

Chapter 4 - The Noble Spirit Which Inspired the People of Asia

The Battle of Imphal's critical role in Indian independence

After Japan lost the war, Great Britain branded the forces of the Indian National Army, who fought at the Battle of Imphal, as a rebel army. Three former officers of the army, one Hindu, one Sikh, and one Muslim, were put on trial at the Red Fort for high treason against the British crown.

Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam are the three major religions of India, and these three officers had been selected as symbols of India.

However, when the trial began, widespread anger erupted across India. The people of India stood up as one to say, "The men of the INA were patriots, not traitors!"

Millions of Indians flooded into the streets. The British attempted to suppress these mass demonstrations, even buzzing them with Spitfire aircraft and strafing them with machine gun fire from the air, but this only increased the chaos.

Eventually, even Indian soldiers and their units joined in on the protests, leaving Great Britain with no choice but to grant India its independence.

Eric Hobsbawm was a prominent British historian who had worked as a professor at the University of London. In his magnum opus, a reflection on the twentieth century entitled "The Age of Extremes", Hobsbawm argued that the independence of India was not the work of independence activists like Gandhi and Nehru, but rather was sparked by the attack on India by the Indian National Army and the Japanese during the Battle of Imphal.

The Battle of Imphal ended in a terrible military defeat, but it did succeed in its objective to put India back in the hands of the Indian people.

Since the 1980s, I have been to India many times.

In August, 1997, I attended the ceremonies commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence, which were held in New Delhi. There were a great many special events.

In his address, the leading Indian politician and former Speaker of the Lower House Rabi Ray said, "As we celebrate this great day, we cannot allow ourselves to forget the year 1905. The people of India were emboldened by Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War and rose up to join the independence movement." Rabi Ray was a longtime socialist and had been considered for the presidency several times by then.

Dr. Pran Nath Lekhi, an Indian independence fighter and influential lawyer, said of the Battle of Imphal, "As long as the light of the sun illuminates the sky, the light of the moon soaks the earth, and the light of the stars shine in the night, the people of India will not forget their debt of gratitude to the people of Japan."

The next year, when I returned to New Delhi, three senior members of the All India INA Committee, a veterans' association for former Indian National Army members, paid me a visit at the hotel where I was staying. They handed me a letter of thanks written in English and told me, "We veterans all feel gratitude to Japan. Please take this letter of thanks to Yasukuni Shrine as an offering."

I translated the letter into Japanese and delivered it to Yasukuni Shrine.

The letter read, "India's debt to Japan is too great to be adequately expressed through words. Your great country offered us all the military assistance it could at the time of the liberation of India. A hundred thousand or more Japanese soldiers fought with us as comrades in arms and shed their blood, sweat, and tears alongside us. The Indian National Army will never forget all those noble men of the Japanese Imperial Army who perished for the cause of India. The Imperial Japanese Army made India an independent country, and we pray that the bond between India and Japan will henceforth become even stronger. -SS Yadav, Captain in the Indian National Army and General Secretary of the All India INA Committee"

Yasukuni Shrine duly put the letter and its Japanese translation up for display in its war museum, Yushukan.

Over 20,000 Japanese soldiers died of disease during the Battle of Imphal. The whole campaign was regarded as being highly reckless, and during the Japanese retreat, huge numbers of soldiers died of disease, injuries, and starvation. So many corpses were piled up along the Japanese lines of retreat that they were called "bone roads".

A letter from a war widow

After returning from India, I got a spot on a television program in which I mentioned Hobsbawm's views on the Battle of Imphal and the letter of thanks from the All India INA Committee I had been asked to deliver to Yasukuni Shrine.

After this, a letter was sent to the television station addressed to me from a widow who said that her husband had died during the Battle of Imphal.

She wrote in her letter, "All this time, I believed that my husband had died in vain. When I saw that television program and learned that the Battle of Imphal had led to the independence of India, I couldn't help but shed tears of joy... I'm sorry to bother a busy man such as yourself, but if you would kindly send me a video of that program, I would be

deeply grateful. I want to place it on the altar dedicated to my late husband." Folded up and enclosed in the letter were five thousand yen in new banknotes.

I asked the television station for a video, which I then mailed to the widow.

Following Japan's defeat in the war, Bose decided to escape to the Soviet Union and carry on the struggle for independence from there. On August 18, he landed at Taipei Airport aboard a Japanese Army transport plane, but immediately after it took off again bound for Dalian, it crashed and burst into flames, killing Bose.

Today, bronze statues of Bose stand on the premises of India's Parliament House and in the garden of the Red Fort. Bose's portrait in Parliament House was hung beside those of Nehru and Gandhi.

Until recently, the Indian ambassador in Tokyo had invited veterans of F Agency or their surviving family members to the embassy for an annual appreciation banquet every October 21. On October 21, Bose had established the Provisional Government of Free India with Japanese support, a date which is commemorated in India as Azad Hind Day, the Day of Free India.

The independence monument engraved with Japan's imperial year

Indonesia declared its independence two days after Japan surrendered.

Japan had promised the month before to grant Indonesia independence in September, but ultimately Japan surrendered to the Allies one month before.

The Indonesian independence leaders Sukarno and Hatta strongly desired to declare independence before the Allied forces arrived, but Japanese Army headquarters in Jakarta firmly rejected their request. The Japanese Army was worried about what sort of revenge the Allies might exact upon Japan if it granted Indonesia independence after the surrender.

In spite of the Japanese Army's strong rejection, Hatta and Sukarno went through with their declaration of independence on August 17. Out of gratitude to Japan, the date printed on the declaration of independence is "17 8 05", meaning August 17 of the 2,605th year since the founding of Japan's ruling imperial dynasty in 660 BC. This "imperial year" system was in common use in Japan before World War II.

Japan did not compel Indonesia to use the imperial year. Indonesia is a Muslim country, so even though the Indonesians could not have used the year 1945 from the Christian calendar, they could have used the relevant date from the Muslim calendar. Even now, Japan's imperial year remains engraved on Indonesia's independence monument in Jakarta.

My first visit to Indonesia was in the year 1970 when I was invited to a development economics conference in Jakarta called, "Indonesia in the Year 2000", presided over by President Suharto.

During World War II, Japan recruited young Indonesians to serve in the volunteer army Defenders of the Homeland, known by its Indonesian acronym PETA. Even today, at Indonesia's Independence Day ceremonies held in Jakarta every August 17, former officers of PETA attend the ceremonies with the Indonesian flag in hand and a Japanese sword hung from the belt of their green uniforms.

Then a female chorus sings the PETA March in Indonesian, which goes "Old Asia suffers in misery, we have endured harsh repression for centuries, Greater Japan stands up valiantly, to protect us and save Asia, Onward! Onward! PETA!" After this, they usually sing patriotic Japanese songs in the Japanese language such as "Flower of Patriotism" and "The Patriotic March". I own a video recording of the entire ceremony.

Due to the work of the officers and men of the Japanese Army, PETA members constituted Indonesia's national army at the time of independence and trained over 40,000 young men.

After the war had ended, British and Dutch soldiers landed in Indonesia in a bid to bring Indonesia back under Dutch colonial rule.

They were fired upon by Indonesian soldiers bearing Indonesia's red and white flag, thus starting a brutal war for independence which lasted four years. Former members of PETA formed the core of the military forces fighting for independence.

PETA was the incubator of many of Indonesia's most talented postwar political leaders. Among PETA leaders were future President Suharto, future Vice-President Umar Wirahadikusumah, and Sudirman, the first commander-in-chief of the Indonesian Army, who was a major unit leader in PETA.

Former PETA members say uniformly that the education they received from the Japanese Army provided Indonesian youth with not only military training, but also the physical and mental training necessary to fight for independence.

After the end of the war, Indonesians continued to pay deep respect to the Japanese officers who contributed to Indonesia's independence and the Japanese soldiers who served as instructors in PETA.

When I travelled to Jakarta, former PETA members often paid me visits at my hotel along with their wives.

They gathered in the hotel lobby and, with lyric sheets in hand, they each sang for me a series of Japanese patriotic and military songs including "Flower of Patriotism", "Heaven's Paratroopers", and "A Soldier's Specialty".

In 1977, when the South Korean representative at an international conference in Manila strongly criticized Japan, Brigadier General Ali Murtopo, special advisor to the president of Indonesia and Deputy Minister of Information, requested a chance to speak, and he reprimanded the South Korean representative as follows.

"Japan is Asia's shining light. Japan fought World War II to make Asia independent. Although this was a battle the people of Asia should have fought, it was the people of Japan who stood up and sacrificed themselves for the cause."

According to Ali Murtopo, the other representatives from Southeast Asia applauded all at once, and the South Korean representative hung his head downward in dismay.

In the year 2011, the Indonesian government donated to Japan a bronze statue of General Sudirman, the supreme commander of Indonesian forces during the war for independence.

Today, this statue is located on the grounds of the Japanese Defense Ministry in Ichigayadai, Tokyo.

Ichigayadai is also where the Tokyo War Crimes Trial was held so that the United States could try Japan's leaders for the crime of acts of aggression against Asia.

During the Indonesian war for independence, General Sudirman was known as Pa Dirman, meaning Father Dirman. He was beloved by all his countrymen.

In Jakarta, there is a Sudirman Street where, at its center, an identical bronze statue of General Sudirman also stands.

Japan's statue of Sudirman was set up in the country's most fitting spot for it. The fact that Indonesia gave Japan a statue of the supreme commander of its independence army and put it in Ichigayadai is a refutation of the legality and the verdict of the Tokyo War Crimes Trial.

Anyone who makes a request at the Ministry of Defense is permitted to view its statue of General Sudirman. Why not go pay your respects there on Indonesia's Independence Day next August 17?

The movie "Pride: The Fateful Moment" moved Japan's youth

The Tokyo War Crimes Trial aimed to try Japan's leaders for "crimes against peace" before a tribunal that the Allies had established in Ichigayadai. However, the Allies had decided in

advance that Japan was the "aggressor nation". The Tokyo War Crimes Trial was in fact an act of murder that certainly did not deserve to be called a "trial".

When I was still in university, I signed on with the script department at Toho Studios and was involved in film production. However, my true dream since then was to create a drama film, perhaps my magnum opus, proving that the Tokyo War Crimes Trial was nothing more than an unjust lynching carried out by the victor powers of World War II.

In 1998, the movie "Pride: The Fateful Moment", featuring Prime Minister Tojo Hideki and Indian justice Radhabinod Pal as its protagonists, was produced and then distributed by Toei Studios. I was the author of the film's draft screenplay.

The word "Pride" which I used in the title was meant to express the pride of Japan and of Tojo Hideki while he was on trial as a defendant.

During our first preliminary discussions with Toei Studios, the studio executives actually told us that, "We suspect that a movie on that sort of topic will only appeal to senior citizens at least in their 60s or 70s."

And yet, when the film premiered, more than half of its audience was in their forties or younger. I peered in on several screenings of the film, and always saw plenty of people in their 20s or 30s. Not a few among them were moved to tears by the film.

Even prior to the premiere of "Pride: The Fateful Moment", when I was serving on the production committee, the film was garnering a tremendous response and many excellent reviews nationwide. It became the most viewed Japanese movie in the first half of the year 1998. Across the whole year, it was the second highest grossing film at the box office, after Toho's movie "Bayside Shakedown".

It attracted this much attention even before its premiere thanks to the considerable coverage the movie received in newspapers and on television.

Before the preview screening, I happened by chance to turn on NHK TV and saw a 7:00 AM news broadcast which started with former Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi's visit to China. There was a video of his meeting with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, during which Jiang denounced our movie and Murayama apologized in response.

There was a close-up of Murayama hanging his head and saying "I deeply apologize." However, if I had been in Mr. Murayama's position I would have responded to Jiang's criticism by saying, "I too found the movie to be deplorable, but unlike your country Japan is a democracy. Even if Japanese citizens create a scandalous movie, the government may not intervene."

That morning, all of Japan's morning newspapers, from the Yomiuri Shimbun to the Mainichi Shimbun, were covering this story at the top of their front pages. Under normal circumstances, it would have been unheard-of for newspapers to discuss an entertainment film on their front page. My colleagues and I were all thrilled by the publicity.

China was familiar with the film even before the preview screening. Clearly, either a person from Toei's labor union or someone else with inside connections had tipped off the Chinese embassy in advance.

Bringing back the spirit of "self-preservation and self-defense"

I served on the production committee of the 2001 film, "Merdeka 17805", about the Japanese liberation of Indonesia. It was released nationwide by Toei Studios.

This was Japan's first nationwide screening of a factually-based drama film concerning Japan's liberation of Asian peoples during World War II.

At the start of the film the subtitles say in large lettering, "Japan went to war for its own self-preservation and self-defense." It was also the first postwar Japanese film to include this message.

The phrase "self-preservation and self-defense" appears in Japan's Imperial Declaration of War of 1941 against the United States and Great Britain.

I viewed the movie many times from the pre-editing rush stage and onwards, but I was touched each time I saw this.

There were large audiences at preview screenings of the film, and many among them were moved to tears. One university professor told me, "Our heartfelt tears have washed away the fifty-five years of humiliation which have elapsed since the end of the war." A member of the Japan Self-Defense Forces remarked that, "I will tell my colleagues to bring a towel to dry away their tears."

After freeing Indonesia, then known as the Dutch East Indies, from three hundred and fifty years of Dutch colonial rule in March of 1942, the Japanese Army set up a military administration with the goal of preparing the country for independence. The Japanese established Indonesian as the standard national language, improved school education, and founded organizations like women's groups, civil defense units, public service groups, and neighborhood associations which operated on all the islands of Indonesia.

The movie is based on the true story of how the Japanese Army founded and trained PETA, the forerunner to the post-independence Indonesian Armed Forces.

Before the release of the movie, my novelization, also entitled "Merdeka 17805", was published.

It is a work that harkens back to a time and a spirit that have been forgotten.

The protagonist is based on the real-life Yanagawa Munenari, a hot-blooded First Lieutenant (promoted to Captain after the war) in the Japanese Army. After graduating from Takushoku University, Yanagawa studied at the Nakano School for army intelligence officers. In 1942, he participated in a landing operation under enemy fire on the island of Java. The scene in the movie where he single-handedly charges into the Dutch Army headquarters with his sword drawn and demands the surrender of the commander was also an actual event.

Yanagawa opened the Youth Dojo to train the future leaders of the Indonesian National Armed Forces. He played a key role in the founding of PETA.

Following Japan's defeat, the Dutch Army returned to Indonesia with the support of the British Army in order to restore the colonial regime. They were resisted by pro-independence Indonesian forces carrying Indonesia's red and white national flag, the Merah-Putih. Former members of PETA, who numbered 38,000 men, formed their core.

If PETA had never existed, Indonesia could not possibly have won the war for independence.

Two thousand Japanese soldiers declined to return to Japan after the end of World War II and, in order to continue their fight to liberate Asia, they instead remained in Indonesia where they participated in the war for independence alongside the Indonesian people. Yanagawa returned home after the end of World War II, so the rest of the protagonist's story is fictional.

Half of the over two thousand Japanese soldiers who fought in Indonesia's war for independence died in combat. The remains of the Japanese soldiers who gave their lives for Indonesia's independence today lie in Indonesia's Heroes' Cemetery.

I named the protagonist Shimazaki Takeo. Right after the Indonesians have achieved victory in the intense final battle for Yogyakarta, Java, Shimazaki is rejoicing with his Indonesian girlfriend when he is shot and killed by a Dutch sniper.

I wrote this scene as follows.

"The bright moon had illuminated the contours of the far-away mountains.

Aryati's forehead reflected the stars and the moonlight cast beautiful shadows over her face.

At that moment, Shimazaki suddenly lurched backwards and fell to the ground. A second later, the sound of a gunshot rang out from far in the distance.

'Takeo!', Aryati screamed. She picked up Shimazaki and cradled him on her lap. The bullet had hit him directly through his chest.

He had been shot by a sniper. The Indonesian side immediately returned fire. Over ten members of his unit dashed into the forest all at once in pursuit of the Dutch soldiers.

Nurhadi ran up to Shimazaki, but there was nothing he could do for him.

Shimazaki could only mumble, "Ryati", in a feeble voice.

'Takeo! Takeo! Don't leave me! Takeo!'

Tears poured down Aryati's nose and face.

Shimazaki gathered all his remaining strength and smiled faintly.

'Takeo! Hang in there. Your dream is a reality! Japan was defeated, but you have won!'

Aryati pressed her cheek against Shimazaki's again and again as Shimazaki faded away."

I meant Aryati's line to signify that Japan had lost the war as a country, but won the war as a people.

Ryati was Shimazaki's term of endearment for Aryati, and Nurhadi was a PETA member who had served alongside Shimazaki.

I went to Indonesia as the film "Merdeka 17805" was being shot on location. Vice Commander of the Indonesian Armed Forces Bambang Yudhoyono graciously allowed us to borrow two hundred soldiers for shooting scenes over a period of two months. Military museums also provided us with free use of contemporary weaponry like machine guns and rifles.

The film contains many battle scenes, but the untrained extras we had hired could not even march in file correctly, and we would never have been able to complete the film without the cooperation we had received from the Indonesian Armed Forces.

In front of the military museum in Jakarta, there is a Japanese, World War II-era Tachikawa Ki-9 Training Aircraft on display. The Tachikawa Ki-9 was a biplane that was affectionately known to the Japanese people as the "Red Dragonfly". Over the course of World War II, it was difficult to transport petroleum from Indonesia to the Japanese mainland, and so the training of pilots was undertaken in Indonesia.

The Japanese Army recruited young Indonesian volunteers, who were called "heiho", and taught them how to operate and maintain aircraft. After the end of World War II, Indonesia's pro-independence forces flew their Tachikawa Ki-9 aircraft above Dutch positions and dropped bombs on them by hand.

The bottom half of the Japanese sun flag on the fuselage of the Tachikawa Ki-9 at the military museum in Jakarta was repainted white in order to change it into an Indonesian flag.

Vice Commander of the Indonesian Armed Forces Bambang Yudhoyono was elected President of Indonesia in 2004.

Yanagawa Munenari's Youth Dojo was located in the city of Bogor on Java. The Youth Dojo expanded into a training facility for PETA officers.

Today there is a PETA Museum in Bogor in front of which stands, just like on Sudirman Street, a statue of General Sudirman.

The museum contains exhibits featuring weapons used by PETA as well as many documents, photographs, and artwork. Among them is a relief depicting Indonesian youth wrestling on sandbags under the guidance of a Japanese Army instructor.

In the film "Merdeka 17805", there is one scene in which even the Japanese Army noncommissioned officers, who are training Indonesian men on the grounds of the Youth Dojo, have stripped naked and are shouting "Fight until death!" with them in Indonesian.

King Sihanouk in the role of a Japanese soldier

I have a close relationship with His Majesty King Sihanouk of Cambodia, and I know that he is not sparing in his praise for the conduct of the Japanese Army during World War II.

The King has made a hobby of directing and starring in his own movies.

In the year 1979, while he was in exile in North Korea, King Sihanouk produced and starred in the drama film "Rose of Bokor", made in a film studio in Pyongyang.

After the Vietnamese Army invaded Cambodia, the King fled abroad and divided his time between staying in Beijing and Pyongyang. When he travelled to Tokyo as a guest of the Japanese government, he always lodged at the Imperial Hotel.

One day I was invited to the hotel and, while being treated to wine, I listened to what the King had to say. It was at this time that I received a video of the film.

King Sihanouk told me that at the preview screening, President Kim Il-sung, who was attending with his eldest son Secretary of the Central Committee Kim Jong-il, praised it as "a magnificent film".

The film starts with a portrait of President Kim Il-sung alongside subtitles praising his leadership. The story begins with the stationing of Japanese soldiers in Bokor, Cambodia.

The King plays as Colonel Hasegawa Ichiro, a unit leader in the Japanese Army, and the King's actual wife Queen Monique appears as Hasegawa's lover, the beautiful daughter of a powerful local man. The video's dialogue was dubbed into Korean, but there were also English subtitles for the benefit of foreign audiences.

The movie portrayed the Japanese Army as a highly disciplined force. The many Japanese soldiers appearing in the film were members of the North Korean Army mobilized as extras. When the Japanese Army came to Bokor, cheering crowds greeted them as "liberators".

The Japanese soldiers occupied the former headquarters of the French Army, took down the French Tricolor from its roof, and raised the flag of Japan in its place.

The extras of the North Korean Army strained to smile as they lined up and presented arms towards the Japanese flag. Then Colonel Hasegawa delivered a speech declaring that "Japan is fighting to liberate Asia." Hasegawa was presented throughout the film as being a gallant Japanese soldier with a military saber hanging on his belt.

There is a scene in which the Japanese Army fights with the French Army. The French commander was killed in combat and a funeral was held at a church on a small hill. Hasegawa also attended the funeral, and as the coffin was being lowered into the earth, Hasegawa stood in salute. As a soldier, he behaved courteously even towards his enemies.

Hasegawa had decorated the top of his office desk with a portrait of the Emperor in uniform riding on a white stallion. In the final days of the war, his aide-de-camp brought him a report informing him that an atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. Once his aide-de-camp left the room, Hasegawa burst into tears and lamentation.

After receiving a communiqué about Japan's unconditional surrender to the Allies, Hasegawa went to the home of his lover, the daughter of a local magnate played by Queen Monique, and played a piece on the piano.

The piece was the Japanese folk song, "Cherry Blossoms, Cherry Blossoms". As Hasegawa's piano music plays, images appear one after another showing the cherry blossoms of springtime Japan in full bloom, the mountains and rivers of the Japanese autumn full of colored foliage, and the white snow of the Japanese winter.

The film conveys the message that, even though Japan was defeated in war, the noble spirit of the Japanese people remained unaltered. I was profoundly moved both by King Sihanouk's affection for Japan, and the spirit of our forbearers who built the Japan which is still admired by people across Asia.

Every time my workplace is visited by Korean journalists, I show this film to them. It doesn't fail to leave them speechless.

Japan had completely changed the face of Asia.

Pro-Japanese collaborators as "race heroes"

The presumption in today's Japan, that Japan is hated because of its conquest of Asia during World War II, is quite contrary to the facts.

It is true that, after the end of the war, thousands of Chinese people who collaborated with Japan, including the leaders of the Wang Jingwei government, were put on trial and executed as "hanjian", which means "race traitors".

On the other hand, in no country between Southeast Asia and India were any pro-Japanese collaborators ever put on trial. Going so far as to execute them would have been unthinkable.

And yet, that ought to have happened if Japan had been hated and deemed an aggressor. In fact, pro-Japanese collaborators in Indonesia, India, and Myanmar were regarded as "race heroes" after the end of the war.

In the Philippines, the eldest son of President Jose Laurel studied at the Imperial Japanese Army Academy during the war and later became the Filipino ambassador to Japan. The family of President Aquino also cooperated with Japan, and indeed, one could cite innumerable similar examples from any country.