

Beatrice Trefalt

Repositioning Asia in the context of Australian memories of the war with Japan

While scholars have written on the development of Japan's 'amnesia' the damage inflicted on neighbouring Asian countries since the late 1950s, little has been written to my knowledge about the way in which memories of the war in Australia have been cast into a 'bi-lateral' or exclusive frameworks, in which the experiences of the people on whose lands and in whose villages the war was fought are rarely acknowledged. In the war of Japan against Australia (and admittedly its allies), there is often little mention of 'the others' that willingly or unwillingly took part in it. Apart from often romantic portrayals of New Guineans as 'fuzzy-wuzzy angels', there is little space, apparently, for remembering the multitude of Asian forced labourers who worked and died alongside the Australian (and Allied) POWs on the Burma-Thailand Railway, in Japan or elsewhere. This paper examines the historical background of this omission, and suggests that the more regular inclusion of the experiences of our neighbouring countries would be beneficial for a number of reasons, not least the multi-cultural and multi-national nature of our classrooms.