



In The Ruins Of Empire: The Japanese Surrender And The Battle For Postwar Asia

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The New York Times said of Ronald H. Spector's classic account of the American struggle against the Japanese in World War II, "No future book on the Pacific War will be written without paying due tribute to *Eagle Against the Sun*." Now Spector has returned with a book that is even more revealing. *In the Ruins of Empire* chronicles the startling aftermath of this crucial twentieth-century conflict.

With access to recently available firsthand accounts by Chinese, Japanese, British, and American witnesses and previously top secret U.S. intelligence records, Spector tells for the first time the fascinating story of the deadly confrontations that broke out—or merely continued—in Asia after peace was proclaimed at the end of World War II. Under occupation by the victorious Allies, this part of the world was plunged into new power struggles or back into old feuds that in some ways were worse than the war itself. *In the Ruins of Empire* also shows how the U.S. and Soviet governments, as they secretly vied for influence in liberated lands, were soon at odds.

At the time of the peace declaration, international suspicions were still strong. Joseph Stalin warned that "crazy cutthroats" might disrupt the surrender ceremony in Tokyo Bay. Die-hard Japanese officers plotted to seize the emperor's palace to prevent an announcement of surrender, and clandestine relief forces were sent to rescue thousands of Allied POWs to prevent their being massacred.

In the Ruins of Empire paints a vivid picture of the postwar intrigues and violence. In Manchuria, Russian "liberators" looted, raped, and killed innocent civilians, and a fratricidal rivalry continued between Chiang Kai-shek's regime and Mao's revolutionaries. Communist resistance forces in Malaya settled old scores and terrorized the indigenous population, while mujahideen holy warriors staged reprisals and terror killings against the Chinese—hundreds of innocent civilians were killed on both sides. In Indochina, a nativist political movement rose up to oppose the resumption of French colonial rule; one of the factions that struggled for supremacy was the Communist Viet Minh led by Ho Chi Minh. Korea became a powder keg with the Russians and Americans entangled in its north and south. And in Java, as the Indonesian novelist Idrus wrote, people brutalized by years of Japanese occupation "worshipped a new God in the form of bombs, submachine guns, and mortars."

Through impeccable research and provocative analysis, as well as compelling accounts of American, British, Indian, and Australian soldiers charged with overseeing the surrender and repatriation of millions of Japanese in the heart of dangerous territory, Spector casts new and startling light on this pivotal time—and sets the record straight about this contested and important period in history.

In The Ruins Of Empire: The Japanese Surrender And The Battle For Postwar Asia Details

Date : Published July 10th 2007 by Random House, Inc. (first published July 2007)

ISBN : 9780375509155

Author : Ronald H. Spector

Format : Hardcover 384 pages

Genre : History, Cultural, Asia, War, Japan, Nonfiction, World War II, China, Military Fiction

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For Postwar Asia Ronald H. Spector**

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Lee says

A revisionist history of Asia after Japan's surrender, Spector turns the idea that World War II won the peace in Asia. In fact, the end of that war was the beginning of multiple other smaller wars that continued in Asia for years after. The book examines those small, nation-oriented wars in Vietnam, China, Korea and Indonesia in the three years after the Japanese surrendered.

Edgar says

This was an emotionally tough book to get through, since it outlines in starkly graphic terms the further turmoil that continental East Asians faced after fighting off the Japanese Imperialists. The people of that region experienced ongoing upheavals that led to heartbreaking conflicts in Indochina against the French, in Indonesia against the Dutch and British, in Korea against the US, and in China between the Nationalists and the Communists. Recommended to those who want a clear understanding of the geo-politics of that pre-Cold War era and area of the world.

Al Berry says

A well written book that takes a glimpse at the political/military fighting of the various areas that Japan controlled during World War 2, when Japan suddenly surrendered while still in control of vast swathes of territory a political leadership vacuum was created in Korea, China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia this book deals with the various struggles between the various rival groups in the various areas. From the Dutch trying to retake Java to the Nationalists and Communists fighting it out over Manchuria. Book does a solid overview of the conflicts.

David says

Problematic. I came to this book right after reading Bayly and Harper's brilliant "Forgotten Armies". Which examines the British war in Asia during the second world war...leaving off shortly after the end of the war. This book picks up, pretty much, where the last one left off...and proceeds to the late 40s with some asinine commentary on Iraq and Afganistan thrown in.

It wasn't a, genuinely, bad book but it was mostly narrative historiography with little analysis thrown in...not when compared to "Forgotten Armies". If you want the 'American' perspective on Asia it's a good book but if you are looking for a larger, pan-Asian, or global perspective it fails rather dramatically. Tends to focus on the Americans' interactions with the Asians and leaves Asians' attitudes out...though not entirely so.

This was a fairly well written and researched volume but I would much rather have read Bayly's "Forgotten Wars" that covers the same period. Not as articulate and comprehensive as it should have been but at under three hundred pages what could you expect. Also focuses on too much...some of which was purely ancillary.

Worth a look...but not much more. Will be giving this book away...not really worth keeping in my library.

Liam says

Excellent, just as expected. Professor Spector is one of the most brilliant scholars of his generation in the field of Politico-Military History, and this survey of the chaotic political milieu throughout East & South-East Asia at the end of World War II will no doubt become the standard work on the subject within the coming years. Written in such a way as to be valuable & instructive both to specialists and a more general readership, I would recommend this book to anyone with an interest in the history of the 20th Century, most particularly as it was impacted by the Second World War. This book is particularly fascinating when one compares its modern scholarly view of events & personalities with the contemporary journalistic perspective offered by books such as the late Harold R. Isaacs' No Peace For Asia (and of course Professor Isaacs' companion volume to the latter, New Cycle In Asia: Selected Documents on Major International Developments in the Far East, 1943-1947 as well...).

Jacy says

This book was very thorough but a bit dry. Spector analyzes the direct aftermath of World War II in East Asia, particularly the former Japanese Empire. Focuses primarily on American and European attempts and failures to vie for control and peace in postwar Asia. It ends a mere three years after the Japanese surrender which is a bit abrupt as the Chinese Civil War was ongoing and Korean War yet to come. An interesting read on a rather obscure yet rather significant time period and subject.

Love says

In the Ruins of Empire offers an overview of the allied occupation of Japan's colonial empire following WW2. This is a fascinating topic that tends to be skipped in most tellings of history.

Take Vietnam as an example, most people know that it was a French colony occupied by Japan during WW2 after which the French returned and there was a war, followed by yet another war involving the US. But between the Japanese surrender and the return of the French, the southern part was occupied by Britain and the northern part by China. This is the period detailed in this book and it is in many ways critical to understand Vietnam's later development.

Stephen Douglas Rowland says

A tedious slog.

hoffnarr says

A good attempt at a synthesis with lots of interesting anecdotes worth reading. Sources include a large

number of US, British, French, and some Japanese archival docs, as well as others, and a lot of memoirs and other early postwar reminiscences some of which are unpublished or took the form of letters to the author.

I can really appreciate how hard it is to bring this all together given the geographic and linguistic scope of the target. It really calls for a collaborative effort, especially in order to better bring in a larger number of voices since this work inevitably has a larger number of Western (and especially military voices) and only some voices from among those who experienced the occupation and its aftermath. However, given the restraints, there is a lot of meat in the book that is really worth looking at.

The section on saving POWs was a bit too long for my liking but will certainly be of interest to many Western readers. Somewhat weak attempt to tie the early postwar situation into an argument about military occupations and US in Iraq. Not enough space to really go into the issues and felt like an afterthought. I also felt the author struggled with the question of where to stop telling the story in each location - since each of the early postwar crises continue for years if not decades after the initial postwar experience.

Of great interest to anyone studying early postwar East Asia - and could well accompany Bayly's & Harper's even more dense *Forgotten Wars*, which is published around the same time. Whereas Spector's book gives you more of a collection of rich snapshots to accompany the politics of the aftermath of the Japanese empire, B & H's book gives a very detailed narrative of the political and violent struggles that follow. There is room now for another book which focuses more closely on the social and cultural legacies and changes that followed the collapse of the Japanese empire on a large regional scale.

Paul Duggan says

An essential follow on to Spector's *Eagle Against the Sun*, this volume provides a careful narrative of events in East Asia after the surrender of Japan in 1945.

Most histories of this era end abruptly with the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings and the Japanese surrender. Great events happened in the next three years that have shaped the world in which we live today. Spector does an admirable job of delineating this important time.

I only wish that he had continued past 1948. Perhaps he is even now working on this book. We can hope.

Skuli Saeland says

Er í dálitlum vandræðum með að meta þessa bók.

Annars vegar er hún ágætlega rannsókuð og fjallar vel um ólguna í kjölfar síðari heimsstyrjaldarinnar í rústum japanska heimsveldisins í Asíu.

Hins vegar segir Spector einungis hluta sögunnar og greinir ekki frá því hvers vegna hann fjallar eingungis um sum ríki en sleppir öðrum né finnst mér hann taka saman niðurstöður sínar með fullnægjandi hætti.

Spector greinir frá aðstæðum og ólgu í Kína, Kóreu, Indókína, Malyasíu og Indónesíu við uppgjöf Japana. Hvernig Bandamenn brugðust við uppgjöfinni með því að senda hersveitir til þessara svæða fyrst og fremst til að bjarga stríðsföngum og afvopna Japani.

Í ljós kemur síðan að þeir verða oft að fá japönsku hersveitirnar til að berja niður þjóðernissveitir heimamanna með valdi allt til 1947 en japönsku hermennirnir gengu líka stundum í lið með þessum sveitum. Þá lentu gömlu nýlendubjóðirnar í miklum vandræðum með að ná aftur tókum á nýlendum sínum á svæðinu. Helstu niðurstöður höfundar eru þær að bandamenn fóru algerlega þekkingarlausir til landanna, t.d. var

enginn í herliðinu sem fyrst fór til Kóreu sem kunnir tungumálið og þeir höfðu einungis nokkrar blaðsíður úr ferðabók frá 1905 til að styðjast við sér til upplýsingar. Spector bendir á hve aðstæður líkjast hernámi Íraks síðar meir.

Að lokum var ég sáróánægður með hvers vegna höfundur tiltók ekki hvers vegna hann fjallaði ekki um aðstæður í Filippseyjum, Japan, Suður-Kyrrahafi og Tævan í kjölfar stríðsins. Umfang slíkrar bókar hefði vissulega verið gríðarlegt en samanburður eða skýringar ættu vel heima.

Marks54 says

This book is a focused exercise in history that focuses on a specific situation faced at the end of WWII in East Asia. This situation came about from four developments:

- 1) Japan surrendered much more quickly after the second atomic bomb at Nagasaki that was expected by the allies;
- 2) Japan at the time of surrender still maintained a vast empire in Asia staffed by a large army that had not experienced defeat in battle
- 3) Victorious forces of the US, Britain, USSR, France, and the Netherlands had not yet reached the locations where they wished to be by the war's end
- 4) the war had demonstrated the vulnerabilities of the former colonial powers and the possibilities for resisting the reimposition of political/military control after the war.

The interaction of these four developments led to considerable uncertainty which in turn caused the political conditions in East Asia to develop in ways that had not been anticipated by any of the parties with the effect of producing the starting point for some of the major conflicts of the second half of the 20th century, including the Chinese Civil War and the emergence of the PRC, the Korean War and the persisting stalemate between North and South Korea; the extended war of liberation in Vietnam involving first the French and then the US, and the growth of liberation movements in the islands of Indonesia. Spector makes clear that many mistakes were made in the early postwar period that significantly shaped the evolution of the region.

A punchline for today? The author waits to the last chapter to mention it explicitly but throughout the book one is drawn to the idea that "losing the peace" is a real problem and is very likely for occupations in places where the occupiers may have good intentions (or may not) but lack critical knowledge and expertise. Iraq and Afghanistan???? Hmmm . . . it could be. The conclusion is not overdrawn, however, and the analysis stands on its own. This book fills in a small stretch of history that links WWII to its aftermath and it does so very effectively.

The events and issues in the book are very specific and may not engage more general readers. The book is effectively written but requires some effort to follow. It is worth the effort.

Austin says

Academic analysis of Post War Asia.

Stuart says

Highly readable analysis of the immediate post-war dismantling of the Japanese empire. I don't read much military history, and Spector clearly writes from the perspective of, "let's get every play-by-play as detailed as possible." That being said, he doesn't burden the text with logistics and numbers, and this is clearly a popular, not academic, history. Parts are even surprisingly humorous, like when Spector discusses the contrasting personalities of the individual British, French, American, and Japanese overlords in the "ruins" of Japan's failed Greater East Asia. (Spoiler alert: the French colonial officers are in as fine form as ever.)

The main theaters are Indonesia, Indochina (primarily Vietnam), China and Manchuria, and the Korean peninsula. There's plenty of attention paid to the big players, like Marshall and the rival Chinese generals, Chiang and Mao, Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh, as well as notable British regional commanders. But Spector includes enough mid-level Old World bureaucrats, rival intelligence agencies, and Asian nationalists to give a remarkably cogent yet thorough overview. He pays particular attention to the daily, street-level interaction between the Allied soldiers and the local populations in Java, northern China, and urban Korea, and how these first, rather mixed impressions - on both sides - colored later interaction.

Spector avoids anything like the Big Picture. It doesn't limit the book's value, because its purpose is to scrutinize an often over-looked, 1945-1947. This is before Mao's takeover of China, the all-out declaration of war by the French against the Vietnamese, and the North's invasion of Southern Korea. It was a period of unprecedented American involvement in geopolitics, when US GIs were left in bureaucratic control of millions of people in lands, to them, unknown. He does conclude with several remarks about the current US occupations in the Mideast and Central Asia, and notes that, of the countless foreign occupations in recent modern history, only 2 (Japan & Germany) - out of, let's say, 24 - ended in what could be regarded as success.

David says

Interesting subject. Decent amount of detail. Fairly workmanlike execution. Better structure would have lead to a more interesting read.
