

Reshaping the Images of a Fallen Army: Postwar Narratives of the Imperial Japanese Army and Civilian Massacres in British Malaya

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Introduction¹

In 1947, five Japanese members of the defeated Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) were tried by the British Forces in Kuala Lumpur in British Malaya. The defendants were charged for war crimes of murdering hundreds of civilians, including women and children, in villages in the southern part of the Malaya Peninsula during World War Two (WWII). One of them was the regimental commander, two were company commanders and other two were platoon leaders from the 11th Infantry Regiment. The court gave four of them the death sentence in 1948.² These Japanese were adjudicated in three different trials among a total of 304 cases of British trials.³ Japan's defeat forced the IJA to

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- 1 The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Program (FP7/2007-2013) / ERC grant agreement n° 313382. This chapter is part of my PhD thesis; see, Otsuka, "Narratives of a Fallen Army: Japanese Veterans' Concepts of Defeat and War Crimes Responsibility in World War Two," (PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2019). This chapter has retained original terms used by the wartime Japanese military and veterans, such as, "mopping-up" (*shukusei*), "subjugation" (*tōbatsu*), and "safety" (*chian*); however, my usage of these terms does not indicate my endorsement of them, but merely to convey the nuances behind their use. Unless otherwise noted, all publications in Japanese have been published in Tokyo.
 - 2 "Eikoku sensō hanzai saiban gaikenhyō" (The Table of British War Crimes Trials), the National Archives of Japan (NAJ), Hōmu-Hei-11-4B-15-7128, 58, 59.
 - 3 These war crimes trial records are kept in the UK National Archives under "WO235 – Judge Advocate General's Office: War Crimes Case Files, Second World War". Major scholarly works on civilian massacres in Malaya and Singapore include: Yuma Totani, *Justice in Asia and the Pacific Region, 1945-1952: Allied War Crimes Prosecutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 129-155; Hayashi Hirofumi, "The Battle of Singapore, the Massacre of Chinese and Understanding of the Issue in Postwar Japan," *The Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* 7 (28):4 (2009). Accessed August 5, 2019. <https://apjff.org/-Hayashi-Hirofumi/3187/article.html>; Hayashi Hirofumi, *Sabakareta sensō hanzai: Igirisu no tainichi senpan saiban* (Adjudicated War Crimes: British War Crimes Trials Against Japan) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1998), particularly, 171-253; Hayashi Hirofumi, *Kakyō gyakusatsu: Nihongun shihaika no Marē hantō* (Massacres Against Overseas Chinese: The Malay Peninsula under Control of the

be confronted with Allied justice. Their crimes represent the Japanese Army's atrocities conducted as part of wartime military operations, particularly "mopping-up operations".⁴

In spite of the trials, the detailed accounts of brutality remained unknown to the Japanese public while they were overshadowed by dominant narratives which evolved during 1950s Japan: soldiers became rather "victims" of "unjust" trials by the Allied Powers and had actually been "heroes" during the war.⁵ From the period onwards, Japanese veterans published internal histories, including regimental war memoirs (*rentai senki*) and war histories (*rentaishi*).⁶ Particularly, war histories based on respective units were published more widely from the 1960s onwards.⁷

This chapter revisits group narratives of the infantry regiments of the 5th Division (10th, 21st, 41st, and 42nd Infantry Regiments) and 18th Division (55th and 56th Infantry Regiments) of the 25th Army, major units which committed civilian massacres in the Malaya Peninsula particularly in 1942; and examines how they reconstructed images of the IJA in the postwar period. The first

Japanese Army) (Tokyo: Suzusawa shoten, 1992); Takashima Nobuyoshi, Hayashi Hirofumi, and Murakami Ikuzō, *Maraya no Nihongun: Neguri Senbiran-shū ni okeru gyakusatsu* (The Japanese Military in Malaya: Massacres in the Negeri Sembilan state) (Tokyo: Aoki shoten, 1989), which reveals Japanese atrocities through conducting interviews of survivors and examining documents at the National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS).

- 4 Most civilian massacres were carried out as a result of orders from the IJA in military operations. See, Hayashi Hirofumi, *Shingapōru Kakyō shukusei: Nihongun wa Shingapōru de nani o shita no ka* (Purges of Singaporean Chinese: What did the Japanese Army do in Singapore?) (Tokyo: Kōbunken, 2007), 218; Hayashi Hirofumi, "Shingapōru Kakyō gyakusatsu" (Massacres of Singaporean Chinese), in *Sensō hanzai no kōzō: Nihongun wa naze minkanjin o koroshita no ka*, ed. Tanaka Toshiyuki (Structure of War Crimes: Why the Japanese Military Killed Civilians) (Tokyo: Ōtsuki Shoten, 2007), 199; Kasahara Tokushi, *Nihongun no chiansen: Nitchū sensō no jissō* (The Japanese Military's War for Security: Reality of the Sino-Japanese War) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2010), 20-21, 24-25, 97-100, 112-119; Kasahara Tokushi, "Chiansen no shisō to gijutsu" (Thought and Techniques of War for Safety), in *Senjō no soshō* (Various Aspects on the Battlefield), Iwanami kōza, Ajia Taiheiyō sensō 5, eds. Yoshida Yutaka et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2006), 217; Hayashi Hirofumi, *BC-kyū senpan saiban* (BC-class War Crimes Trials) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2005), 76.
- 5 For instance, see, James J. Orr, *The Victim As Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001); Utsumi Aiko and Udagawa Kota, "Sensō to sabaki: Ōsutoraria saiban to hikoku'nin" (War and Justice: The Australian Trials and Defendants), *Osaka keizai hōka daigaku Ajia taiheiyō kenkyū sentā nenpō*, 2015: 2-8; Sandra Wilson, "War, Soldier and Nation in 1950s Japan," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 5:2 (2008), 187-218.
- 6 Yoshida Yutaka, *Nihonjin no sensōkan: sengoshi no naka no hen'yō* (The Japanese Perception of War: Its Transformation in Postwar History) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1995), 94-100.
- 7 Yoshida Yutaka, *Heishitachi no sengoshi* (The Postwar History of Soldiers) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2011), 124-125.