

The Politics of Asia-Pacific War Memorialization in Thailand's Victory Monument and the Philippines' Shrine of Valor

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Abstract: *This paper explores the politics of Asia-Pacific War memory and memorialization in Southeast Asia, evident in the production context and visual semiotic resources of Thailand's Victory Monument, a generic memorial to Thai war heroes, and the Philippines' Shrine of Valor, a historical shrine complex dedicated to Filipino and US soldiers of the Asia-Pacific War. These heritage structures represent two divergent memorialization practices that demonstrate how the commemoration or suppression of war memory is influenced by politics, agendas, and the benefits it brings to the state. In Thailand, the inward justification and outward restraint stem from the difficult choices the state had to make during the war. In the Philippines, while war memorialization was pronounced and served state aims, it was initially undermined by President Ferdinand Marcos, who wanted to bolster his fraudulent war heroism claims. The cases illustrate how diverging national memorial practices surrounding the war's contested past achieved similar aims and how memorial sites become repositories of meaning potentials through which we could make sense of the nation and its international entanglements.*

Keywords: *Memory Politics, Memorialization, War Memorials, Asia-Pacific War, Thailand, Philippines*

Introduction

To mark the 70th anniversary of the Asia-Pacific War, the *Nikkei Asian Review* gathered responses from individuals across Asia regarding their views on the war. While the respondents recognized past hardships and juxtaposed them to productive relations with Japan in the present, Thai respondents highlighted a different war experience. Former Thai leader Anand Panyarachun observed that the war “did not have much impact on Thailand... we don't have the historical enmity...we are an exception” (“How Asians See World War II” 2015).

Contrasting interpretations of Southeast Asian countries' war experiences abound in the region, making for complex public forms of heritage (Lunn 2007). For example, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos have no day of remembrance related to the Asia-Pacific War despite the event's significance in their national histories (Blackburn 2010). The numerous nationalist revolutions during and after the Asia-Pacific War became the core of their national myths since they served the state's nation-building goals. War commemoration is present in other countries in the region, such as Myanmar (Burma), Singapore, and the Philippines, as it furthers national unity (Blackburn 2010). In the case of the Philippines, war remembrance is prominent. Historical markers to commemorate the war were installed as early as the late 1940s, while the key battlegrounds of

Corregidor Island and Bataan were declared “national shrines” in 1954. In 1961, a national holiday was legislated to commemorate the Battle of Bataan. War commemoration extends to the present. Another law was passed in 2019 that declared another holiday to commemorate the war's end (Kyodo News 2019), and in 2022, a war monument fashioned from old war cannons was erected in Manila Bay (Candelaria 2022). State-sanctioned memorialization has been consistently present throughout the years.

Thailand and the Philippines were both involved in the Asia-Pacific War, but they remember it differently. While the damage to life and property was more substantial in the Philippines, the Asia-Pacific War was no less consequential for Thailand: Japan invaded it in December 1941, killing 183 Thai soldiers, and the Allies bombed Bangkok on numerous occasions, killing hundreds of citizens. Despite this, no state-sanctioned observance was held on the war's 70th anniversary in 2015, while the anniversary of Thailand's participation in the First World War in 2014 and the Korean War in 2015 was celebrated (Raymond 2018). Asia-Pacific War memorials are also “few and relegated to Bangkok's outer fringes or rural provinces” (Raymond 2018: 178). Meanwhile, the Philippines' official monuments, shrines, and historical markers are numerous and well-represented throughout the archipelago, and anniversaries are broadly commemorated.

In this article, I interrogate the politics of memorializing the Asia-Pacific War in Thailand and the Philippines by analyzing their most prominent war memorials: The Victory Monument in Bangkok, Thailand, and the Shrine of Valor or the Mount Samat National Shrine in Bataan, Philippines. Examining the politics behind the creation of these memorials is vital to uncovering how states intended to utilize public spaces to recall the past and assign value to historical events. While commemoration through public holidays, anniversary celebrations, and state officials'

actions and words indicate the state's recognition of historical events, monuments and memorials are durable, constraining, and immobile fixtures that allow citizens to reproduce themselves and their social world (Sewell 2001). I argue that commemoration through heritage could also represent how the state uses war memory to serve state aims by establishing borders between the past and what memory should be remembered in the present. The state chooses to background or foreground commemoration when the memory represented competes or supports the state's agenda and those who rule it. Here I hope to illustrate how the Asia-Pacific War remains a contested memory in Southeast Asia and how this war memory has been foregrounded or backgrounded in the national histories of Thailand and the Philippines.

Situating Southeast Asian war memories and analyzing war memory sites

For many nations in Southeast Asia, the post-war period was a time to consolidate the nation's foundations, suture together their fragmented societies, and commence their nation-building projects. Towards these aims, monuments and memorials were built to remember the tragedy and heroism that made self-rule possible, thus punctuating a shared identity among the nation's citizens. Historical memory, in particular, is an essential aspect of shared identities within nations (Morley and Robins 1995), while memorialization and remembrance amount to a mechanism of identity formation (Davis 1994). In Southeast Asia, memorialization is inherently political and state-led, enabling those in power to manipulate historical memory to legitimize their authority (Foote and Azarhayu 2007). Nonetheless, the symbolic meaning invested in spatial structures could change over time,

There is an inherent “presentness” in memory, as it depends on contemporary interests and is

shaped by future concerns. Such utility of memory makes it easy for a society's dominant groups to favor official memory, a variety of memory that the state, as a hegemon, forwards in search of a "usable past" that furthers state aims (Berger 2012: 19). While I recognize that collective memory occurs in numerous mnemonic communities (Kansteiner 2002) in different scales and spheres beyond the state, my approach in analyzing the Pacific War's contested memory in Southeast Asia deliberates memory politics as primarily the domain of political elites that occupy influential positions and prescribe a version of the past to the rest of the nation (Rawski 2012). Thus, the state remains a "major producer and choreographer of commemoration" (Winter and Sivan 1999: 38).

Despite Southeast Asia being a major theater of war, it is unfortunate that war commemoration literature often overlooks the region (Schumacher 2015). Little is known about the region as Japan's war space (Hayase 2007) since it has been customary to look at the development of Southeast Asian nations according to national particularities. I address these gaps by focusing on Thailand and the Philippines as national and transnational case studies. Both countries experienced the Asia-Pacific War, but their approaches to war commemoration differ significantly. By analyzing the rationales behind the state's war memorialization practices, this article sheds light on how war experiences could be seen as beneficial or detrimental to the state's nation-building project.

The choice of two representative sites, the Victory Monument in Bangkok, Thailand, and the Shrine of Valor in Bataan, Philippines, relates not only to spotlighting underrepresented sites in war commemoration literature, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to mapping out a transnational war memorial space. This space emphasizes the Asia-Pacific War's centrality in the nation-

building projects of Southeast Asia and provides tangible evidence of Japan's expansive war past (Rusneac 2022). The comparative analysis makes apparent the state agendas behind memorialization, the workings of official memory, and the binary of state-sponsored remembering and forgetting. Furthermore, this approach enables the exploration of the intricate relationships among the various actors involved during and after the war.

The memorial sites I studied in this article were subjected to a two-step analysis that first dealt with their production context and, second, focused on their visual semiotic resources. The more complex second step involved Abousnnouga and Machin's (2010, 2013) multi-modal critical discourse analysis, which included (1) denotative and connotative description, (2) metaphorical association, (3) symbolic iconology, and (4) critical discourse analysis. This semiotic approach allows a more profound and systematic interrogation of a memorial site's communicative activities that resurfaces discourses, identities, values, and events (Abousnnouga and Machin 2010). It also considers non-linguistic texts as alternative yet equally important repositories of meaning through which we can make sense of the past in the present.

A tale of two memorials

The Victory Monument (in Thai, *Anusawari Chai Samoraphum*), pictured in Figure 1, was created in 1941-1942 during the first administration of Plaek Phibunsongkhram (hereafter referred to as Phibun). It is conspicuously located in a traffic rotunda intersecting Ratchawithi, Phaya Thai, and Phahonyothin roads. The cornerstone was laid before the Japanese invasion, and the monument was formally dedicated in the presence of Japanese leaders. Since then, the stone-clad reinforced concrete structure has become a significant landmark in the capital

city's urban fabric (Noobanjong 2011).



Figure 1. The Victory Monument. Photo by Gil Turingan, 6 February 2022. Reprinted with permission.

In 1932, the royal absolutist reign was overthrown by the People's Party, a group of European-educated military officers and civilians, who then developed a constitutional government. Later, party members split along ideological lines, and within the young military group, Phibun rose to power, first as Minister of Defense in early 1934. Phibun's group was attracted to states developing a strong, militarized version of nationalism, such as Japan and Germany. They secured Japan's commitment to assist in case Western powers intervened in the country. Phibun's US- and UK-inspired officer training course transformed into a militarized youth movement similar to the Hitler Youth after exposure to Germany's Nazi Party (Baker and Pasuk 2014). In 1938, Phibun became Prime Minister as his faction took control of the government. He was particularly interested in creating a unified national identity that legitimized his power and "modernized" the Thai state—reshaping traditional loyalty to the monarchy into a commitment to the nation through numerous government efforts to develop nationalism

(Ricks 2008). Under Phibun, the country's name was changed from Siam to Thailand, and the government launched a nationalism campaign that mixed secular and non-secular strategies.

The Victory Monument's story started with Phibun's aspirations to "avenge the wrongful past" (Noobanjong 2011: 58) when Thailand lost tributaries to European colonial powers. With the Japanese military expansion in 1937 and France's fall to Nazi Germany in 1940, Phibun was emboldened to regain these lost territories. In December 1940, the Franco-Thai War erupted in Indochina, lasting until January 1941. Phibun sent troops to seize parts of French Cambodia. The armed clashes were indecisive, and Japan stepped in to mediate before further escalation. The final territorial settlement was arranged by Japan, with the signing of a peace convention in Tokyo in May 1941. The French were effectively coerced into ceding several provinces from Cambodia and Laos to Thailand. For Phibun's government, it was a victory worth celebrating and commemorating, so parades were held, and the Victory Monument was built (Baker and Pasuk 2014).

In explaining how the Victory Monument was manipulated through time to serve politics, Noobanjong noted that the monument was an opportunity for the Prime Minister and the armed forces to "assert, legitimize, and preserve" power, especially since Phibun himself was an admirer of Fascist Italy's Benito Mussolini and Nazi Germany's Adolf Hitler, and how they "transformed their nations through modern architectural and urban designs" (Noobanjong 2011: 59). The Victory Monument is but one of the many monumental projects commissioned during Phibun's term.

The circumstances that led to the transformation of the Victory Monument into an Asia-Pacific War monument are perplexing—it was created before the Asia-

Pacific War in Thailand to commemorate another war. Phibun inaugurated the memorial on National Day, 24 June 1942, stating it was “for all Thais to recall the honor of the heroes who sacrificed their lives for the country” (Raymond 2018: 180). The monument was dedicated to the fifty-nine soldiers, police, and civilians who died in the Franco-Thai War. Japanese representatives were even present during the monument’s inauguration. But as the Asia-Pacific War wore on, it was clear that Japan treated Thailand not as an ally but as an occupied territory. They wrecked the Thai economy to supply the needs of Japanese troops in the region. In 1944, Phibun was maneuvered out of power through the machinations of the US-assisted *Seri Thai* or the Free Thai Movement. In the war’s aftermath in 1945, Thailand found itself in a difficult situation: its government sided with the Axis and later with the Allies. Britain wanted to punish Thailand by dominating it, but the United States opposed imposing any semblance of colonial influence (Baker and Pasuk 2014). France demanded the return of the lands granted to Thailand after the Franco-Thai War. Phibun orchestrated a return to power in 1948, repackaging himself as a democracy champion. In an apparent atonement for his actions during the Asia-Pacific War, he allowed the rededication of the Victory Monument (Strate 2015): the names of soldiers who had been killed in the Asia-Pacific War and other wars were included, transforming the Victory Monument into a generic memorial to commemorate all Thai soldiers.

The construction of the Shrine of Valor (in Filipino, *Dambana ng Kagitingan*), pictured in Figure 2, came much later than the Victory Monument, but the two structures share a similarity: they were initiated by leaders toying with authoritarianism. The shrine was created through the initiatives of President Ferdinand Marcos in his first term before declaring martial law and leading as a dictator. Marcos is

part of the pre-war generation of Filipino reserve officers, who were “hardened in guerrilla warfare that thrust them forward as soldier-politicians... using their guerrilla comrades as constituencies to win political office” (McCoy 2000: 333). Before Marcos, another politician had capitalized on this background to win the presidency: former president Ramon Magsaysay, whose guerrilla exploits after the Fall of Bataan, among other things, contributed to his 1953 electoral victory.



Figure 2. The memorial cross of the Shrine of Valor. Photo by Milbonn Yaya, 9 July 2012. Reprinted with permission.

The province of Bataan was a crucial battle site in the Philippines’ defense against Japan in 1942. Ricardo Jose (2018) contended that the Battle of Bataan was more a Filipino than a US fight since eighty percent of the soldiers were Filipino, coming from all over the country. The defenders had been at the site for three months, lacking supplies and reinforcement, while the Japanese were relentless in their onslaught. Ultimately, the joint Filipino-US forces in Bataan surrendered to prevent further loss of life. The Japanese took them as prisoners and forced them to march a hundred kilometers to San Fernando, Pampanga, where

they were packed in boxcars and transported to Capas, Tarlac, where they were again forced to walk to Camp O'Donnell. This event came to be known as the Bataan Death March. Hundreds died along the way, and thousands more died in the prison camp later, totaling an estimated 30,000 combined Filipino and US casualties (Fak 1962).

In 1961, the Philippine Congress passed a law declaring 9 April as Bataan Day. When Ferdinand Marcos became president, Bataan took on a more significant place in the country's Asia-Pacific War commemoration. Marcos, like Magsaysay, used his alleged service in Bataan to bolster his run for president. His campaign biography, *For Every Tear a Victory*, claimed that Bataan would have fallen three months sooner without Marcos. He also claimed to have been awarded twenty-eight war medals to attest to his bravery, and his survival in one of the bloodiest battles in the war's history was a "clear sign of heroic destiny" (McCoy 2000: 333). As soon as he took office, Marcos started planning the Shrine of Valor in Mount Samat, Bataan. He wrote: "What I'd like to see is more young people visiting this place because they do not know, aside from reading their Philippine history, of the tremendous sacrifice their elders offered here in Bataan" (Romualdez 1971: 21). Marcos was directly involved in the project: proposing the design (Llora 2012) and laying the cornerstone for the shrine (Jose 2018). While the Shrine of Valor in Mount Samat became the Philippine government's main Asia-Pacific War shrine, the United States built its version: the Pacific War Memorial on Corregidor Island (Jose 2018), where the combined US and Filipino forces fought their last stand against the Japanese.

Commemorating the war through the monumental form

The two monuments' production contexts show

how state-led memorialization projects were meant to promote specific meanings of the past to the public. A straightforward analysis of state motivations illustrates how the Thai and Philippine states attempted to create enduring meaning from the war through the monuments' imagery, symbols, and iconographies as they remain accessible to everyday viewers. Thus, the semiotic choices create different discourses of what war and the nation mean to the state, which are then projected to the people. These structures in everyday public spaces disseminate and legitimize discourses and communicate particular values, identities, goals, and motives (Abousnnouga and Machin 2010). Reading the meaning potentials emanating from these sites could also surface what war narratives were suppressed when states decided on what discourses had to be foregrounded.

The Victory Monument is a modernistic and Western-inspired structure, an "amalgam consisting of various early twentieth-century stylistic movements" (Noobanjong 2011: 60). An obelisk, designed by M.L. Pum Malakul, stands on elevated radial platforms. It comprises five bayonets clasped together on a high pentagonal plinth. This design highlights the structure as masculine and militaristic. The pedestal, housing the ashes of the Franco-Thai War's deceased soldiers, is lined with marble plaques with the soldiers' names engraved. Canons and lanterns flank the five façades, with double life-sized bronze statues of a soldier, a sailor, an airman, a policeman, and a civil servant, created by Italian sculptor Corrado Feroci.

The monument's statues (Figure 3) are replete with meaning potential. First, the choice of bronze for the statues communicates timelessness, an inspiration sourced from the classics (Abousnnouga and Machin 2013). Another is size and height: being more than life-sized signifies power and creates an imposing image (Van Leeuwen 2005), while the

statues' height and positioning indicate loftiness. As pointed out by Sturm, what sticks out in the statues' design is the heroic realism style employed (Sturm 2007). The fascists and communists widely adopted heroic realism in the 1930s (Noobanjong 2011: 60) when art was used as propaganda and figures were depicted as ideal types and symbols without the ostentatious displays that have become standard in classical structures.



Figure 3. The statues of the Victory Monument. Photo by Gil Turingan, 6 February 2022. Reprinted with permission.

When states commission designers to work on public sculptures, meticulous attention and direction are given, recognizing that art sends a message, and the message should be consistent with the government's aims. The Victory Monument was initially dedicated to the fallen soldiers of the Franco-Thai War; thus, the choice of military symbols is logical. The five statues' poses and faces show a calm resolution while wielding their object of choice. It was not enough for the figures to be garbed in stereotypical military clothes, but the weapons they hold signify distinct military branches, while the lone civil servant holds a book to signify the civil duty of focusing on

education. The larger-than-life statues and the towering fifty-meter obelisk accentuate the military's centrality to the state. For Feroci, the aesthetic disharmony between the obelisk and the statues he designed is undesirable—he later called the memorial “the victory of embarrassment” (Wong 2006: 64) since it represented a period when artists had little control over their art. Different artists conceived the obelisk and the statues separately, and their visions could not have been close to what the state had when the two elements were combined.

The Shrine of Valor is a memorial shrine complex designed by Lorenzo del Castillo that consists of a colonnade and a large memorial cross, its most prominent structure. The colonnade is a marble-capped structure with an altar, an esplanade, and a museum. It is filled with artistic, historical, and symbolic depictions. On the other hand, the memorial cross is made of steel, reinforced concrete, and finished with granolithic marble. It stands at ninety-two meters from the base and rises 555 meters above sea level. It is one of the biggest memorial crosses in the world, so big that when the skies are clear, the silhouette the cross casts against the setting sun can be viewed from Manila. The base, pictured in Figure 4, is covered with bas-reliefs designed by Napoleon Abueva. Named *Nagbiag nga Bato* (living stones), the reliefs portray selected Philippine historical events and figures: from the precolonial hero Lapu-Lapu and the Battle of Mactan in 1521; revolutionary heroes Jose Rizal, Antonio Luna, among others; to the events of the Battle of Bataan. A footpath from the colonnade leading to the base of the memorial cross was paved with bloodstone mined from Corregidor Island, a reminder of the symbolic connection of Bataan to another historical place of the Asia-Pacific War.



Figure 4. A facet of the memorial cross' base shows some iconic Philippine history scenes. Photo by Milbonn Yaya, 9 July 2012. Reprinted with permission.

The sheer size of the cross is designed to evoke awe from viewers wherever they are—from afar, at the base, and even inside it—as an elevator takes them up to a viewing gallery inside the arms of the cross. According to Van Leeuwen (2005), seeing (and, by extension, being in) the core of three-dimensional objects gives viewers a sense of vulnerability and suggests a degree of openness. It is an invitation to go in, live the experience, and engage with the past being memorialized in the structure.

The bas-relief takes the viewer on a journey of Philippine history through significant figures and events, alluding to the message that Filipino heroism continues in the present. While a mishmash of imagery, it is apparent that the creator appealed to the Filipinos' familiarity with stereotypical imagery of Filipino heroes. For example, revolutionary heroes are depicted in their most recognizable poses: Apolinario Mabini sitting down; Antonio Luna, arms folded, looking away; Jose Rizal, about to succumb to a firing squad behind him, among others. This way, visitors can instantly identify the story being told by the reliefs. The

decision to put these bas-reliefs atop the entrance to the cross forces visitors to recognize Filipino heroism and connect the fallen soldiers of Bataan to the more familiar and firmly established historical heroes.

The Victory Monument and the Shrine of Valor present two distinct war imageries. In the Victory Monument, the imposing obelisk and the soldiers in their action poses make military triumphalism evident. In the Shrine of Valor, the soldiers' defeat and consequent death became the subject of the monumental form and are reinterpreted as heroism and sacrifice. These memorial sites invoke the same national glory in two divergent ways, a testament to the monumental form's malleability in transforming memory according to the narratives the creator aims to forward.

The sites' other aspects relate to state motivation and agenda relevant to how political leaders perceive the value of memorialization. Location is one of these factors. In his analysis of war memorial sites in Thailand, Raymond argued that the spatial distribution of these sites is a crucial measure of how commemoration is constrained and demoted (Raymond 2018). While the Thai state's decentered and dispersed commemorative locations may indicate this, it may not be painting a complete picture of the perceived state sponsorship of recalling the past. If it did, would the decision to construct the Shrine of Valor in Mount Samat, mostly a forested and inaccessible site, mean that the state downplays its commemoration? In the case of the Philippines, commemoration and historicity go hand in hand as the state creates shrines, museums, and related structures where commemorated events transpired. This consciousness and attention to historical faithfulness enhance the sacredness of a memorial structure. Foster (2004) believes this "imaginative charge" stems from the "triangulation between the living, the dead, and geographical space" (260), which lends

credibility to the memorial while cueing the viewer to identify with the events to which the memorial refers.

The Victory Monument is centrally located in Bangkok, the state capital. However, it is “strangely isolated and unheeded” (Raymond 2018: 180). The Victory Monument functions as a traffic island for a busy four-lane roundabout for most of the year. The monument is fenced and generally inaccessible to the public, except Veterans’ Day, an annual day of war remembrance on 3 February. The monument’s inaccessibility could indicate the state’s intent to hinder public engagement with the structure’s symbols and iconographies. In contrast, the Shrine of Valor, located more than a hundred kilometers from the center, is regularly open for visitors as a popular site for students’ educational trips. Such openness enhances and aids the recalling of the past. More than location, the openness of a spatial structure increases the meaning potentials and further enables commemoration.

There is also a noticeable divergence in the effect of including other historical personalities in the memorials. When the state appended other names to the original list, the Victory Monument was transformed into a generic memorial for all Thai soldiers who died in the consequent wars. The monument was not created to commemorate the Asia-Pacific War, but appending the soldiers’ names transformed it into an Asia-Pacific War memorial site. However, such action diluted the site’s connection to *any* war, which aided the state’s intent to background the country’s contentious war past and instead focus on recognizing the military as the state’s building block. The opposite effect is observable in the Shrine of Valor: when other Filipino heroes from other historical periods were included in the memorial cross, they *enhanced* the image of the fallen soldiers, placing them in the same roster of historical figures revered by the state.

Thus far, this analysis highlights the monumental form’s potency in serving the state’s intent to background or highlight war memories. The two cases illustrate that official forgetting and remembering could indeed be rendered through specific semiotic choices. These regimes suppressed the narratives of violence and human suffering of civilians and combatants to foreground heroism, which suited the state and its leaders’ agenda. The following section explains this point in detail.

State agendas and motivations behind memorialization

Commemoration serves the state’s aims and can advance the state leader’s agenda. Thailand’s Phibun was fashioning himself after European dictators Mussolini and Hitler through a similar memorial frenzy. Under him, the state deployed mass media and the educational system to popularize a new history filled with “prideful ethnonational rhetoric” and tales of great savior-leaders, ancient empires, and glorious wars (Noobanjong 2011: 59). Similarly, Marcos’ cultural campaigns included the ambitious national history-writing project *Tadhana* (destiny), a reconsideration of the country’s official history (Curaming 2018) that ends with Marcos’ New Society project.

While Marcos was still a democratically elected leader at the time the Shrine of Valor was being built, his authoritarian fantasy and the military’s primacy were already apparent in the structure’s design. Marcos inserted himself into the Shrine of Valor, personalizing it according to his myth-creation (Llora 2012). While consistent with the site’s place in war history, venerating Bataan also served Marcos’ agenda of popularizing his claim of being the country’s foremost war hero. His greatly fictionalized accounts of war exploits have largely been disproven (Sharkey 1983). However, his presence is palpable in the Shrine of Valor through some signs bearing his words (Llora

2012). The choice of fashioning the memorial as an altar, a ubiquitous fixture in many Filipino catholic homes, was Marcos' personal preference. The memorial took inspiration from the memorial cross in Spain's *Valle de los Caídos* (Valley of the Fallen), built by the fascist leader Francisco Franco to honor Spanish Civil War deaths. Marcos also personalized other elements in the memorial, such as the signages and the bas-reliefs of the cross. Ruling for over two decades, Marcos attempted to memorialize himself through numerous buildings, but the Shrine of Valor stands among his first ones.

The reference to European fascist memorial design was shared by structures built under Phibun and Marcos, which relates to their authoritarian tendencies on the one hand and, on the other, the use of memorials as a "visual signature of modernity" (Koselleck 2002: 292). Under Phibun, there was an effort to fashion Thai society as departing from the traditional imagery of Siamese society under the king, while in the Philippines, the "authoritarian modernization" (Tadlar 2009: 237) under Marcos was aimed at demonstrating modernity and attracting foreign investment.

Another aspect of state agenda apparent in commemoration and memorial sites is the dimension of international relations and politics. First, at the regional level, the dynamics of the Cold War and the resulting post-war geopolitics led to a strong US-Japan alliance that served the purpose of double containment: Japan could not be a threat to the United States and its allies while it was to be militarily integrated to contain the communist bloc. Japan was encouraged to go southward, conclude reparation agreements, and establish diplomatic relationships with newly independent Southeast Asian nations. These reparations transformed into official development assistance (ODA), and the ODA destination matched Japan's international trading and investment interests (Rudner 1989).

Second, the international context weighed heavily at the state level. Thailand rationalized its misadventure with the Axis as an effort toward state preservation. The narratives of state-sanctioned history books also reflected this: Thailand intended to be neutral, the Allied forces provided no assistance, and resistance would lead to damage and death, yet Thailand resisted the invasion to the best of its ability (Raymond 2018). The Asia-Pacific War exposed Thailand's vulnerability to foreign perceptions due to its record of collaboration with Japan. Amidst the post-war challenges and the Cold War, Thailand focused on projecting itself as the "land of the free," consistent with how the country was stereotyped as an "oasis on a troubled continent" (Philips 2016: 4) by the United States, its new benefactor. Thailand's restrained take on its past benefitted its relationship with Japan, especially since the latter no longer posed a threat while Thailand needed the reparations that Japan would eventually pay (Reynolds 1990). Downplaying war memory served the interests of post-war military leaders such as Phibun, who needed to legitimize their rule.

Thailand's Asia-Pacific War past coincided with another humiliating record for its military government: the overturning of Thailand's victory in the Franco-Thai War and the resulting return of their reacquired territories, which led to public disillusionment. A former Thai official even suggested that the Victory Monument be painted black to mourn the loss of the territories (Strate 2015). In the 1960s, the government sought to demolish and replace the Victory Monument, which the public opposed since the site held the soldiers' cremated remains (Strate 2015). Thus, the monument was left to remind the loss of territories, which remains a contentious issue in the region, perennially resurfacing in the post-war years. Most recently, the Preah Vihear dispute between Thailand and Cambodia from 2008 to 2011, which occurred in the same contested territory (Chachavalpongpun 2012),

was linked by Thai media reporting to the loss of the territories in 1946 (Strate 2013), leading to a reexamination of Thailand's humiliation more than fifty years ago. Reminding the public about Thailand's territorial losses and disastrous alliance with Japan would have undermined the state's legitimacy. Thus, being "internally justified but externally restrained" (Raymond 2018: 185) served the Thai state's aims.

If the silencing of war memories in Thailand plays well with the international and national contexts, the same is true for the Philippines' emphasis on war memory. The country emerged from the war with stories that portrayed atrocities as sacrifices and soldierly death as heroism. The Filipino guerrilla resistance movement was viewed in conjunction with the fight against Spain and the United States at the turn of the nineteenth century. The collaboration with Japan, mainly through the puppet government, was viewed as an anomaly (Jose 2012), overshadowed by the attention to heroism memorialized in state-sponsored monuments like the Shrine of Valor. Official memorial sites avoided references to Japan as the aggressor and the Philippines as a victim; instead, the emphasis was on the soldiers' sacrifice, heroism, and enduring Filipino-US friendship and unity.

However, disappointment with the United States set in as the Cold War wore on. After all, the defense of the Philippines was supposedly a US responsibility. Similarly, the Marcos government started to become unpopular as it was perceived to be backed by the United States (Jose 2012). Anti-neoimperialist writings reinterpreted the war years, and scholars and intellectuals began to consider the war as a conflict between Japan and the United States, in which the Philippines was unwillingly dragged into on its way to independence. Despite this shift, the state's war commemoration remained intertwined with the United States during the Marcos era.

In the 1970s, as anti-Japanese sentiments waned and Japan's role in the Philippine economy increased, Japan was actively included in war commemoration efforts (Jose 2012). Joint projects with the Japanese government and private initiatives led to the establishment of memorial sites for grieving Japanese war dead. The presence of Japanese war memorials in the Philippines may suggest forgiveness and forgetting of past atrocities, but vocal sectors still argue that Japan has yet to atone for its war actions adequately. The issue of Filipina comfort women forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army remains divisive. In 2017, a memorial for comfort women was installed near the Japanese Embassy in Manila, drawing strong reactions from Japanese diplomats (Kyodo News 2018). Later, it was removed due to a drainage project, to the anger of activists (Cabico 2018). This event highlights the constraints and international considerations surrounding Asia-Pacific War commemoration, where memories that provoke and upset are often silenced instead of remembered.

Conclusion

This article examined the Victory Monument in Thailand and the Shrine of Valor in the Philippines to understand the differing memorialization of the Asia-Pacific War. Thailand adopted a low-key approach to war commemoration, aligning with its nation-building efforts and international image. In contrast, the Philippines consistently and prominently commemorates the war but also shapes it to align with broader state aims. Various factors contribute to these disparities, including the countries' different positions during the war.

My analysis emphasized how monuments and memorials represent the reframing and recontextualization of past events over time. The Victory Monument's premature

commemoration and subsequent dilution served its aim to emphasize militarism. In contrast, the Shrine of Valor transformed defeat into a celebration of heroism, enriched by external elements. Notably, Japan was absent from Thailand's official war narrative and the Philippines' official commemorative spaces, highlighting state agendas that silenced war memories in Thailand and focused on friendship with the United States in the Philippines.

The monuments' production contexts tell us how these structures became vestiges of their respective patron's agendas. The Victory Monument illustrated Phibun's inclination towards European styles and fascist leaders during the interwar period. The Shrine of Valor, inspired by a European memorial built by a fascist leader, was Marcos' way of codifying his spurious war heroism record in stone. Subsequently, the visual semiotic resources of the structures tell the story of how authoritarian leaders effectively transformed soldierly heroism to symbolize their regimes and impose a historical narrative that legitimized their rule. As a result, the voices of combatants and civilians and their victimhood were suppressed, a casualty of the state and its political elite's agendas. Indeed, the search for a usable past according to the needs of the present extends not only to nation-building but also to broadening the political elite's hegemony.

Ultimately, I highlight the need to revisit and analyze war memorialization in Southeast Asia. The comparison of Thai and Philippine cases I presented in this article substantiates the claim that war memories remain contested in the region. These contestations are borne out of the historical trajectories taken by many Southeast Asian states during their respective nation-building projects in the twentieth century. While there are various manifestations of war memorialization in the region, the two dissimilar cases of official remembering in the

Philippines and official forgetting in Thailand illustrate the potential of gleaning the region's contested memories through the monumental form. The comparison of these two memorial sites contributes to seeing the Asia-Pacific War as a genuinely transnational event that produced transnational memories. Indeed, while there is a divergence in memorial practice, the Thai and Philippine cases revealed a proclivity towards authoritarianism, the foregrounding of militarism, and the use of memorialization to legitimize the political elite. As war memories continue to drive domestic and international concerns in Southeast Asia, analyzing the dynamics of these contestations through memorialization can provide insights into the unsettled issues surrounding the region's war past.

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