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Review of *Detention Camps in Asia: The Conditions of Confinement in Modern Asian History* by Robert Cribb, Christina Twomey, and Sandra Wilson (eds)

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**Robert Cribb, Christina Twomey, and Sandra Wilson (eds), *Detention Camps in Asia: The Conditions of Confinement in Modern Asian History*. Leiden: Brill, Social Sciences in Asia Series; v. 41, 2022, xii + 326 pp. 15 maps. ISBN: 978-9004471726 (hardback) ISBN: 978-9004512573 (E-book). Price £39.00**

This book, edited by three prominent historians of war and conflict in Indonesia, Australia and Japan respectively, makes an excellent contribution to the history of imprisonment of soldiers and civilians during periods of conflict. The geographical focus is broad, taking in a range of nations across Southeast and Northeast Asia, with papers analysing a variety of detention camps from the start of the twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty-first. The chapters in this book tackle detention in conflict writ large: camps are considered as features of international conflicts (the Philippine-American War, the Asia Pacific War, the Korean War, the Malayan emergency, the Indonesian Occupation of Timor, the Vietnam War and the refugee crisis it engendered), but also as features of domestic conflicts and ideological clashes (the detention of Indonesian communists, Burmese political dissidents, Uyghur minorities). The collection as a whole makes clear that detention is not just about race or ethnicity; not just about politics and ideology; not just about punishment, or re-education, and not even about the use of labour: detention camps in Asia, in all their forms, aimed to segregate one group, within shadowy legal definitions, as a means to assert and manage control over the population as a whole. The chapters are arranged under four themes that allow for a variety of scholarly concerns and approaches to the topic: 'counterinsurgency', 'isolating public enemies', 'torture and re-education' and a last section that deals with 'managing the camps.' All sections present fascinating research on the many shapes of imprisonment and segregation, on their purposes, and on the convoluted justifications for their (mostly) extra-legal existence, if the camps were acknowledged to exist at all.

The last section in this book includes three chapters on the management of Allied prisoners of war by Japan during the Second World War, which is particularly pertinent to the topics addressed in this special issue. The inclusion of chapters on Japanese prisoner of war (POW) camps in a collection such as this is perhaps unexpected. After all, the segregation of captured soldiers away from the battlefield during a global war bears little resemblance to, for example, the detention and torture of Communists in Indonesia in 1965-66 (chapter 7) or the re-education camps for Muslim ethnic minorities in Xinjiang (chapter 10). But the inclusion of chapters on Allied POWs is important for two key reasons. First, it allows us to place these wartime camps in a comparative perspective. Just like camps for political dissidents in Burma (chapter 4) or for suspected sympathisers of Timorese resistance fighters

## REVIEWS

(chapter 6), Allied POW camps were shaped by the need to control not only the inmates, but also the population outside the wire: domestic unrest over extreme war shortages was worsened by the perception that POWs were better fed or clothed than the Japanese population (chapter 11 and 13). The conditions of detention of individual Allied POW camps were thus shaped in large part by local circumstances, as were the conditions of detention in other countries at different times. This insight is familiar to Japanese studies scholars of the Second World War, but it rubs against a widely accepted (and yet entirely mistaken) assumption that conditions in Japanese camps were universally atrocious because of Japanese government policy, rather than because of contingencies and bad planning. Placing these chapters against these widespread assumptions makes a powerful point, as does the comparison with other detention camps in different times and places. Furthermore, placing the brutality in wartime Japanese camps against that in US camps for Communist prisoners in the Korean War (chapter 14), or Indonesian camps for Vietnamese refugees (chapter 15), reminds us that the administrators of Japanese wartime camps operated, like many other camp administrators, in largely unregulated spaces and with shifting responsibilities. In this sense, the inclusion of Japanese wartime POW camps in a broader book about detention camps across Asia undermines the tendency to treat them as a coherent system, contingent only on wartime Japanese government policy. In short, this edited collection is highly recommended reading, providing innovative research in Asian studies and conflict studies on the many ways in which people are removed from zones of conflict, under what conditions, and with what justifications. For those interested in wartime history and the history of POW camps, the opportunity to consider the Allied POW camps in this broader perspective will be perhaps challenging, but this opportunity must be taken seriously if we are to understand the POW experience in its full complexity. The ability to produce a coherent collection from such a wide variety of topics is particularly praiseworthy, as is the faultless editing and presentation of these research chapters.

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