Prisoners of the Asia-Pacific War: History, Memory, and Forgetting

Discussion published by Daniel Milne on Monday, October 17, 2022

This is a call for papers and panels for an online symposium on February 8, 2023 on soldier and civilian prisoners in the (Austral)Asia-Pacific during WWII. In particular, it focuses on places, practices and memories of incarceration.

Individual papers of approximately 15 minutes each (plus Q&A) and panels of three to four presenters are welcome. In addition, we will have a short panel for authors to discuss books they have recently published. We hope to use the symposium as a platform for an edited journal or book. Symposium submissions should be received by 30 November, 2022. See more on the themes of the symposium and on submission guidelines in the outline below.

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The treatment of prisoners of war (POWs) and civilian internees have been central to debates worldwide about the civility of warfare since the early nineteenth century. Institutions set up to ensure the humane treatment of prisoners were tested and expanded throughout twentieth century conflicts, during which millions of soldiers and civilians were taken into custody and hundreds of thousands died, many due to mistreatment. The maltreatment of prisoners at the hands of captors has taken a central role in collective national memories of war, including for Australia, in which POW mistreated by the Japanese has become a prime symbol of Australia’s Asia Pacific War (Twomey, 2018). Likewise, civilian and citizen incarceration has been central to how Japanese-Americans remember the impact of the war on the homefront (Daniels, 2004). In contrast, POWs have a negligible place in Japanese war memory (Utsumi, 2005), and beyond exceptions such as Cowra, the home-soil captivity of Japanese and other POWs play a minor role in Australian war memory (Pieris and Horiuchi, 2022). Further, while there has been a shift toward more comprehensive understandings of incarceration during the Asia-Pacific War (Blackburn and Hack 2007; Fujitani, 2013; Joven, 2022; Pieris and Horiuchi, 2022; Utsumi, 2001; POW Research Network Japan, n.d.), scholarship about Anglophone experiences still dominates, and the significant place of others in the Asia Pacific as
POWs, forced workers, camp guards and onlookers remains under researched. Finally, as recent scholars have argued (Kovner, 2020; Pieris and Horiuchi, 2022) the (post)colonial and transnational nature of POW camps, those involved with them and the post-war fate of wartime camps is underexplored.

This symposium will bring together scholars researching the histories, memorialization and forgetting of prisoners and prison camps of the Asia Pacific War. It aims to expand knowledge of the internee and POW experience and memorialization and to reveal transnational intersections and perspectives about wartime prisoners that help traverse established national narratives. In particular, it will focus on the following three themes:

1. Place and space, including the significance of the designed, built and remnant camp landscapes.

2. Movement and remembrance practice, such as the travel, ceremonial practice, pilgrimage and mobility of people, animals, plants, objects and stories.

3. Memory and memorialization, especially as they interact and overlap at personal, local, national and transnational scales.

Submit your abstract (up to 250 words) along with a brief bio (up to 50 words) by 30 November, 2022 to Daniel Milne at: milne.danieljerome.6w@kyoto-u.ac.jp