lasting feuds within their ranks. In Indonesia Islamic élites and militant youths came to jostle for Japanese favours with nationalists of the prewar Indonesian National Association (PNI), whose leaders anyway hedged their bets on the outcome of the war: Sukarno openly co-operated with the Japanese, while Mohammed Hatta acted as intermediary with Sutan Sjahrir's small underground organization. Asian communists were particularly taxed by the ideological and practical implications of collaboration and resistance, and split over the Comintern directive (issued after Hitler's invasion of Russia in June 1941) to ally with imperialism in opposition to fascism. Of Burma's Marxist Thakins, some, like Thein Pe Myint, were prepared to form an anti-fascist alliance with Britain whereas others, notably Aung San, argued that the interests of the Burmese pointed to joining with the enemies of Britain.⁸ Meanwhile the perfidious secretary-general of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), Lai Teck, kept his options open, following Moscow's line of 'united front' yet betraying his anti-Japanese comrades when it suited him.⁹

The choice between collaboration and resistance at any given time was determined by a mixture of considerations. Some were attracted by the prospect of rewards, seduced by the ideology of the Co-prosperity Sphere or bewildered by the apparent omnipotence of the Japanese empire. Selection of sides was also affected by ethnic allegiances, kinship ties and conflicts far more localized than the global struggles between fascism, communism and imperialism. Collaborators were not necessarily drawn from those who had previously opposed Western rule; as we have seen, Asian functionaries of European governments, who may be thought to have had vested interests in the old régime, generally submitted to employment under the new one. Moreover, the critics of colonialism who at first were eager to espouse the Japanese cause grew to doubt Japan's willingness and ability to transfer power to Southeast Asians.

⁸ See Robert H. Taylor, *Marxism and Resistance in Burma 1942–1945. Thein Pe Myint's 'Wartime Traveler'*, Athens, Ohio, 1984.

⁹ Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star over Malaya. Resistance and Social Conflict During and After the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941–1946*, 2nd edn, Singapore, 1987, 56–100.

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0521663725 - The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: From World War II to the Present,
Volume Four

Edited by Nicholas Tarling

Excerpt

[More information](#)

To be effective, a collaborative relationship must bring advantages to both parties involved. The Japanese used Southeast Asians to run routine administration and mobilize support for political demonstrations, public works and agricultural schemes. The extent to which Southeast Asians themselves derived political benefits from these activities is, on the other hand, difficult to measure. Co-operation with the régime did not in itself guarantee concessions from it. Aung San, for example, lost faith in Japanese promises so much so that in 1944 he formed the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) whose services he offered to Mountbatten in June 1945. Sukarno was abandoned by the Japanese before they were able to inaugurate Indonesia's independence, and it was the Pemuda (youth) who forced him to declare *merdeka* (independence) two days after the emperor's surrender. Moreover, Japanese patronage could not for long compensate adequately for lack of local support and credibility. Parties, like Masjumi in Indonesia, which represented significant constituencies were able to capitalize on the relationship, but shallow-rooted organizations failed to survive if the Japanese prop was removed. Whereas Sukarno's republican movement had the ballast to ride the storms of 1945, Ibrahim Yaacob's KRIS (Union of Peninsular Indonesians) was flat-bottomed and easily overwhelmed: Ibrahim, who tried to take over the helm in mid-August, was powerless to guide the Malayan vessel and soon abandoned ship for refuge in Jakarta. Similarly, when the Japanese replaced the French-manned administration of Vietnam with an 'independent' government in March 1945, it was not the incumbent Bao Dai but the revolutionary Ho Chi Minh who made the most of Japan's weakening grip upon Vietnam.

If collaborators were not synonymous with the opponents of European colonialism, then resisters were by no means its natural allies. The backbone of anti-Japanese resistance movements was, on the contrary, provided by historic enemies of Western imperialism, namely Kuomintang cells and especially Southeast Asia's communist parties, who shrewdly calculated on an eventual Allied victory, but also set their faces against the restoration of European rule.¹⁰ Their first priority, however, was to muster lasting local support and they did this by harnessing rural unrest and concealing their communist creed within a nationalist front of more widespread appeal. Thus in Burma communists were active in the AFPFL until the Burma Communist Party was expelled from the League in 1946. In Malaya the Chinese-dominated MCP, influenced not least by ingrained Sino-Japanese enmity, followed the Comintern line, setting up the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army and making contact with Force 136 agents. In Vietnam between May and October 1941, Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh) launched the Vietminh (League for Vietnam's Independence) as a broad-based resistance organization comprising all anti-Japanese nationalists. Although the Vietminh's programme was not communist (its goal

¹⁰ For local resistance movements see Taylor, *Marxism and Resistance in Burma*; Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star over Malaya*; Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion. A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines*, Berkeley, 1977; and Greg Lockhart, *Nation in Arms: The Origins of the People's Army of Vietnam*, Sydney, 1989. Cf. Charles Cruickshank, *SOE in the Far East*, Oxford, 1983.