

Book review: Chandler, D., Cribb, R., & Narangoa, L. (eds.) (2016). *End of Empire: 100 Days in 1945 That Changed Asia and the World*

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On 5 August 1945, the B-29 bomber 'Enola Gay' was loaded with 'Little Boy', the US atomic bomb that was to destroy the Japanese city of Hiroshima the following day. A hundred days later, on 12 November 1945, Indonesian regional commanders elected Sudirman as Indonesian army commander. He immediately ordered an assault on British and Dutch forces in Ambarawa, Java, marking a turning point towards more forceful military resistance, which eventually led to their withdrawal. In between these two dates, the world order was changed in East and Southeast Asia in a way that is formative up to this day. Over this time period, colonialist powers were defeated, but later took back territories, only to be eventually expelled, independence movements rose and fragmented, power struggles ensued between and among members of different ethnic groups as well as of different political ideologies, and empires ended. Division was easier reached than unity.

As 2015 marked the 70-year anniversary of the end of World War II, Scandinavian publisher NIAS Press developed the idea of balancing the focus on Asia in light of the commemorations, which usually focused more on Europe and the US. In *End of Empire*, general editors David P. Chandler, Robert Cribb, and Li Narangoa combine textual and visual contributions by nearly a hundred historians, lawyers, political scientists, cultural and social anthropologists, and scholars on Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Russian, Southeast Asian, and East Asian studies.

The volume fittingly illustrates that, generally, the end of war does not mean the end of conflict, and specifically, that the end of World War II brought peace to "almost nowhere in eastern Asia" (back cover). This point, which is too often overlooked from a Eurocentric perspective on World War II, is vigorously brought home. Through combining voices from all across Asia as well as the US and Europe, the study shows that not only was the war transnational and global, but also the efforts to end it as well as the consequences of those efforts. The developments of those 100 days fundamentally changed East and Southeast Asia and laid the groundwork for the way the affected countries are governed today as well as for ongoing conflicts, which in turn have a global impact. In the eponymous *100 days that changed Asia and the world*, the Indonesian and Vietnamese independence movements took shape, the wartime truce between Chinese Communists and Nationalists frayed, and Japan made first steps towards a new democratic order. The focus on Asian events and politics is also fitting as World War II began and ended in Asia, with the Japanese invasion of China in

July 1937 and with Japan's surrender on 15 August 1945, respectively. The end of the war also "marked the end of the Japanese empire", but the events in the following days "foreshadowed the demise of other empires and set into motion developments that transformed the post-war world" (p. 1).

Following the introduction, a prelude sets the stage and background for the events unfolding in the next 100 days. Short case studies of countries or regions enable the reader to contextualize the following information snippets. Regionally, *End of Empire* broadly focuses on Burma, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Korea, Malaya, Mongolia-Manchuria, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, though over the course of the 100 days as well as the preceding and subsequent periods described in the introductory and concluding chapters, borders and names are prone to change. Not unusually, the volume is chronological. Quite unusually, however, it has entries for every single day, reminiscent of a diary or a daily. These entries span anything between half a page and 17 pages and are peppered with photographs, maps, propaganda posters, political cartoons, and other visual material. In addition to the short newspaper-style paragraphs outlining current events – usually several a day, covering several countries and perspectives – about 80 approximately two-page vignettes explore specific aspects and topics, like forced laborers (pp. 90-92), the Great Vietnam Famine (pp. 103-105), or Prisoners of War (pp. 106-107). Personal statements like diary entries, opinion pieces, and reflections by contemporary witnesses complete the picture.

Regrettably, the volume offers quite an androcentric perspective and consequently, the focus on women's role during and after the conflicts is mostly lacking. In this collection on military history, other than as 'comfort women' and civilian victims – though Tessa Morris-Suzuki's exploration of the Japanese military and the 'comfort women' (pp. 92-94) is as sensitive as it is concise and contextualizes an ongoing debate – women's agency is highlighted only in a few cases. Considering the breadth of topics, regions, and events, in too few, though notable, cases: Vera Hildenbrand explores the 1943 recruitment of women into the Indian National Army's all-female Rani of Jhansi Regiment. They spanned all religions, castes, and social classes and were raised in the Indian diaspora in Malaya, Burma, and Thailand (p. 119). The regiment's namesake Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi was a rebellion leader and symbol of resistance to British rule who died in battle in 1858, thus drawing several parallels to their situation, as the Jhansi Regiment was also battling the British. Another example of women playing a part in the war is Kumander Liwaway, though little more is offered than a photo. The caption does recognize that "women played a central role in the Hukbalahap rebellion", one of the most significant peasant-based revolutions in modern Philippine history, and names their roles as "spies, organizers, nurses, couriers, soldiers and *even* military commanders" (emphasis added; p. 307). Hiromi Sasamoto-Collins draws attention to the way the post-war Japanese constitution was drafted as well as to Beate Sirota's influence and contribution to the implementation of gender equality (p. 244).

The publisher, NIAS Press, wanted to produce a volume on the end of World War II in the Pacific that transcends mere Eurocentric attention to the war in Europe as well as the US American inclination to think the war ended with and because of atomic bombs (Stuligross, 2016). Not only did the editors collect and connect the

knowledge of academics and experts of different fields from a variety of academic institutions from around the world, they managed to expose a diverse variety of inter- and transnational connections and impacts that continue to shift. *End of an Empire* portrays a variety of sides and perspectives of the complexities of World War II and the post-war period in truly inspiring and enriching ways, without falling into nationalistic or patronizing traps.

Though the timeline at times may seem frantic or chaotic, this is not inappropriate for such a turbulent period, innovatively demonstrates the complexities of the post-World War II period, and is a refreshing take. More conventionally, the same breadth of topics could have been covered in several volumes in a more distant or clinical voice. This, however, would probably not serve to reach and engage as large an audience as *End of Empire* can and should. After finishing learning about the eponymous *100 days*, the reader may wish for an even more in-depth analysis of preceding and subsequent events. She or he may be relieved, then, to learn from the Editors' Note that more publications are planned as well as a "broader, less frenetic project" to "commemorate the 75th anniversary of the war's end in 2020" (p. 310). In addition, an accompanying Facebook page¹ and website² provide relief.

The impacts of the events that happened in the 100 days portrayed continue to shape current international relations and policy. In addition to reading like a thriller one just cannot put down until finished in one go, surely every reader will learn something new from engaging with this unusual collection.

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1 See <https://www.facebook.com/endofempire1945/>

2 See <http://www.endofempire.asia/>

