

‘WAKING SLEEPING BABIES’: BUILDING MEMORIALS IN JAPAN TO ALLIED PRISONERS OF WAR

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Photo: The Statues of Peace and Friendship at Naoetsu Peace Memorial Park

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ROOM 503, 5F, BUILDING 6, SOPHIA UNIVERSITY
IN PERSON ONLY / NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Approximately 36,000 Allied prisoners of war (POWs) were held in around 130 camps in Japan during the Pacific War. They endured gruelling labour conditions, suffered from illness and disease, and received inadequate medical care and food, leading to the death of around one in ten. Their suffering played a major role in the trials of war criminals and in national narratives of the Pacific War, especially in Australia and the USA. In Japan, it has been argued, Allied POWs have largely been forgotten. Here, we present research on 12 major memorials built at former camps, workplaces, and graves for Allied POWs, and introduce a newly published encyclopedia by the POW Research Network Japan on POWs and civilians interned in Japan. We focus on major factors that shaped memorials to Allied POWs in Japan: firstly, that local Japanese activists, former POWs and their descendants were the main actors that constructed them; secondly, that local memory of POWs shifted in tension with that of executed war criminals; thirdly, that they have been points of international and interlocal reconciliation; fourth, that they have often been built in connection to victims of nuclear bombs and forced Asian labour; and finally, that companies that exploited POW labour have become increasingly involved in recent years.

Daniel Milne (Kyoto University, member of POW Research Network Japan) has led a JSPS grant on sites of memory of Allied POWs in the Asia Pacific. A journal special issue on the topic is scheduled for publication in mid-2024. He has previously co-edited special issues on his topics of war-related sites, memory, and tourism in Japan and Kyoto for *Japan Review* and *Japan Focus*.

After an encounter with the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Yokohama, **Taeko Sasamoto** began researching POW camps in Japan in 1997. Taeko has published *Epitaphs of Allied POWs* (Japanese, 2004) and, as a leader of the POW Research Network Japan, the newly published encyclopaedia on Allied POWs and civilian internees in Japan (December 2023).

This event is organized by Sven Saaler (Professor of History, Sophia University).