Might May Rule the Moment, but Right Prevails Forever



Zainul Abedin (Bangladesh), *Untitled*, 1944.

Dear Friends,

Greetings from the desk of Tricontinental Asia.

On 28 November 1924, Sun Yat-sen delivered a speech in Kobe, Japan titled *China and Japan: Natural Friends, Unnatural Enemies*. Here, he outlined his progressive vision for *Pan-Asianism* – a world where the 'rule of right' would triumph over the 'rule of might', where the multitudes of oppressed peoples in Asia would unite to 'terminate the sufferings of the Asiatic peoples' and 'resist the aggression of the powerful European countries'.

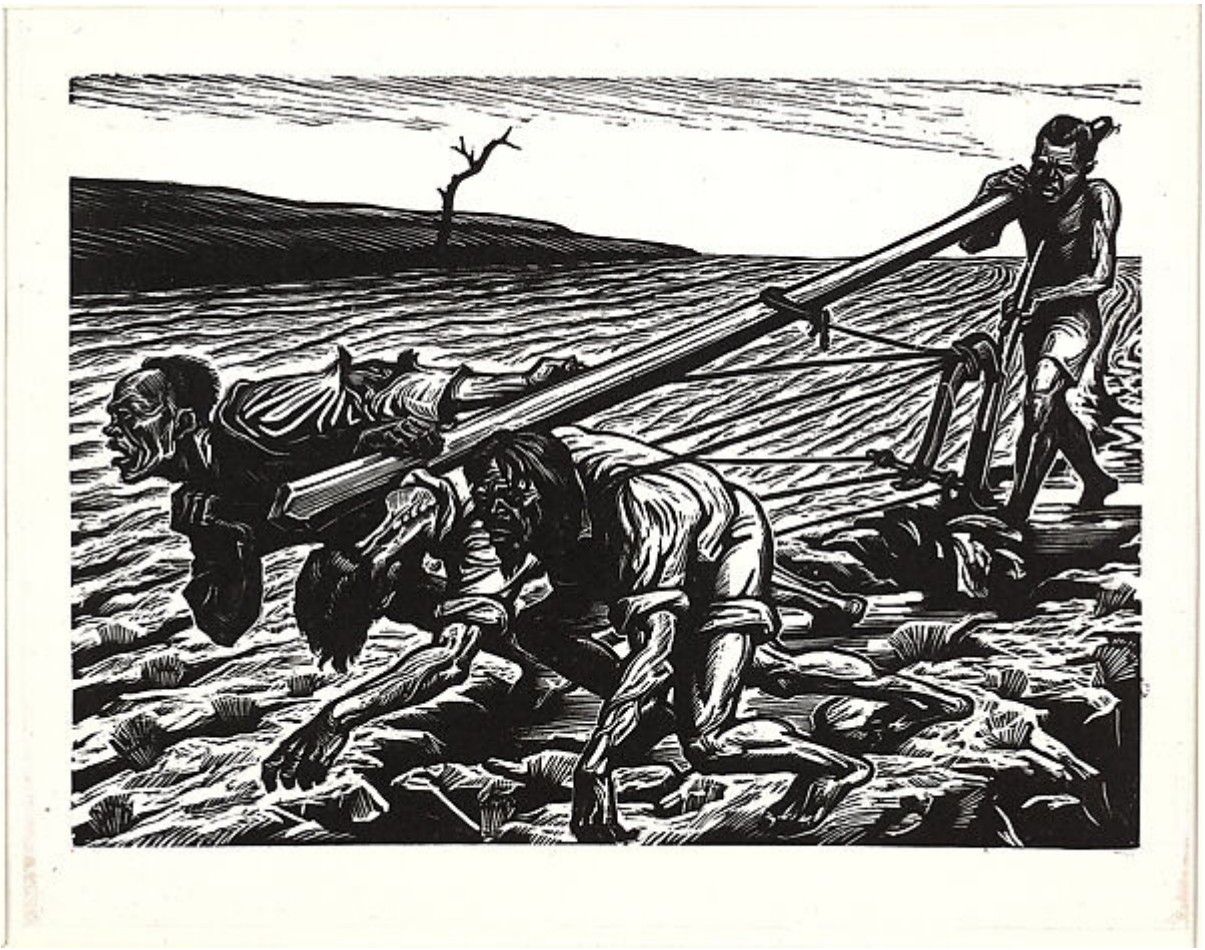
Sun Yat-sen traced Asia's regeneration to the rise and modernisation of Japan, which had abolished unequal treaties with the West, developed its scientific and military prowess, and successfully defended itself in a war against the Russian Empire in 1905. He ended his speech with a grave warning:

'Japan today has become acquainted with the Western civilisation of the rule of might, but retains the characteristics of the Oriental civilisation of the rule of right. Now the question remains whether Japan will be the hawk of the Western civilisation of the rule of might, or the tower of strength of the Orient. This is the choice which lies before the people of Japan'.


Chittaprosad 3 Aug'46
HALISAHAR, Chittagong.

Chittoprosad (India), *Halisahar*, 1944.

Western mainstream narratives of World War II (or what we prefer to call the World Anti-Fascist War) often begin with the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939 or the attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941. But for millions across Asia, the war began much earlier. On 18 September 1931, Imperial Japan – gripped by the vicious logic of capitalism, fascism, and racism – staged a false-flag attack near Mukden (Shenyang). This date, known in China as the 9.18 Incident, marked the start of a brutal occupation of China and set the stage for Japan's wider war of aggression across Asia. On 7 July 1937, Japan launched a full-scale invasion of Manchuria in northeast China. For the next eight years, the Chinese people fought an existential War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. By the conclusion of this war on 2 September 1945, 23.6 million Chinese people had been killed (considering the years 1937 to 1945 alone) – 20.6 million direct deaths from combat and massacres, plus 3 million dead from the 1942 Henan famine caused by the Japanese invasion. With wounded included, total casualties rise to a staggering 35 million.



Li Hua (China), *Raging Tide I: Struggle*, 1947.

Imperial Japan's rampage extended from northeast China to Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), Singapore, and Burma (Myanmar). According to new **research** by Tricontinental, 8.7 million colonial subjects died during the World Anti-Fascist War – ten times the Anglo-American death toll. Among these were 3.4 million people killed in the Dutch East

Indies (nearly 5% of its population), 1.5 million in Indochina (6.1% of its population), and 345 thousand in Burma.

It wasn't just the brutality of Japanese militarism that led to the deaths of colonial subjects – the policies of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill directly led to the Bengal famine which killed 3 million Indians. Colonial subjects were also on the frontlines of the battle against fascism. Around 2.5 million Indians fought under British command during the war, out of whom 89 thousand died in battle. These soldiers were subject to racial discrimination, segregation, and lower pay, even as they risked their lives for Britain's sovereignty.

The horrors of war destroyed Sun Yat-sen's dreams of pan-Asian unity, leaving the region scarred and divided. On 6 and 9 August 1945, the US dropped a nuclear bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing over 400,000 people, mainly citizens, and seemingly ending the war. But wars in Asia did not stop there; the region would remain a theatre of death – from the British Partition of India (1949) to the US war on Korea (1950–52) and then Vietnam (1955–1975) to the US-backed anti-communist killings in Indonesia (1965–66). On and on it went, imperialism's bloodthirst insatiable. Sun Yat-sen called Japan and Türkiye the eastern and western barricades of Asia – according to data from a 2024 US congressional **report**, there are around 115 overseas US military bases between these two barricades.



Li Hua (China), *Pursuit of Light*, 1944.

On 3 September, China commemorated the eightieth anniversary of its victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War with a massive parade in Beijing. 'Serve the people!' roared the over 10,000 military personnel as President Xi Jinping made his rounds in the Hongqi convoy, followed by a display of the People's Liberation Army's modernised system of military arms and services. The celebrations were attended by twenty-six foreign leaders, including Russia's President Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. This was followed by a series of high-level discussions, including with Cuba's President Miguel Díaz-Canel, in which China affirmed its continued support for Cuba and its fight for sovereignty and dignity.

'Might may rule the moment, but right prevails forever. Justice, light, and progress will inevitably triumph over evil, darkness, and regression', Xi said in his speech at the event. 'At all times, we must always commit to

the path of peaceful development, stay resolved to safeguard global peace and tranquillity, and work together to build a community with a shared future for humanity'.



On 17 September, Tricontinental Asia is organising a webinar to reflect on the anniversary of the 9.18 incident – an often-overlooked origin of the World Anti-Fascist War. We centre the experiences of Asian peoples and their resistance struggles – from Chinese anti-Japanese fighters to Korean and Southeast Asian anti-colonial movements – as essential parts of the international struggle against fascism and imperialism.

At a time when the world is experiencing an insurgent **far right of a special type**, growing militarisation, and a dangerous New Cold War targeting China and the Global South, the need to revisit fascism's historical and ideological roots is urgent. This event is jointly organised with the **Global South Academic Forum**, with whom Tricontinental is partnering for this year's conference on the theme, 'The Victory of the World Anti-Fascist War and the Postwar International Order: Past and Future'.

You can register for the webinar **here**.

Yun Dong-ju (1917–1945) was a Korean poet born in Northeast China. Much of his work was inspired by Korea's independence movement against Japanese colonialism. Four years before his death in a Japanese prison, he wrote *Prologue*:

> Until the day I die
> I long to have no speck of shame
> when I gaze up toward heaven,
> so I have tormented myself,
> even when the wind stirs the leaves.

> With a heart that sings the stars,
> I will love all dying things.
> And I will walk the way
> that has been given to me.
> Tonight, again, the wind brushes the stars.

Warmly,

Tings Chak and Shiran Illanperuma



Tings is an artist, writer, and organiser whose work contributes to popular struggles across the Global South. Her current research focuses on the art of national liberation struggles. She received her Master of Architecture from the University of Toronto and is the author and illustrator of *Undocumented: The Architecture of Migrant Detention* (2017).



Shiran is a journalist and political economist based in Sri Lanka. His research focuses on industrial policy and the importance of industrialisation to national liberation and socialist construction. He has an MSc in Economic Policy from SOAS University of London.