

MASSACRE OR GENOCIDE?
REDEFINING THE SOOK CHING

By

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Sook Ching is a Chinese term meaning “purge through cleansing.” Operation Sook Ching took place in Singapore from February 21 to March 4, 1942. It was a military operation carried out by the Japanese with the intent of executing anti-Japanese Chinese men between the ages of 18 and 50. Ultimately, it is impossible to know exactly how many people were killed; the official Japanese figure is 5,000, while unofficial estimates reach as high as 50,000. Men were called into screening centers, where disorganized screening procedures determined if they were anti-Japanese. The Sook Ching’s legacy lives on as one of the greatest tragedies in Singapore’s history.

The intent of this paper is to argue for a redefinition of the Sook Ching as a genocide rather than a massacre. The cornerstones of this research are the United Nations’ Genocide Convention and contemporary sources discussing the crime. This research is important because it sets a precedent of accountability, as well as acknowledging the wrongs that the Japanese committed during the Second World War. This thesis will discuss the Sook Ching, its legacy, and the steps required to address the incident and right the wrongs that occurred. It will also examine the racial and political environment that set the stage for the tragedy, as well as the scars it left behind.

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INTRODUCTION

On February 3, 1942, artillery shells reached Singapore from Johore, part of modern day Malaysia.¹ It was the beginning of the end. Singapore was Britain's southernmost post on the Malay peninsula, and was considered almost impenetrably secure. This hubris would ultimately hurt residents; many shores were defenseless, as Arthur Percival, Lieutenant-General in charge of the island, believed reinforcing them would only harm morale.² When members of the British army realized they'd likely lose the city, panic broke out. Many abandoned their uniforms and disguised themselves as civilians to avoid capture, while members of the Chinese Mobilisation Council, a local volunteer force, haphazardly sewed new ones to take up the flag and fight to their deaths in the northeastern suburb of Kranji.³ On February 14, Japanese forces reached Alexandra Hospital in southern Singapore. Claiming that they'd seen British sniper fire, they entered the operating theatre and killed everyone inside. Over 200 staff and patients died that day.⁴ After this, chaos reigned. When families tried to escape the oncoming Japanese, they were met with unfought fires, bomb craters, debris, and human bodies.⁵ February 15 marked British surrender of the island--a feat that took two weeks rather than the expected six months.⁶ It was also the first day of the Chinese New Year.

Six days later Operation Sook Ching began.

1 Geok Boi Lee, *The Syonan Years*, (Singapore: National Archives of Singapore, 2005), pp. 43.

2 *Ibid.*, 48.

3 *Ibid.*, 50.

4 *Ibid.*, 52.

5 *Ibid.*, 53.

6 *Ibid.*, 54.

Operation Sook Ching was a twelve day long cleansing of ethnic Chinese Singaporeans during World War II. The Japanese forces occupying the island rounded up Chinese men and killed those they determined to be untrustworthy. The Sook Ching left somewhere between 5,000 and 50,000 people dead, and is remembered as the largest recent tragedy of the country.⁷ Despite the integral role race played in the crime, the Sook Ching has been memorialized as a massacre, rather than a genocide. What drove this decision, and what has the significance of the Sook Ching been in the years and decades after?

I will begin this thesis with an overview of the invasion and Sook Ching itself, with a focus on the targeting of ethnic Chinese. The tragedy that occurred in Singapore was not isolated; it followed the Rape of Nanking and other war crimes committed against ethnic Chinese throughout east and southeast Asia. Viewing the Sook Ching as part of a lineage of racially driven crimes expands our understanding of it. This section will be followed with an overview of the history of genocide studies. This covers contemporary times, all from World War II forward. I have included a variety of sources that provide a context of genocides and genocide studies that the Sook Ching fits into. I will then define genocide as it is used in this paper, and lay out how I conceive the Sook Ching fitting in to this framework. I use the United Nations Genocide Treaty as the basis for my argument here by stating that the Sook Ching fits three out of their five determinants of genocide. This section is followed by a section addressing potential reasons for why Singapore as a country does not view the crime as a

⁷ Frances Tay, "Remembering the Japanese Occupation Massacres: Mass Graves in Post-War Malaysia," in *Human Remains and Identification: Mass Violence, Genocide, and the 'Forensic Turn,'* edited by Jean-Marc Dreyfus, pp. 221-238. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015.

genocide. I include here reasons such as economic ties to Japan and the ethnic tensions that led to Singapore's independence. This is followed by a series of counterpoints, all of which argue that a genocide classification is not appropriate in this case. I've gathered these from a variety of sources, some first and some second hand. These include arguments questioning the significance of the number of people killed, the gendered targeting of victims, and the fundamental questioning of how baseless the Japanese idea of Chinese guilt due to race was.

I also discuss the politics of memory and how it can help us better understand the legacy of the Sook Ching. I address both Singaporean and Japanese perceptions here. For Singaporeans, a series of impactful war shrines and monuments reflected changing perspectives. From demands for justice to cries for racial harmony, Singapore's relationship to the Sook Ching has varied over the years. Japan has had an even more conflicted view of its wartime activities. Many people still visit the Yasukuni shrine each year, a site where several class A war criminals are interned.⁸ There has been a move towards acknowledgement of war crimes, but a sense of Japanese victimhood still often surrounds such discussions. This is caused in part by the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, tragedies so enormous they may be seen to eclipse any suffering inflicted during the war. The differing memories here are of particular importance because they give us insight into how war crimes and genocides can be understood and misunderstood with time. I will close with a comparison of the Sook Ching to the Cambodian Genocide, which had a more successful conviction

⁸ Sheila Miyoshi Jager, and Rana Mitter, *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007, pp. 33.

of war criminals. This acts as a case study for future genocide prevention and war crime trials. I will also discuss what genocide prevention success stories look like and why they're so difficult to identify. Ultimately, I argue that the Sook Ching should be redefined from a massacre to a genocide because of its compliance with the United Nations Genocide Treaty standards for defining genocide.

SECTION ONE: THE SOOK CHING

Operation Sook Ching lasted from February 21 to March 4, 1942. It was a military operation carried out by the Japanese with the intent of executing anti-Japanese Chinese men between the ages of 18 and 50.⁹ The fact that the Sook Ching began only a week after Japan initially invaded Singapore means that it's likely they had plans for the cleansing beforehand.¹⁰ General Yamashita Tomoyuki was the man in charge of the occupation of Singapore. Although he clearly had a role in the Sook Ching, he argued that his men exceeded his expectations in executing a "severe disposal" of hostile Chinese, as he left his troops and marched on to Sumatra during the operation.¹¹ He was eventually hanged in the Tokyo Trials after the war without ever being tried for his crimes in Malaya.¹²

Ultimately, it is impossible to know exactly how many people were killed; the Japanese official figure is 5,000, while unofficial estimates reach as high as 50,000.¹³ Lieutenant Colonel Hishakari Takafumi, who was at that time a

⁹ "Operation Sook Ching," *Singapore National Library Board*, 2013.

¹⁰ Geok Boi Lee, *The Syonan Years*, pp. 43.

¹¹ Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941-1945*, Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2005, pp. 211.

¹² *Ibid.*, 211.

¹³ Frances Tay, "Remembering the Japanese Occupation Massacres," pp. 221-238.

newspaper correspondent, stated that they had been instructed to kill 50,000 Chinese and had reached half that number by the time the operation was called off.¹⁴ One cause of uncertainty was the method used to dispose of bodies. They were typically taken to shorelines around the island and shot, where their bodies could be washed out to sea by the waves.¹⁵ Despite our inability to specify the number of deaths, the Sook Ching was certainly the largest single atrocity in the war in Southeast Asia, and served to strengthen, rather than weaken, the Chinese identity of Singapore.¹⁶ It serves as a good example of how national identities can be built around collective suffering, something I will discuss in depth in my later section titled Politics of Memory.

During the Sook Ching, Chinese Singaporean men were called into screening centers, where the *Kempeitai*, the Japanese military police, determined whether or not they were anti-Japanese.¹⁷ Five groups were targeted in these procedures:

- (1) members of the volunteer force;
- (2) Communists;
- (3) looters;
- (4) those possessing arms; and
- (5) those whose names appeared in lists of anti-Japanese suspects maintained by Japanese intelligence.¹⁸

There are several accounts, however, that state these qualifiers were not strictly upheld, and the decision of whether someone was innocent or guilty was often arbitrary. For instance, any man who spoke the Hainanese dialect were targeted,

14 "Operation Sook Ching."

15 *The Syonan Years*, 112;

16 Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Wars: Freedom and Revolution in Southeast Asia*, Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2007, pp. 25.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*

as they were all considered communists.¹⁹ At Jalan Besar, one of the screening centers, men who wore glasses were selected because they were assumed to be educated and therefore guilty.²⁰ Once a man was determined to be guilty, he was loaded onto a lorry alongside other Singaporeans and transported to a remote area to be gunned to death.²¹ Known execution locations are Punggol, Changi, Katong, Tanah Merah and Blakang Mati, and several other sites are acknowledged by local people, although no concrete proof has been yet discovered.²² The operation was initially meant to last three days, but the Chinese population of Singapore was 600,000 in 1941, far too many to be processed in that time.²³ For this reason the Sook Ching was extended.

Surprisingly, the Japanese required little force to get these men to screening centers. In interviews sourced from the Singapore National Archives, Charlie Fook Ying Cheah, an eyewitness to the invasion, stated, “The people were very calm. You can say they just simply took it lightly. Because the British put up the propaganda: ‘Oh, these Japanese, they got these match-box aeroplanes. They can’t do much harm.’ So the people were, more or less, quite confident.”²⁴ Along the same lines, Robert Chong, another survivor of the Sook Ching, stated, “I would say the British were too confident. They took things easily. They spent too much time on relaxation...instead of concentrating on the war...So we, being civilians and under the British control at that time, what can we do? Just take their

¹⁹ *Forgotten Wars*, 212.

²⁰ *The Syonan Years*, 108.

²¹ Operation Sook Ching.”

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *The Syonan Years*, 105.

²⁴ Charlie Fook Ying Cheah, interview A000385, transcript, Oral History Department, National Archives, Singapore, 7.

word.”²⁵ It’s clear that Singaporeans for the most part believed that, as bad as the invasion might seem, the British would come back and take care of things. Sentiments such as these set the tone for Singapore’s reaction to the Japanese invasion.

Once Japanese forces took Singapore, the rounding up of Chinese men began. Cheah confirms that people were compliant with the summons: “Of course not knowing what [the summons] were all about, the people and myself were in fear that if the response was not there, they would use their soldiers to come out and physically check each individual flat. And that would make it worse for those of us caught remaining behind in the flats. So the bluff worked.”²⁶

There exists one notable case of Japanese resistance to the Sook Ching. Mamoru Shinozaki, a civilian administrator during Japanese occupation, actively helped to save tens of thousands of straits Chinese (the portion of the Chinese diaspora living in Singapore) and Eurasians during the proceedings.²⁷ In his words, the Sook Ching was “a crime that sullied the honour of the Japanese army.”²⁸ There were many other Japanese that also helped the locals in a more limited fashion. One helped a man because he spoke some Shanghainese, a language the soldier spoke; another saved a family by telling them to stay inside during the summoning after seeing their mother praying to a Buddhist shrine for the Goddess of Mercy.²⁹ I state this here to acknowledge the fact that Japanese forces were not simply a unified whole, but were made up of individuals capable

25 *The Syonan Years*, 58.

26 Charlie Fook Ying Cheah, 21.

27 *Forgotten Wars*, 93. .

28 *Ibid.*, 25.

29 *The Syonan Years*, 109.

of making their own choices. This makes those individuals who aided the Chinese all the more heroic, and those who followed their orders to kill much harder to defend.

I will also note here that Chinese men were not the only victims of Japanese occupation. Although this thesis focuses on their suffering, it is important to note that many Singaporean women were victims of rape during Japanese occupation. Chinese women tended to be primary targets, as their ethnic group was already viewed with more disdain than their Malay peers.³⁰ During the start of the Sook Ching, many families hid their female children in fear of a repeat of the Rape of Nanking, a crime fresh in the region's collective memory.³¹ It was also common for girls and women to darken their faces, leave their hair untended, and wear conservative clothing to make themselves less attractive to Japanese men.³² There are no concrete statistics on these rapes, and we are left with only sparse eyewitness accounts. I'll also include here a brief mention of the comfort women system. It was instituted by the Japanese military to decrease rapes, a goal that ultimately failed.³³ Somewhere around 139,000 women were taken from Japanese occupied territories to serve the army full time, often getting shipped straight to battle fronts under the listing of "military supplies."³⁴ According to Lee, "80 per cent of these 'women' were aged between 14 and 18."³⁵

Additionally, Singaporeans at the time were aware that the Japanese occupation was driven by race. In her seminal book *The Syonan Years*, Lee Geok

30 *Forgotten Armies*, pp. 210.

31 *The Syonan Years*, pp. 54.

32 *Ibid.*, 55.

33 *Ibid.*, 56.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*

Boi quotes Thambiraju Paramasivan, an Indian man who lived through the period: “Serangoon Road residents would go to Race Course Road open field and put up Indian flag so that Japanese bombers would not drop their bombs there.”³⁶ She also quotes a European who feared for his daughter’s safety: “There was a trend of feeling also that [the Japanese] will not harm the Malay families.”³⁷ Knowing that contemporary residents were acutely aware of the racial dimensions of the Sook Ching helps strengthen my case that it should be considered a genocide rather than a massacre. Had the killings been more indiscriminate, they could be viewed as part of a wartime massacre. The Japanese focus on ethnic Chinese demonstrates their racial bias.

The legacy of the Sook Ching took several forms. An important one to note is that of ethnic identities in Malaysia as a whole. Many influential Brits had hoped to form a multiracial identity in Malaysia, but the Sook Ching drove home the idea that racial splits within the country were still of great importance.³⁸ Schools were formed in an attempt to unite the colony, but few Malays attended, and the Chinese majority was distrustful of the western-centered education they received.³⁹ This distrust led to a widespread independence movement that ultimately failed due to a lack of Malay support; independence only came once the nation formed coalitions of ethnically unified groups.⁴⁰ This early emphasis on ethnic divides set a precedent for Singapore’s eventual independence.

36 *The Syonan Years*, pp. 43.

37 *Ibid.*, 197.

38 *Forgotten Armies*, pp. 504.

39 *Ibid.*, 506.

40 *Ibid.*, 529.

SECTION TWO: A CASE FOR GENOCIDE

This section will contain an overview of the history of genocide studies, some definitions of genocide, an explanation of the United Nations Genocide Treaty, an analysis of the Sook Ching through this lens, and counterpoints to my argument.

The History of Genocide Studies

The following section will serve as a summary of the field of genocide studies into the modern day. This serves the purpose of providing a wider context for my research. It achieves this by highlighting several main points in the chronology of genocide studies, and ends with a few notes on how the field differs when we approach it from an Asian context.

Any discussion of genocide must begin with Raphael Lemkin. Lemkin was a Polish Jew famous for the coinage of the term genocide, as well as for his subsequent study of the subject.⁴¹ His work began prior to World War II, but did not become truly popular until after the war ended. His ultimate goal was to outlaw genocide not only as a war crime, but as a crime in and of itself.⁴² As he states in his work titled “Genocide,” “Genocide is not only a crime against the rules of war, but also a crime against humanity.”⁴³ Lemkin recognized the importance of delegating the responsibility of trial to an international body to

41 “Life of Raphael Lemkin,” *Lemkin House: An Asylum Community*, 2013.

42 Ibid.

43 Raphael Lemkin, “Genocide,” *American Scholar*, Volume 15 no. 2, April 1946).

ensure true justice.⁴⁴ Essentially, he set the standard for what genocide studies would look like in following years. Lemkin's desire for international courts was fulfilled by the post-World War II trials, of which the Tokyo Trial is of greatest significance for my work. Unfortunately, perpetrators of the Sook Ching were not brought to justice here, which sets the stage for my research in modern times.

Gregory Stanton published his Ten Stages of Genocide framework in 1986, again helping to refine the study of genocide. These stages are Classification, Symbolization, Discrimination, Dehumanization, Organization, Polarization, Preparation, Persecution, Extermination, and Denial.⁴⁵ The important thing to note here is Stanton's suggested prevention methods for each stage. At the Classification stage, he recommends the building of institutions that transcend racial or ethnic boundaries to encourage cross cultural communication; at the Denial stage, he suggests that the perpetrators be tried by an international body to bring some semblance of justice for the victims.⁴⁶ These suggestions are fairly in line with the trajectories of genocides that have occurred before and after Stanton structured his framework, and portions of it can be effectively applied to the Sook Ching.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court was adopted in 1998, establishing the International Criminal Court and four main crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression.⁴⁷ This was a step in the right direction for genocide prevention, as it created a

44 Ibid.

45 Gregory Stanton, "10 Stages of Genocide," *Human Rights Watch*, 1986.

46 Ibid.

47 UN General Assembly, *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (last amended 2010)*, 17 July 1998, ISBN No. 92-9227-227-6.

framework with which to prosecute these varieties of war crimes. Since this court is fairly new, we will have to wait and see what real effects it has in the long term. However, it does bode well for the future of genocide prevention. Although this statute was created long after the Sook Ching, I would argue that some acts committed in its duration would qualify as genocide.

In 2002, Samantha Power published *A Problem from Hell*, her analysis of the United States' comprehension of, and responses to, genocides around the world. It is a comprehensive book that covers the history of genocide from the Armenian genocide in 1915 to present day issues. One important point Power makes is her suggested cause for increased US interest in anti-genocide laws. She attributes this to the newfound awareness that the United States' refusal to engage in discussions about anti-genocide law has damaged their international reputation.⁴⁸ I point this out as a counter to Japan's response, which has been a widespread disinterest in pursuing anti-genocide legislation. I will expand upon their reasoning in my section addressing politics of memory, but I include this here as an introduction to the idea.

In 2006, The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) was formally endorsed by the United Nations Security Council.⁴⁹ Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon released a report titled *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect* that same year, which endorsed the R2P. This was discussed further in 2009.⁵⁰ Under R2P, individual governments agreed to do as much as possible to prevent mass atrocities from

⁴⁸ Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell*, New York: Basic Books, 2002, pp. 158.

⁴⁹ "R2P-A Short History," *United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe*, 2019.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

occurring. It is also stated that a UN mandate is required to give legitimacy to any movement to follow R2P, a safeguard against states using it to justify intervention into other countries.⁵¹ According to Ban Ki-Moon, cases of R2P being invoked without force outnumber those with force: “If you actually look at the last several years, we’ve invoked the responsibility to protect, at least on the (UN) Secretariat side eight or nine times. Only in one of those cases, with Libya, was it tied to the use of sanctions or military force.”⁵² The Responsibility To Protect is a strong resource to help prevent and address war crimes. Although R2P has no impact on the Sook Ching, I include it here to suggest that any push towards preventing genocide should be examined critically from all angles. For this reason, I have been meticulous with my research and have run my ideas past multiple critics.

In 2014, the United Nations published their Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes. This document provides guidelines for detecting early signs of an impending genocide, establishing risk factors and matching indicators.⁵³ Genocide is one of the crimes targeted under this framework. They state that “Genocide, according to international law, is a crime committed against members of a national, ethnical, racial or religious group. Even though the victims of the crimes are individuals, they are targeted because of their membership, real or perceived, in one of these groups.”⁵⁴ This is in line with the definition I will be using in my coming analysis. This framework will hopefully be used with success to decrease genocides in future years.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 UN Office of the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect, *Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes*, October 2014.

54 Ibid, 1.

I'd like to note here that the sources I've addressed so far have a regional bias. We know what genocide studies tend to look like in the west, as most efforts for defining it have taken place in that hemisphere; things are altered a bit in an eastern context. David Frank argues that international anti-genocide norms and their institutional incorporation have led to a quick decrease in genocide risks in East Asia.⁵⁵ He points out that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) nations have entered a relatively peaceful period, particularly when compared to just 50 years ago; the one clear exception is the current genocide of the Rohingya in Myanmar, which stands out even more starkly when compared to the relative peace of its surrounding countries.⁵⁶ He also cites Alexander Bellamy, who lists four reasons that genocidal activities have slowed in Asia:

The dramatic and sustained decline of genocide and mass atrocities in East Asia was not produced by any single factor, but by the combined effects of at least four important ones: a reduction in the deliberate targeting of civilians in war, growing incomes across the region, creeping democratization, and changing ideas about the nature of sovereignty and the responsibilities for protection.⁵⁷

Essentially, the fourth point demonstrates that norms can and do change. ASEAN's incorporation of the R2P doctrine caused a shift in norms, leading to a decrease in genocidal action. These changes do not come about organically, but are rather pushed forwards by initiatives such as translated versions of the R2P and incorporation of the ideas into educational curriculums.⁵⁸ I bring this article

⁵⁵ David A. Frank, "The Reduction of Mass Atrocity Crimes in East Asia: The Evolving Norms of ASEAN's Prevention Mechanisms," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* Vol. 11: Iss. 3: pp. 99, 2018.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Alexander J. Bellamy, ed., *The Responsibility to Protect: A Defense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁵⁸ David A. Frank, "The Reduction of Mass Atrocity Crimes in East Asia."

up to show how the study and prevention of genocide has formed in the Eastern hemisphere, and what initiatives have succeeded in preventing further atrocities.

Argument for Sook Ching as Genocide

There are many definitions of genocide, such as that by Mark Levene, professor and author specializing in genocide: “Genocide occurs when a state, perceiving the integrity of its agenda to be threatened by an aggregate population--defined by the state in collective or communal terms--seeks to remedy the situation by the systematic, *en masse* physical elimination of that aggregate, *in toto*, or until it is no longer perceived to represent a threat.”⁵⁹ This definition makes the distinction that the event need not have fully destroyed a population, but only needs to have decreased it to the point of no longer being perceived as a threat. I personally like definitions such as this one, as it is concise and easy to read; however, for the purpose of my paper, I will use the United Nations’ definitions and qualifications of genocide. I do so to ensure that I utilize the most widely known and embraced delineation of the term, so that if one contests my points it results from faulty premises, rather than faulty definitions.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted its genocide convention on December 9, 1948.⁶⁰ This treaty defines genocide as “... any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such:

(a) Killing members of the group;

⁵⁹ Mark Levene, “Is the Holocaust simply another example of Genocide?” *Patterns of Prejudice*, 28 (1994): 10.

⁶⁰ *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, No. 1021. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%2078/volume-78-i-1021-english.pdf>.

- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.⁶¹

I claim that the Sook Ching qualifies as a genocide due to its fulfillment of three points on this list. A, Killing members of the group, of course occurred when Japanese soldiers executed thousands of Chinese men en masse. B, causing serious bodily or mental harm, occurred in line with point A and also encompasses those citizens who faced attempted murder but survived (such as Cheng Kwong Yu, whose words will later be used as reference to prove the lack of distinction used when selecting victims). Point C is particularly important to my argument, as it specifies that an act committed to destroy a group “in part” may be designated a genocide. It is clear that the Sook Ching was indeed intended to destroy a significant portion of the Singaporean Chinese population, and so I will include this point as well. As far as my research shows, no substantive evidence of points D or E exists in relation to the Sook Ching. Due to existing cases of points A, B, and C, I state that the Sook Ching should indeed be labelled a genocide.

One important point in determining whether or not the Sook Ching was a genocide is that Japanese forces had a premeditated number of killings they were

61 Ibid.

to commit, at least according to Lieutenant Colonel Hishakari Takafumi.⁶² The government had established plans for the Sook Ching in their "Implementation Guideline for Manipulating Overseas Chinese," drawn up in late December 1941.⁶³

The operation had five categories of targeted Chinese:

- (1) members of the volunteer force;
- (2) Communists;
- (3) looters;
- (4) those possessing arms; and
- (5) those whose names appeared in lists of anti-Japanese suspects maintained by Japanese intelligence.⁶⁴

There are several accounts, however, that state these were not strictly upheld, and the decision of whether someone was innocent or guilty was often arbitrary. In a Straits Times interview Cheng Kwong Yu, a survivor of the massacre, described the selection process: "There was a crowd that came and picked us out. They had a liking for those who were big."⁶⁵ He also stated that there was no trial, nor additional questions asked. All of the people around him were Chinese.⁶⁶ These accounts demonstrate that there were ulterior motives beyond simply weeding out opposition. In postwar trials, Hishakari also stated that he had been instructed to kill 50,000 Chinese in Singapore; he was later told it was impossible to kill this number, and the massacre was called off.⁶⁷ This is a condemning statement. If the

⁶² "Operation Sook Ching."

⁶³ Hirofumi Hayashi, "The Battle of Singapore, the Massacre of Chinese and Understanding of the Issue in Postwar Japan," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Volume 7, Issue 28 No. 4.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Pakir Singh, "The dead littered the massacre site like fish in a market stall," *The Straits Times*, 7 January 1975, pp. 10-11.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ "Plan to Kill 50,000 Chinese in Singapore," *The Straits Times*, 19 March 1947, page 5.

killings were executed not to target threats to the state, but rather to fill a quota, it negates any claim of justified killing.

I will note here that Japan has never ratified the United Nations' Genocide Convention. Brian Greenhill and Michael Strausz provide an explanation for this in their article "Explaining Nonratification of the Genocide Treaty: A Nested Analysis." They argue that because Japan did not sign on at an early point, over time it became almost inherently supposed that they oppose genocide; there was simply less pressure to comply since it was taken for granted.⁶⁸ Additionally, they suggest that Japan's civil law system may have contributed to their lack of ratification. Their analysis found that common law countries are more likely to ratify sweeping agreements than civil law societies, a statement particularly true in Japan, "where courts have been extremely unlikely to rule against the government, particularly in human rights cases."⁶⁹ Greenhill and Strausz also acknowledge that the act of ratifying the convention would likely cost more than it would potentially be worth. This type of agreement would require significant money and time to execute, and the result would be an agreement that is both unlikely to stop a genocide from occurring and redundant in the eyes of a society that already abhors genocide.⁷⁰ Unfortunately, a modern abhorrence for genocide does not negate Japan's dark wartime history. It's striking to me that a country which committed so many atrocities refuses to sign the genocide convention. This is likely not their intent, as I doubt many people today would suggest Japan is pro-

⁶⁸ Brian Greenhill and Michael Strausz. "Explaining Nonratification of the Genocide Convention: A Nested Analysis," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 10 (2014): 381.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 386.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 387.

mass killings. Still, signing the convention would serve as a promise that past crimes will not be repeated. With the context of the Sook Ching, I am less sympathetic to the claim that the monetary and time costs involved with ratifying the convention are severe enough to justify a lack of signage.

Another point to make regarding Japan's stance on the UN's Genocide Convention is their apparent acceptance of it as a norm, despite their lack of ratification. Several occurrences of Japanese politicians using the convention as a call for investigation of potential crimes have popped up since its creation, such as politician Ootani In'o's condemnation of China's crimes against the Tibetan people.⁷¹ What this shows is that Japanese ratification is almost irrelevant in relation to how serious of a norm the treaty sets. The Japanese government appears to accept the convention to such an extent that there is simply no reason to push for ratification; it would be a waste of time and resources. Again, I don't question the modern Japanese abhorrence for genocide, but I do think it would serve the country well to ratify the convention. Doing so would make official the fact that Japan has no intent to commit crimes similar to that of World War II again, and indeed could even be seen as a small apology.

Another point to bring up is the question of genocide versus politicide and democide. Rudolph Rummel, a professor at the University of Hawaii, differentiated between genocide and other forms of state violence.⁷² Essentially, he states that genocide is a killing of people due to group memberships such as religion and race, while politicide is a killing due to political ideology or for

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Max Roser and Mohamed Nagdy, "Genocides," *Our World in Data*.

political purposes.⁷³ Democide encompasses these two, along with mass murders, as long as they are committed by a government. Personally, I agree with these definitions. The Sook Ching would fall somewhere between genocide and politicide on this scale, depending on how significant one believes race to have been in the proceedings. To keep my thesis within reasonable bounds, however, I'll be using the United Nations genocide qualifications despite my agreement with other definitions.

Gregory Stanton's "Ten Stages of Genocide" is another useful tool to use alongside the UN's Genocide Convention. Stage seven, Preparation, rings particularly true. As Stanton states, "Leaders often claim that "if we don't kill them, they will kill us," disguising genocide as self-defense."⁷⁴ Acts of genocide are disguised as counter-insurgency if there is an ongoing armed conflict or civil war."⁷⁵ This is reflected in the Kempeitai's targeting of Singaporean Chinese, particularly their portrayal of the men as a threat to Japanese occupation due to their race. Stanton's entire system is very useful for identifying what stage a potential or past genocide is in, and can potentially help us to prevent further crimes.

Reasons for Singapore's Acceptance of Massacre Designation

Singapore's timeline is important to consider when analyzing reasons for the Sook Ching not being labeled a genocide. After the Japanese occupation period, the British took back Singapore in 1945; it remained under British control

73 Ibid.

74 Gregory Stanton, "10 Stages of Genocide."

75 Ibid.

until September 16, 1963, when it merged with Malaysia.⁷⁶ Singapore remained part of Malaysia until August 9, 1965, when it became independent.⁷⁷ This independence came about as a result of clashes between the majority ethnic Chinese population in Singapore and the Malay population in Malaya and in Sabah and Sarawak states in Borneo.⁷⁸ Singapore's trajectory of nation-building subsequently broke off from the route taken by most other Southeast Asian countries. Their emphasis was not on creating a mythological history for themselves or hating foreigners, but rather on modernizing as quickly as possible and making themselves an indispensable part of the region.⁷⁹ Singapore's small size also became a blessing; infrastructure overhauls for the entire country were possible, and centering itself as a commercial center was feasible.⁸⁰ Ultimately, it's likely that its initial lack of independence and subsequent turmoil made it hard for Singapore either as a colony or young nation to focus its energy on re-qualifying the Japanese war crimes.

Singapore's precarious geopolitical standing also contributed to forward looking policies. I've already discussed some issues stemming from clashes with Malaysia, but Singapore had another neighbor who began making bold international moves in the 1960s. Indonesia announced their *Konfrontasi*, or Confrontation, on January 20th, 1963.⁸¹ It lasted from 1963 to 1966, and was a

⁷⁶ "Political Change 1946-1964," *HistorySG*, National Library Board, 2018. This website is an official Singaporean government site.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Gungwu Wang, *Nation-Building: Five Southeast Asian Histories*, Singapore: ISEAS Publications, 2005, pp. 211.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁸¹ "Indonesia Announces Konfrontasi (Confrontation)," *HistorySG*, National Library Board, 2019.

response to the perceived “neo-colonialist project” of creating the Federation of Malaysia.⁸² The Konfrontasi included bombings, armed incursions, and propaganda in conflicted regions such as Singapore.⁸³ Indonesia’s government had no initial issues with the Malaysian government’s plan, but the Brunei Revolt of December 1962 changed its position. The revolt was instigated by insurgents who didn’t want Brunei to join Malaysia, and was quickly silenced by British forces.⁸⁴ This signaled to Indonesia that the Malaysian government was still a pawn of the British, and an armed insurgency was superior to a diplomatic solution. Singapore was one of several targeted areas, with the first bomb attack occurring eight days after it joined Malaysia.⁸⁵ International threats to Singapore’s security likely dissuaded the government from pushing for retribution against Japan, one of its few allies (as I will discuss momentarily).

A lack of international pressure may also have played a role in Singapore’s reluctance to push for more comprehensive recognition of the Sook Ching. The International Military Tribunal, which tried war crimes, was active during the late 1940s.⁸⁶ Since Singapore was not independent until the 1960s, the majority of public awareness of the crimes had vanished. It is also likely that Singapore as a young nation had little interest in further destabilizing its relationship with other countries. It had broken with Malaysia and desperately needed allies; Japan became one of its very first.

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.

86 “War Crime Trials,” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Japan also has a history of crimes against the Chinese, setting a precedent for the Sook Ching massacre. This may also contribute to why it has not drawn international attention; the crimes in mainland China were so violent and numerous that they may dwarf it in comparison. The 1937 “Rape of Nanking” sticks in collective memory as one of the greatest crimes of the Second World War, in which Japanese soldiers massacred hundreds of thousands of Chinese and raped 300,000 in three months.⁸⁷ The fact that Nanking was the capital of China when it was sacked makes the tragedy all the more poignant. Events in mainland China such as the Nanking Massacre typically outweigh the comparatively smaller atrocities enacted in Southeast Asia, making it harder for countries such as Singapore to push for recognition of Japanese war crimes.

Another likely reason that Singapore has not pursued charges against Japan is the economic relationship between the two countries. Because Singapore was not independent until 1965, it could not establish an independent relationship until that point. It is also important to note that soon after independence, Singapore and Japan agreed on a reparations payment of \$50 million Singapore dollars.⁸⁸ This 1967 agreement set a strong precedent for diplomatic relations between both parties. In the same year, the Civilian War Memorial, the primary location for remembrance of the Sook Ching, was unveiled. At its unveiling, Lee Kuan Yew, the first prime minister of an independent Singapore, stated: "We meet not to rekindle old fires of hatred nor to seek settlements for blood debts. We meet to remember the men and women who are the hapless victims of one of the

⁸⁷ Editor Roy L. Brooks, *When Sorry Isn't Enough: The Controversy over Apologies and Reparations for Human Injustice*, New York, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1999, p. 4.

⁸⁸ Narushige Michishita, "Japan, Singapore, and 70 years of post-war ties," *The Straits Times*, 11 February 2015.

fires of history. We suffered together. It told us that we shared one destiny."⁸⁹

Clearly, there had been a move towards forgiving the crimes of history.

The choice to establish diplomatic relations with Japan aided Singapore greatly in the decades that followed. In the 1970s, Japan became Singapore's largest trading partner and foreign investor.⁹⁰ Singapore also began to incorporate many aspects of Japanese society and culture, adapting things such as neighborhood police posts and Japanese food.⁹¹ These ties made it both impractical and undesirable to focus on the country's violent past. This is still true in the modern day; currently, Japan is Singapore's fifth largest foreign investor (making up 6.9% of investment), and Singapore is Japan's fourth largest (13.2%).⁹² The two countries have also engaged in multiple trade agreements, such as the Japan-Singapore Economic Partnership Agreement.⁹³ By increasing economic involvement, Singapore is increasingly unlikely to push for a revitalization of post-World War II anger. As two regional superpowers, Japan and Singapore have a responsibility to maintain diplomatic relations, something that could become destabilized if the state itself publicly called for a revision of the Sook Ching Massacre.

It is very difficult to categorize and prosecute genocide. This is particularly true when examining a regime like that of wartime Japan, in which a verdict on Hirohito's guilt is itself difficult to reach. He was never tried for his

⁸⁹ Quoted in Tommy Koh, "Japan, Singapore and 50 years of post-war friendship," *The Straits Times*, 26 April 2016.

⁹⁰ Michishita, "Japan, Singapore, and 70 years of post-war ties."

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² "Singapore: Foreign Investment," *Santender Trade*, 2017.

"Japan: Foreign Investment," *Santender Trade*, 2017.

⁹³ "Japan, Singapore and 50 years of post-war friendship."

involvement in World War II.⁹⁴ In an environment as contentious as this, it becomes all the more difficult to address the question of genocide guilt. Who would be held accountable? One could try the leaders of the Kenpeitai, or military police, in Singapore; however, these were simply the people acting out orders given by their superiors. Perhaps then one goes up a step, to the people issuing the orders. These would be either Chief of Planning and Operations Tsuji Masanobu, or Chief of Staff Hayashi Tadahiko.⁹⁵ However, what about Hideki Tojo, the prime minister during the Sook Ching Massacre? He was found guilty of waging war illegally and violating international law, as well as inhumane treatment of prisoners.⁹⁶ Perhaps he would be the best choice, as he has already been found guilty of comparable crimes.

The importance of this discussion is to drive home how difficult it is to even begin genocide trials. There is typically no one clear person guilty of executing an entire genocide; instead, it is often the system itself that must be put on trial. This already difficult task is made exponentially harder when the perpetrating system has dissolved, as has the Japanese military government guilty for the Sook Ching Massacre. Addressing these difficulties is a long and arduous task that garners little international attention. Although it has been done before, the idea of reviving a crime as old as the Sook Ching seems unrealistic. The Cambodian Genocide is still being legally hashed out over 40 years after it began;

⁹⁴ Hal Brands, "The Emperor's New Clothes: American Views of Hirohito after World War II," *The Historian*, Volume 68, No. 1, Spring 2006, pp. 1.

⁹⁵ Hayashi Hirofumi, "Massacre of Chinese in Singapore and Its Coverage in Postwar Japan," *Geocities*, in *New Perspectives on the Japanese Occupation in Malaya and Singapore*, Chapter 9.

⁹⁶ Richard Cavendish, "Tojo Hideki Executed," *History Today*, Volume 58 Issue 12, 12 December 2008.

how can we expect this same diligence for a 77-year-old crime of a comparatively tiny scale?

Counterpoints

One argument against the qualification of the Sook Ching as a genocide was its focus on quantifying the people killed. It was a military operation carried out by the Japanese with the intent of executing anti-Japanese Chinese men between the ages of 18 and 50.⁹⁷ There is no certain death count; estimates range from 5,000 to 50,000.⁹⁸ Because this number pales in comparison to events such as the Holocaust and the Khmer Rouge Genocide, some argue that the Sook Ching is disqualified. However, the United Nations General Assembly said otherwise in their Genocide Convention. I use this as the most legitimate form of qualification, as there has been no comparable convention on the subject. As mentioned previously in the section titled “Definition of Genocide,” The UN defines genocide as “... any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

97 “Plan to Kill 50,000 Chinese in Singapore.”

98 “Remembering the Japanese Occupation Massacres,” 221.

(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.⁹⁹

No part of the convention labels a number of deaths needed to qualify an event as a genocide; indeed, some qualifiers do not even require deaths to occur. For this reason, I argue that the number of deaths does not disqualify the Sook Ching from being defined as a genocide.

Another possible point of contention is the fact that the Sook Ching Massacre did not focus on killing all Chinese Singaporeans, but targeted only men aged 18-50. I argue that this does not disqualify it, as there is a precedent set by the Srebrenica Genocide of 1995. In this small Bosnian town, 8,372 Muslim men and boys were massacred by the Serbian military government.¹⁰⁰ Although this tragedy was limited to men, and there clearly not meant to destroy Muslim Serbs in their entirety, the act was ruled a genocide in the 2007 International Criminal Tribunal.¹⁰¹ The Tribunal set a precedent for the Sook Ching, as it was once again only men being targeted. After all, the United Nations uses the language “in whole or in part,” and men are certainly a part of the population. Because of the ruling on the Srebrenica Genocide, I argue that the Sook Ching should be qualified as a genocide as well.

I will also mention here a more fundamental criticism of my argument. Robert Cribb, Professor of Asian History at the Australian National University,

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Sonja Biserko, “The Srebrenica Genocide: Serbia in Denial,” *Pakistan Horizon*, Volume 65, No. 3 pp. 1.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

pointed out potential issues with this thesis's usage of the statement "in whole or in part" pulled from the UN treaty.

The specification 'in whole or in part' in the Genocide Convention is problematic. Clearly it can't be just 'in whole' or genocidaires would escape by sparing (or not reaching) a single potential victim. On the other hand, it feels to me that it seriously stretches the definition if any killing of some members of another ethnic group is identified as genocide. The extended definition would make it difficult to exclude the killing of enemy soldiers in battle from being regarded as genocide. In choosing a definition of genocide, I think it's important to consider what other cases would become genocide and whether the overall effect is morally or analytically acceptable.

It feels to me that genocide should refer to an attempt to destroy a community, even if that community is only part of its overall ethnic/religious/national group. Thus, the murder of all the members of an ethnic community in a town, district or province could be considered genocidal, as in Bosnia, whereas the assassination of political leaders of that community or the execution of militia members would not.

In the case of Sook Ching, it seems to me that although the victims were all Chinese, they were not targeted because of their ethnicity but because they were identified (by a flawed and ramshackle method) as individuals likely to resist Japanese rule. Many Chinese were 'screened' and released because they were judged to be harmless. Release in that way is not usually a characteristic of genocide.¹⁰²

These are all very good points which I will take a moment to counter here. Firstly, I argue that the very fact that Chinese men were targeted specifically is due to their race. It is true that there was significant Chinese resistance to Japanese rule; however, this is because there was a significant Japanese presence in China. Chinese people were not inherently more prone to dissent. The fact that Japan was occupying areas with large Chinese populations simply made it more likely that

¹⁰² Robert Cribb, (Professor of Asian History, Department of Political and Social Change, Australian National University), in discussion with author Lauralei Singsank, July 2019.

those pushing back against it would be Chinese. General Tomoyuki Yamashita, the man in charge of the Singaporean occupation, believed that Singaporean Chinese were more combatant due to a small group's strong resistance to Japanese occupation of the island.¹⁰³ I argue that this misrepresents the population, as due to a demographic majority of Chinese in Singapore, it is most likely that any resistance group there would be primarily ethnic Chinese. Perhaps if there had been an equally large diasporic community of Malays around East Asia that Japan conquered, we'd be having this discussion about ethnic Malays rather than ethnic Chinese.

Despite this, one could say that Japanese forces had an inclination that ethnic Chinese abroad might side with their countrymen and cause disruptions. This was, according to Cribb, mostly due to their significant population in Singapore and a history of involvement in mainland Chinese politics.¹⁰⁴ However, there was no direct evidence of potential insurgency, as Japanese forces had not previously occupied Singapore. The idea that racial ties might cause problems is one that may at first seem compelling, but upon further examination becomes more problematic. Indeed, this approach appears to me to be similar to that used in Japanese American internment, where ethnic ties were seen as an inherent sign of guilt.

As for the fact that these Chinese Singaporeans were killed for political reasons, I will again reference my point about the obscurity of politicide in my "Definition of Genocide" section. Although I do agree that there are many

¹⁰³ *Forgotten Armies*, 210.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Cribb, August 2019.

elements of the Sook Ching that tie in with political violence, and that ideally it would fall somewhere on the scale between politicide and genocide, this differentiation strikes me as divisive. When race plays as strong of a role as it did in the Sook Ching killings, I believe it irresponsible to dismiss its importance under the aegis of political killings. This detracts from the fact that these men would simply not have died had they been a race other than Chinese. By saying that they died for political reasons, one implies that it was acceptable that Japanese forces determined political leanings by ethnic ties. If this mentality is accepted for the Sook Ching, how is it different from saying that Japanese American internment was in fact a legitimate, non-racist decision on the part of the United States' government?

SECTION THREE: POLITICS OF MEMORY

In this section I will lay out the Singaporean and Japanese politics of memory relating to the Sook Ching. I will focus on their significance as represented by physical monuments, as well as presenting possible reasons for the differences we see.

Singapore's Memory

In modern day, each February 15 is a day of remembrance during which school children are instructed to think about the suffering that their people underwent during the period of Japanese occupation. This remembrance is not limited to those of Chinese ancestry; instead, it is meant as an experience of

collective suffering amongst all ethnicities.¹⁰⁵ This was an intentional strategy that Lee Kuan Yew began enacting prior to Singapore's expulsion from Malaysia. This unification around a tragic event serves to create a sense of national identity, regardless of accuracy. After all, it was primarily Chinese Singaporeans who suffered, but the focus on collective suffering serves to soothe these racial divisions.

War memorials were important for both Singapore and Japan. On Singapore's side, one sticks out as particularly notable. The Civilian War Memorial is the centralized post for remembrance of the Sook Ching. It is composed of four pillars known as "The Chopsticks," each meant to represent an ethnic group of Singapore that suffered under Japanese rule: Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Eurasian.¹⁰⁶ They represent racial unity by merging at their bases. What is important to note, however, is that racial unity was not the initial goal of the monument. It was constructed in response to widespread demand by the Chinese Singaporean community as an acknowledgement of their suffering in particular.¹⁰⁷ What explains this shift in commemoration? Kevin Blackburn's article "The Collective Memory of the Sook Ching Massacre and the Creation of the Civilian War Memorial of Singapore" gives a possible answer. To begin, we need some history of the racial strife that plagued 1960s Singapore. An essential argument Blackburn makes is that the Sook Ching was harnessed by leaders of the young nation after its independence as a method of creating a national

¹⁰⁵ Kevin Blackburn, "The Collective Memory of the Sook Ching Massacre and the Creation of the Civilian War Memorial of Singapore," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 73 No. 2, 2000, pp. 71.

¹⁰⁶ Hito Saito, *The History Problem*, pp. 77.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 73. .

identity.¹⁰⁸ Singapore's independence was not a voluntary thing. It had become a part of Malaysia in 1963, but within two years racial and political tensions came to the forefront of politics. Chinese Singaporeans felt discriminated against due to affirmative action policies put in place to benefit Malaysians, and racial tensions reached a peak during the July 21, 1964 riots that broke out between Malay and Chinese youths in Singapore.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, Singapore's strong economy was a perceived threat to the central power of Kuala Lumpur, and in conflict with past agreements, it continued to face internal trading restrictions.¹¹⁰ On August 9 1965, Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman expelled Singapore from the nation with a vote of 126-0, leaving Lee Kuan Yew, previously the leader of the People's Action Party (the primary party of Singapore), the unexpected head of a nation.¹¹¹ He had only been warned of the impending separation three days before, and was unable to mend the rift despite his best efforts. A tearful quote from the press conference reads "For me, it is a moment of anguish. All my life, my whole adult life, I have believed in merger and unity of the two territories."¹¹²

The nature of this separation is significant because it drives home the importance of creating a national identity for the new leaders of Singapore. Typically, nations have a sense of national identity prior to being formed; whether it be ethnic, political, or simply strong geographical ties, it is atypical to encounter a nation such as Singapore in which its very existence was, to some degree, nonconsensual. For this reason, leaders such as Lee Kuan Yew used the tragedy

108Kevin Blackburn, "The Collective Memory of the Sook Ching," pp. 71.

109"Road to Independence," *Country Studies*, U.S. Library of Congress. Accessed 1 April 2019.

110Ibid.

111Ibid.

112Ibid, 72.

of the Sook Ching to foster a sense of national cohesion. His sponsorship of the Civilian War Memorial represented this goal of racial unity. Although it to some degree diluted the suffering of Chinese Singaporeans by claiming that all citizens suffered equally, it did present a more unifying message. An important fact to note here is that Lee Kuan Yew was not acting selfishly. It may seem to our eyes that he determined the Sook Ching an insignificant enough crime that one could reinterpret it without much consequence; however, he was himself a survivor of the genocide. Lee had escaped off of one of the lorries transporting men to be killed, barely escaping death.¹¹³ Clearly, he was acting not from self-interest but from what he believed would be best for the nation.

It's also important to note that there was one subversive addition that did commemorate Chinese losses. 600 funeral urns were interred below the monument, the ashes of Chinese victims quietly settling into their final resting place.¹¹⁴ The bodies of those murdered in the Sook Ching form the foundation for the memorial we see today. When I visited the memorial in 2018, I was unable to find any English note of the urns' presence. The complex history of the Civilian War Memorial demonstrates how collective memory can both be used and subverted for national interests.

There's also an argument to be made that the Japanese occupation influenced Singapore's eventual independence. Under Japanese rule, residents of Singapore were forced to contemplate their own racial and political identities. During the occupation, Malays were typically treated well, and often became pro-

¹¹³ Kevin Blackburn, "The Collective Memory of the Sook Ching," pp. 86.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

Japanese.¹¹⁵ Straits Chinese typically held opposing views. After Japanese forces were driven out, the divides within communities often became contentious. Ahmad Khan, a Singaporean who investigated wartime collaborators, stated that “If the Japanese Occupation may not have achieved anything else...it did create...political awakening.”¹¹⁶ It’s quite possible that the racial rifts which formed during occupation played a role in Singapore’s eventual expulsion from Malaysia.

Once Singapore was independent, it had to create its own identity. As I mentioned before, Lee Kuan Yew wanted to avoid a racial split for this determination. He decided to emphasize collective suffering to unify the country. Wang Gungwu, a Singaporean scholar of China and the Chinese Diaspora, discusses another route and reason for creating a collective Singaporean identity. He references Singapore’s national heritage, and mentions another complexity in their journey to cohesion. Singaporean leaders made a conscious decision to de-emphasize any sense of history in their early years.¹¹⁷ According to Minister S. Dhanabalan, this was because “we were all too preoccupied with surviving the present to worry about recording it for the future.”¹¹⁸ This sentiment was pushed even further by a fear that hunting for history would divide the nation. As a multiethnic country born of a colony, worries were that searching for history would either lead back to Europe or to each ethnicity’s home country.¹¹⁹ These concerns ran so deeply that history as a subject was dropped from primary school

115 *The Syonan Years*, 302.

116 *Ibid.*

117 Gungwu Wang, *Nation-Building*, pp. 224.

118 *Ibid.*

119 *Ibid.*, 225.

curriculum in 1972.¹²⁰ All of this is to say that for a period, Singapore had little, if any, cohesive sense of history or identity.

It was only in the 1980s that people began to speak seriously about the detriments of lacking a national history. Essentially, people worried that without any binding history, Singapore would risk dissolution if ever threatened by a conquering force.¹²¹ If their economic power and physical location were shaken, what cultural ties would remain? For this reason, the 1990s saw the beginning of a nation building initiative. This led to a standardized National Education in 1997, which also stemmed from the fact that “it was found that many Singaporeans...did not know how Singapore became an independent nation. Many...young people did not know when Singapore gained independence, and that Singapore was once part of Malaysia.”¹²² At the same time, the memoir of Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew (who had retired from his post as Prime Minister), *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* was published, driving home the point that history was now of value.¹²³ The 1964 and 1969 race riots were referenced here as a risk.¹²⁴ The problem with this was that it made Singaporean history a distinctly political thing. Lee Kuan Yew was the leader of the People’s Action Party (PAP), the single party that has run the country since its inception.¹²⁵ Using his memoir as the definitive telling of Singaporean history made it a partisan tale, and indeed made it more vulnerable to criticism.

120 Ibid., 224.

121 Ibid., 226.

122 Ibid., 228.

123 Ibid., 229.

124 Ibid.

125 Ibid., 230.

In my opinion, the Sook Ching did not play a large role in this nation-building because it was primarily one ethnic group that suffered during it. It would have weakened the national identity to focus too much on the suffering of only Chinese Singaporeans. It would also have harmed Singapore's image after its breakup with Malaysia, as it fought hard to portray itself as multicultural, rather than only Chinese. It was easier to focus on events that preceded and followed the break than World War II era events, which would have less widespread sympathy with a 1990s population.

During their occupation, Japanese forces used prisoners of war to build three war memorials and a Shinto shrine in Singapore.¹²⁶ One, named Syonan Chureito, had the ashes of war dead from both Japanese and British forces.¹²⁷ This interment of ashes was fairly common during the war and post war eras. All of these war memorials and shrines were ultimately torn down after the occupation as a further expulsion of Japanese influence.¹²⁸

It's also important to note that the Sook Ching was not an isolated incident. It was part of the larger occupation of Singapore by Japan, which had wider cultural impacts. One example is the education system set in place during *Syonan-to*, or occupation. Japan reopened schools in April of 1942, just over a month after the Sook Ching.¹²⁹ Primary schools began mandatory Japanese classes in July, with students learning the Japanese anthem and celebrating Japanese festivals.¹³⁰ School attendance declined during the Japanese occupation. Families

¹²⁶ *The Syonan Years*, 132.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

who could homeschooled their children, a custom enhanced by the fact that no secondary schools were open during *Syonan-to*.¹³¹ This was likely due to the lowered quality in education, as much attention was paid to assimilation into Japanese culture and little to academic success. These same traits were found in the few universities left open, where many students likewise ceased attendance. It's likely that this shortage of good education played into postwar resentment of the Japanese, enhanced by the fact that education under the occupation focused on immersing students in the culture of the conquerors.

The war crime trials in Singapore are also important for our understanding of memory and retribution. Ironically, Tsuji Masanobu, the primary architect of the Sook Ching, got away with the crime; it's likely the Kuomintang were sheltering him back in mainland China during the trials, where he served them as an adviser.¹³² The war crime trials lasted from 1946 to 1948, and tried 1,101 men.¹³³ One thing that prevented the Sook Ching from getting adequate attention in these trials was its timing. It was addressed last in the trials, which meant that many of the prosecutors and witnesses were tired and ready for the process to end.¹³⁴ Only seven men were tried. Two of these, Kawamura Saburo and Oishi Masayuki, received the death sentence; the other five received life sentences that ended after five years when Japan regained its sovereignty.¹³⁵ Compared to the 133 recipients of the death penalty prior to this trial, those responsible for the Sook Ching seemed lightly punished.¹³⁶

131 Ibid., 183.

132 Ibid., 305.

133 Ibid., 306.

134 Ibid., 307.

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid.

I believe that this comparatively light sentencing prevented victims from feeling free of their wartime experiences. This is echoed in the memories of some survivors. The Oversea Chinese Appeal Committee was formed with the singular goal of securing a death sentence for all convicted Japanese; they, along with two war widows, were permitted to watch the two hangings that did occur.¹³⁷ They wanted to watch these hangings so that they could feel some sort of justice for the crimes committed against them. Indeed, after the hangings one of the widows is quoted to have said, “I’m not satisfied. I want to see their faces to make sure they are dead.”¹³⁸ Even seeing two men put to death for their crimes did not satiate a need for justice. I believe that this lack of any collective sense of justice among Chinese Singaporeans is one of the main reasons the Sook Ching’s collective memory is so complex, as many believe those who perpetrated the crime were not held accountable.

In the decade following World War II, Singapore struggled to figure out how to deal with the Japanese who remained on the island. Organizations such as the Singapore Japanese Association reopened, and many members of the Japanese community returned to the island as “advisers” who succeeded in reviving themselves with the use of wartime connections.¹³⁹ Local Japanese were thus able to regain stature in Singaporean society, something that would likewise happen for international Japanese a couple decades later. In this case, stature is regained through economic, not social, means. As Bayly and Harper remind us,

¹³⁷ Kevin Blackburn, “The Collective Memory of the Sook Ching Massacre,” pp. 79.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ *Forgotten Wars*, 545.

By 1972 Southeast Asian countries purchased nearly 12 per cent of total Japanese exports and supplied 16 per cent of total imports. By 1979, 35.4 per cent of Japan's total manufacturing investment...and 43 per cent of investment in mining was in Southeast Asia... 'Even after the war,' one Japanese historian has observed, 'many Japanese businessmen and entrepreneurs still thought of Indonesia as a sort of second Manchuria.'¹⁴⁰

Japan's economic superiority over newly independent Singapore made them a strong ally. This ties back into my earlier section discussing potential reasons for the Sook Ching not being acknowledged as a genocide. Economic ties can erase many historical injustices, and Singapore struggled with this dilemma after the war.

In the 1990s, Japan began to spread its influence into the Southeast Asian region once again. This came as a result of their attempts to work as peacekeepers during the Gulf War.¹⁴¹ Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki visited member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) from April to May of 1991 in an attempt to strengthen relations with the region, and in Singapore issued an apology for Japan's actions during the Sook Ching. He stated his "strong feeling of remorse for our country's act that caused unbearable suffering and grief among many people in the Asia-Pacific region," an apology that was not fully accepted by Singaporeans.¹⁴² Former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew stated that Japanese peacekeeping forces were unpopular because it was "like giving chocolate filled with whisky to an alcoholic."¹⁴³ Japan had not properly apologized for their actions during World War II, so why should they be trusted to once again arm

140 Ibid., 545.

141 Hito Saito, *The History Problem*, pp. 77.

142 Ibid.

143 Ibid., 78.

themselves and interfere with international conflicts? Singapore's dissatisfaction with Japanese intervention 50 years after the Sook Ching demonstrates that the wrongs committed by their army had not been properly apologized for.

I will also include reference to Paul Slovic's study on psychic numbing here in order to further explain how genocide is viewed on a global scale. He proposes that a psychophysical function may explain why people have a difficult job registering the magnitude of mass killings. This model suggests that psychophysical numbing may result from being exposed to numbers too large to easily conceptualize.¹⁴⁴ However, this model suggests that empathy caps out at a certain point, but maintains at that level of magnitude; Slovic therefore proposes another idea for why genocides may be received with little to no empathy.

An earlier study that Slovic helped run found that people were twice as likely to donate winnings to an identified child in need than to a general cause.¹⁴⁵ Shockingly, however, when another group was exposed both to the child in need and the statistics about a larger issue, their contributions declined. Additionally, a follow-up study showed that when participants were primed with calculative thoughts, "simple arithmetic calculations," rather than emotive ones, they donated less.¹⁴⁶ Even more concerning is the fact that when Slovic and others ran an experiment to see how large a group must be to demonstrate a decrease in empathy, they found that a group as small as two may determine a significant drop in empathy.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Paul Slovic, "Psychic Numbing and Genocide," *Psychological Science Agenda*, November 2007.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

Ultimately, Slovic determines that an important move to increase genocide prevention is an emphasis on rational thought. He references the successful ratification of the United Nations' Genocide Treaty, a rational choice made in 1948 to draw up a document with which genocide might be prevented and punished.¹⁴⁸ I agree with his approach, and hope to contribute to this rational field of thought by constructing this thesis in a logical, straightforward manner.

Japan's Memory

I will include here a short discussion of Japan's memory of World War II. Comparisons between Germany and Japan are popular in the postwar period, and it's of note that Germany is typically considered to have the "better" postwar period despite arguably fighting a better war overall.¹⁴⁹ This was largely due to the lack of acknowledgement of war crimes on the Japanese side, paired with a lack of public awareness after the war. Yasukuni Shrine is a good example of problems with Japan's war memory. It is a shrine to war dead in Japan with a contentious history, as several Class A war criminals were secretly interned there in 1978.¹⁵⁰ Public officials also made several visits to the shrine in the far right period of the 1980s.¹⁵¹ Among them was Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro in 1985, whose visit sparked widespread controversy.¹⁵² This created tensions between those who had lost people close to them in wars, and those who treated the shrine as a physical embodiment of Japanese nationalism.

148 Ibid.

149 Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Rana Mitter, *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia*, pp. 33.

150 Ibid, 27.

151 Ibid.

152 Ibid., 85.

Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), and the supervision of the Tokyo Trials played another role in the determinations about Japan's future. The main issue was that allied powers had significant issues among themselves. The late 1940s brought about an escalation of the Cold War, and SCAP decided that democratization and demilitarization were less important for Japan than reconstructing and rearming.¹⁵³ This allowed the allies to use the country as a supporter, but this came with many consequences. Nineteen class A war criminal suspects were released, and only microfilms of the trial records were made available in select places.¹⁵⁴ This meant that there was an immense decrease in external pressure to fix war legacies in Japan.

It wasn't until the 1990s that Japan began to investigate its World War II era war crimes in greater detail. According to Sheila Miyoshi Jager, this was because "the newly current concept of 'memory' provided a broad public with a lens through which to reexamine the entire postwar order and discover missed chances or unresolved issues that might explain the current social and political instability."¹⁵⁵ It was also hastened by the fact that most eyewitnesses and victims were aging or dying. This revival in interest about World War II crimes contrasted with previous periods, when Japan was notorious for ignoring wrongs committed in the eastern hemisphere of the war.

¹⁵³ Hito Saito, *The History Problem: The Politics of War Commemoration in East Asia*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2017, pp. 23.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

An important note for why Japan may have been reluctant to acknowledge many crimes was because of the way their veterans were treated in the postwar period. The military bore the brunt of the blame for postwar destitution, and most discharged veterans had difficulty reestablishing themselves in the civilian world.¹⁵⁶ Because they were so disdained, many veterans were reluctant to speak out about their experiences in the war; 48.3 percent of veterans wanted to speak but “found it perhaps impossible to be understood.”¹⁵⁷ An additional problem was that of the people who did choose to share their experiences in immediate postwar times, many bragged shamelessly about their victories and crimes without guilt.¹⁵⁸ It wasn’t until the 1970s that many veterans who felt shame spoke out, and by that time a precedent of bravery and victory had been set.

Another explanation of Japan’s reluctance to confront their crimes relates to the Tokyo Trials. After the war concluded, victor countries ran these trials to hold Japanese forces accountable for both starting the Pacific theater of the war and for their various war crimes.¹⁵⁹ The idea of “war responsibility” here alienated many Japanese citizens. Essentially, Japan was held entirely responsible for the wars with Allied powers and China during 1931 to 1945.¹⁶⁰ Many contemporary Japanese citizens, as well as later historians, disagree with this verdict. The fact that victor countries prosecuted Japan made it all but impossible for them to take any form of responsibility for beginning the war, both out of fear that Japan would thus avoid responsibility and because it would undermine their presentation

156 Ibid., 80.

157 Ibid., 81.

158 Ibid.

159 Ibid., 136.

160 Ibid.

of a “good war” that vindicated their actions.¹⁶¹ Anger over this perceived hypocrisy made many in Japan less regretful of their country’s war crimes. To me, this is a sympathetic perspective; when the country prosecuting your war trials bombed civilians with nuclear weapons not once, but twice, it would be difficult for me to be as compassionate as I would be during an impersonal trial. This demonstrates the importance of assigning responsibility on all sides, whether or not one force is considered the victor. Perhaps if other countries such as the United States had taken more responsibility for their wartime crimes, Japan might have had less reluctance to face their own.

This all shows that Japanese memory and approach to war reconciliation was complex. Their desire to forget war crimes in the immediate postwar period did not stem from a collective evil or a diminution of the value of human life, but rather came in large part from civilian horror and misplaced blame. Many Japanese citizens who did not fight abroad did not know the extent of their army’s crimes, and those who did often felt too socially threatened to speak out. Being aware of these reasons may give us a leg up in preventing any similar forgetfulness in the future.

CONCLUSION

In this section I will discuss a comparison of the Sook Ching to the Cambodian Genocide, a discussion of success stories in genocide prevention, and my conclusion. The Cambodian Genocide is a good comparison because of its wider impact and more successful war crime trials. I bring up the issues relating

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 136-137.

to successful genocide prevention because it's difficult to determine whether or not a crime that didn't occur would have if some intervention had not occurred. This makes studying histories such as that of the Sook Ching all the more important by providing context to discussions about future prevention.

Comparison to Cambodian Genocide

The Cambodian Genocide is particularly strong as a comparative case due to its regional proximity. Its history has little overlap with that of the Sook Ching, but the repercussions and eventual conviction of the Khmer Rouge's leaders set a precedent for the sort of verdict I'm hoping for in my research.

The Cambodian Genocide began in 1975, after the Khmer Rouge took power. They were a communist insurgent group that had been working for over a decade to gain power, and named their regime Democratic Kampuchea (DK).¹⁶² Their origin was built atop a legacy of US bombing in Cambodia; lasting from 1969 to 1973, this violence gave the communist Pol Pot and his followers effective anti-US propaganda and a defense for their murder of enemies.¹⁶³ Killings were particularly violent and widely distributed; almost anyone could be perceived as an enemy of the state, for almost any reason.¹⁶⁴ There were three main groups targeted: religious groups, ethnic and racial minority groups, and the eastern Khmers, who lived near Vietnam.¹⁶⁵ Here again ethnic Chinese were targeted. This time it was not because of their perceived dissidence, but because

¹⁶² Ben Kiernan, *Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008, pp. ix-x.

¹⁶³ Ben Kiernan, "Cambodian Genocide," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 149 (1 March 1990), pp. 18.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Ben Kiernan, *Pol Pot Regime*, pp. ix.

of perceived laziness derived from their city dwelling.¹⁶⁶ Of their original population of 425,000 in 1975, only 200,000 had survived by 1979.¹⁶⁷

Out of a population of 8 million, approximately 1.5 million Cambodians are estimated to have died during this time, many from executions and many from starvation.¹⁶⁸ Although we've learned much of this through oral histories, the prosecutors of the Cambodian Genocide also got lucky. Kang Khek Iev, often known as Deuch, was in charge of the Khmer Rouge prison and extermination center Tuol Sleng. When the regime fell, he didn't destroy the prison archives that documented the crimes which occurred there; instead, he made sure to murder almost all remaining prisoners.¹⁶⁹ These documents formed the foundation of many arguments by the Extraordinary Chambers in the Court of Cambodia that investigated the genocide. This was a common thread throughout the Cambodian Genocide. Many top officials meticulously documented their actions, both out of ignorance of their coming fall and of the coming of the internet, which would allow their documents to be widely circulated.¹⁷⁰ This sort of written documentation is perhaps the most helpful tool genocide researchers can have. Unfortunately, the Sook Ching has significantly less written documentation, and so I must focus more on oral histories.

The Khmer Rouge was ousted by Vietnamese forces in 1979, but Pol Pot continued to lead an insurgent group from the Thai border until it collapsed

166 Ibid.

167 Ben Kiernan, "The Nature of Genocide in Cambodia (Kampuchea)," *Social Education* 55 (February 1991), pp. 115.

168 Ibid., 114.

169 Ben Kiernan, *Pol Pot Regime*, pp. xiii.

170 Ben Kiernan, *Pol Pot Regime*, pp. xv.

inward during 1996 to 1998.¹⁷¹ Pol Pot died of illness in his sleep, never facing trial for his crimes.¹⁷² Throughout this all, the United States and China continued to support the Khmer Rouge; up until 1992, the United Nations supported Pol Pot's regime and considered the exiled Khmer Rouge Cambodia's representatives.¹⁷³ This legacy of genocide acceptance, or even denial, shows us an alternative of how the Cambodian Genocide could have remained in collective memory had it not been for institutions such as the United Nations and their Genocide Convention. The establishment of international courts of law is of huge importance for the trial of crimes of this magnitude. Without the UN, Cambodia's legitimate government would have needed to face the soft power of both the United States and China to gain recognition for crimes committed.

All of this may sound depressing, but things are slowly improving. Infrastructure is being rebuilt, land mines dug up, and new professionals are getting trained. Additionally, in November of 2018, the United Nations-backed Extraordinary Chambers in the Court of Cambodia convicted two of Pol Pot's assistants of genocide.¹⁷⁴ This is the first ever verdict of its kind, as the organization has spent years collecting evidence (and facing widespread criticism for its slow movement). An important point here is how long it took the UN to establish an international tribunal to begin hearings. They didn't begin this process until 1999, a full 20 years after the Khmer Rouge was removed from power.¹⁷⁵ Despite this long wait, the courts have successfully brought several

171 Ibid., pp. xii.

172 Ibid.

173 Ibid.

174 Hannah Beech, "Khmer Rouge's Slaughter in Cambodia is Ruled a Genocide," *The New York Times*, 15 November 2018.

175 Ben Kiernan, *Pol Pot Regime*, pp. xxi.

criminals to justice. This long wait proves that the age of a crime does not make it ineligible for genocidal study. Although the Sook Ching is a significantly older crime, we have many firsthand records of what happened, along with documents from both sides of the genocide. The 20 years that passed before the Cambodian Genocide was officially examined by the UN proves that immediate action after a crime is not a prerequisite for bringing about justice.

The most important part of these proceedings for my argument are the methods through which the tribunal convicted these men of genocide. Prosecutors used the same language from the United Nations Convention on Genocide that I have used here in my own argument, namely that the Khmer Rouge had the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.”¹⁷⁶ This was then corroborated by the Khmer Rouge’s mass killings and deportations of ethnic Vietnamese, along with the ethnic Cham minority and ethnic Chinese populations. The fact that prosecutors successfully used this language to convict people of genocide is very valuable to my case, as it sets a precedent for historical crimes such as the Sook Ching.

Success Stories

The importance of my research here is to strengthen the precedent of genocide identification to prevent further crimes. The fact that the Sook Ching is an old crime does not diminish the net gain that would come of using it as a precedent in future preventative measures. Unfortunately, the very nature of

176 “Khmer Rouge leaders found guilty of Cambodian Genocide,” *BBC News*, 16 November 2018.

genocide studies makes it difficult to identify failed genocides; even when they have indisputably occurred, there tend to be deniers, making it increasingly difficult to associate the label with events that never happened. As Christina Cliff, professor of political science at Franklin Pierce University stated, “[When] a regime (or group) has plans to commit a genocide but were stopped by external forces...[it] is difficult to discern, although you could argue that the NATO intervention in Libya prevented Qaddafi from mass slaughter, although whether his plans would have been legally defined as genocide is questionable.”¹⁷⁷ Herein lies the problem. Although we know that NATO intervened to halt Qaddafi’s mistreatment, we cannot determine with any great level of certainty that his regime would have progressed to genocide. Due to this uncertainty, we can only say that it is possible that an intervention prevented a genocide, not that it did so definitively. Using historical evidence of crimes such as the Sook Ching helps us identify dangerous patterns, and ideally allows us to intervene early enough that no tragedy occurs.

One of the strongest forms of genocide awareness comes from the communities that have formed online to keep people informed about potential and current genocides. Genocide Watch is perhaps the best known of these. Its website features a tab titled “Current Genocide Watch Alerts” that informs readers about potential areas of genocide around the world.¹⁷⁸ Features such as these allow public citizens to learn about global conflicts, as well as demonstrating that there is some level of care taken by those determining whether

¹⁷⁷ Christina Cliff, (Associate Professor of Political Science, Security Studies, Franklin Pierce University), in discussion with author Lauralei Singsank, August 2019.

¹⁷⁸ “Current Genocide Watch Alert,” *Genocide Watch*, <http://www.genocidewatch.com/countries-at-risk> (accessed 5 August 2019).

or not to intervene in other countries. Genocide Watch and other websites like it have the ability to enhance confidence in governing bodies, along with giving people the information needed to make personal decisions about activism or intervention. This is a clear marker of improvement in public awareness about genocide. At the time of the Sook Ching, it would have been near impossible to spread the news of it to distant countries in any sort of timely manner. Since the entire crime took only twelve days, and itself only began a week after Japanese occupation began, it's unlikely prevention could have occurred at the time. Nowadays, with watches going on and being publicized, it will hopefully become easier to predict and prevent future genocides.

Conclusion

I've discussed a variety of reasons here that the Sook Ching should be considered a genocide, rather than a massacre. My argument utilizes the United Nations Genocide Convention's five qualifications for genocide, stating that because the Sook Ching fulfilled three, it should thus qualify as a genocide. I also give readers a background on the history of genocide studies, along with an in-depth history of the Sook Ching itself. This is accompanied by a series of counterpoints that defend the view that the Sook Ching was not a genocide, which I respond to. I then discussed the politics of memory on both sides of the invasion. I specifically focused on the use of war shrines and memorials in Singapore, and wrote about how they were used by both Japan and Singapore to back up a political agenda. I finish with a comparison to the Cambodian Genocide and its similarities and differences to the Sook Ching.

I will add a disclaimer here that my research is somewhat incomplete. Some sources I used here are tertiary due to inability to procure others; Hayashi's writing about the Sook Ching is an example, as I was unable to read the Japanese plans myself (I cannot read Japanese).

My argument is not merely an academic one. I think the alteration of the label is important to set a precedent for future genocides. By labeling something like the Sook Ching a genocide, it will leave a record which we can reference in the future to bring justice to other mass tragedies.

In November of 2018, the Khmer Rouge was convicted of genocide in Cambodia for their crimes of the 1970s.¹⁷⁹ This ruling sets a strong precedent for

179 Ibid.

genocide trials. Rather than only finding individuals guilty (though this is necessary as well), the government and system within which the genocide occurs has been found guilty. I hope that this reaps benefits in the form of continued genocide convictions around the world, including the Sook Ching.

History, of course, is subjective. I'll leave you with a quote from Talaat Pasha, initiator of the Armenian Genocide: "I have the conviction that as long as a nation does the best for its own interests, and succeeds, the world admires it and thinks it moral."¹⁸⁰ Perhaps if Japan had succeeded, the conversation we have would be a very different one.

¹⁸⁰ Quoted in Mark Levene, "Why is the Twentieth Century the Century of Genocide?" *Journal of World History*, Vol. 11 No. 2, pp. 336. Fall 2011.

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