

Commentary on the Adachi-Mckay paper, by Dr Charles Schencking, Melbourne Institute of Asian Languages and Societies, University of Melbourne.

I would like to begin my remarks by expressing my gratitude for being invited to speak here today and to thank all of the audience members present, including the Honorable Kaku Shisei, for expressing their interest in a subject that I feel is of such critical importance today.

I would also like to thank Professor Alison Tokita for her tireless efforts in organizing this forum and for publicizing it widely.

Lastly, I would like to thank the authors, Adachi Ryoko and Andrew McKay. Your work, your passion with the subject material, and your sense of just how important your project has become is why we are here today. You have made an important contribution to our understanding of the war and its lasting impact on the participants who were involved with it first hand. Thank you.

As Alison mentioned, I teach Japanese history at the University of Melbourne and one subject I teach every year is a history of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific from 1931 to 1952.

It is a very very popular subject averaging just over a 100 students per semester.

I find this rewarding because it shows to me just how interested young people still are in the war.

This, I believe, is a very good thing: The Second World War was a defining event of the 20th century; one of the most important events of human history.

It was a war that transformed states, nation, societies, and peoples and the relationship between all four on a global level.

It was an event that forever altered the trajectory of human history on this planet; its ramifications are still felt this day. To borrow if not plagiarize from your title: the war casts a long shadow over so many aspects of life from international relations, politics, the relationships between state and society, memory, and of course over the people who were directly involved in the conflict.

In an engaging and authoritative way, your excellent study demonstrates how the war fundamentally changed the individuals who experienced it first hand and how it still influences their lives today. This is something that is often lost in the meta-histories of the war, the overarching books that examine the war through a lens of elite politics, economics, diplomacy, technology, and grand strategy.

Your book is a welcome, and I feel, excellent book for a whole host of reasons.

You have drawn from 178 questionnaires and interviews, which have since been deposited at the AWM.

From these 178 questionnaires, you construct a compelling tapestry of human histories, all of which to one extent or another fall under the shadow of the war.

It is beautifully written and thoroughly engaging; I read it one sitting and filled up three 6 X 8 note cards.

It relays so many fascinating stories. In the first instance, your book provides much needed individual accounts of what is arguably one of the most awful and dislocating events of the modern era.

Uniquely, your book explores the processes of coming to terms with the war that many have faced over the past 60 years: processes that some have found difficult if not impossible, others troubling, and still others cathartic. This is a very rich narrative, you should be very proud of your achievement.

Most importantly, I think your book demonstrates with authority, clarity, and persuasion that the war was, and remains to many to this day, an intensely, if not fiercely personal issue.

I will confess, I found many of the personal accounts in the book quite confronting.

I also found sections of this book disheartening; particularly the chapter entitled "The Unforgiving." In this chapter you deal with some of the memories and opinions of the 51 out of 178 respondents who confessed to still harboring ill feelings if not outright hatred towards Japanese, not just Japanese soldiers of 60 years ago, but strong feelings towards many if not all Japanese.

You handle this section, like all parts of this book with great maturity, objectivity, and never do you let what I would call the 'authors' ego enter into the book.

What I like best about this very confronting section of your study is the fact that never, at any time, do you pass judgment on any of your respondents or interviewees. It is a sign of great maturity and objectivity.

Throughout the book, I think there are at least 5 occasions in which the people you interview claim that war "brings out the worst in people" and at least four occasions in which your interviewees suggest that people today are truly incapable of judging people who lived through the horrors of the war.

In many senses, you let these people tell their stories, express their opinions, even if they are very confronting.

In doing so your work shows that while no one can forget, some people still cannot and choose not to forgive.

This, however, is just one part of your book.

To me, the most important, uplifting, and rewarding part of your book revolves around the 93 out of 178 respondents who have confessed to having no animosity towards Japan or Japanese as a result of the war; people that we could easily expect to harbor feelings of animosity.

As you describe it, many of these individuals have embarked on voyages of forgiveness, people who have begun and in many instances completed the process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

One individual is Joan Wills: "I was brought up to believe in the White Australia policy and any other race or person who wanted to settle here was a threat. My views have changed because I've traveled more and met people whose company I have enjoyed. I had a lovely holiday in Japan in 1980. (63)

Another is Bill Rogers, a man who states bluntly that he has many Japanese friends and acquaintances, concluding that he is a strong believer in personal exchanges at all levels. (65).

Others are Des Dobson and Philip Opas, individuals who returned personal possessions of Japanese soldiers who died in the war to their relatives in Japan.

Another moving account comes from your interview with Neil McQualter: "a man who established a long lasting friendship with a former exchange student from Japan. They have spent many memorable times together in Australia and Japan." "He says of his time in Japan: People were most approachable and friendly, not only when I was with our Japanese friends, but when I was a lone foreigner going about what a person does when visiting a country and not able to speak their language."

What I find striking in many if not all of the stories and reflections from those who I consider have begun their 'Voyage of forgiveness' is the importance that is placed on cross cultural exchanges, personal contacts whether through work, leisure, student exchanges, and travel.

Many if not all of these voyages, it seems, have begun with a personal encounter such as Philip Opas having to meet and greet members of the Japanese Olympic team in Melbourne in 1956. Your

book describes in a moving fashion the trepidation he feels before the meeting and how after greeting them and shaking their hands he reflects” “How can anyone dislike these lovely boys and girls.”

More than this, your work illustrates that this was a transformative event in his life, and one that would ultimately be a transformative event in the lives of many people both in Australia as well as Japan.

Philip Opas stated: “After the Games I made up my mind that at the first instance I would return the samurai sword which had been surrendered to me.”

This initiates his voyage to Tokyo in 1971 where he returns the sword back to the family of Major Satô Hajime in what can only be described as a moving cross cultural exchange.

The theme of cross-cultural exchange is the theme with which I would like to end my brief remarks here today. 2006 is, of course, an important year for Australia and Japan: It is the international year of exchange.

More than anything, I feel your book illustrates the importance of exchanges not only for our countries and people of today, but also for the people who lived through and were participants in the darkest chapter of what has been a long relationship between Japan and Australia.

I hope, and do believe that your book (and all of the interpersonal exchanges that occurred as a result of your work) will help foster further exchanges and that it will help others embark on voyages of reflection, perhaps reconciliation, and hopefully forgiveness.

I hope that your book will help many people reach the point that Neil McQualter has reached. As he states so forcefully on page 64 of your book:

“It is time that former enemies lived in harmony. I certainly do.”