

THE POLITICS OF MEMORY AND THE STATE IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA INTRODUCTION

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It is a pleasure to introduce this themed collection of research reports, which features five papers and an epilogue. These papers were developed from presentations delivered at the Society for East Asian Anthropology Conference, held in early July, 2009, on the Academia Sinica campus in Taipei, capital of the Republic of China (Taiwan). In organizing this panel for the SEAA conference, I wanted to find papers based on ethnographic fieldwork that addressed the political significance of memory and history and considered the roles of both the individual and the state in remembering the past, from sites across Asia.

In addition to the papers, the location of our conference served as a tangible site from which to examine many issues regarding memory and history. Chien-yuan Chen's paper examines the Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall and how it has become the locus of debates over who has the authority to both govern Taiwan and narrate its past. Recently renamed the Taiwan Democracy Hall, and then changed back again to commemorate Taiwan's founding father, the debates over the renaming of this symbol of national identity reveal ambivalences as well as contestations. Hidekazu Sensui considers the political significance of the work of George H. Kerr, the statesman turned scholar, whose narration of Okinawan history as an independent kingdom has become a standard in English-language scholarship (as has his *Formosa Betrayed*, for Taiwan). Sensui's paper reminds us to consider the larger implications of our ethnographic research far from home. Across the East China Sea, to the north, Hyeon Ju Lee provides an exploration of the discursive practices in representing North Korea as both Communist threat and source of humanitarian crisis, from the perspectives of the North Korean refugees among whom she conducted fieldwork.

Memory work in Vietnam and China, two of Asia's states that ended up on the other side of the Cold War fence, is no less complicated than that of their Asian neighbors. At the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, memories of the recent past are explored in a recent exhibit, and as Margaret Bodemer illustrates, museum ethnologists and community participants explored the role of ordinary people in the era preceding Vietnam's 1986 economic and political reforms. This has added complexity to the official narrative that positions the Party and the government as the key instruments of Vietnam's modernization and recent successes. Daniel Roberts examines how three generations of farmers in an eastern Chinese village construct their personal narratives of history around the impacts of government policies experienced during early adulthood, thus revealing the local influence of the state on social memory through the formation of distinct generational cohorts. Taken as a group, these research reports illustrate the political significance of history and memory by examining the role of the state and the role of the individual in

remembering the past and attest to the validity of ethnographic research in examining these issues to contribute to a broader dialogue.

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