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THE UNAUTHORIZED HISTORY OF SINGAPORE SHRINE¹

ABSTRACT. When the Japanese took Singapore from the British in 1942, they built a shrine in the middle of the island. It was called *Syonan Jinja*, which now lies in ruins. The cause of its destruction at the end of the Second World War remains in dispute. Some say that the Japanese burnt it down because they feared it would be desecrated by the British; others say the British destroyed it as a mark of humiliation. While the site is officially recognized as being of historical importance by the National Heritage Board, it has been left completely unmarked, undeveloped and unprotected. It is now visited by almost no one, owing to the dense, tropical rainforest around it and the reputation of the area as the haunt of ghosts and vampires. This paper is an examination of the afterlife of *Syonan Jinja*, or Singapore Shrine, and the place it occupies physically and culturally at edge of a highly developed city and the authorized historical record.



Figure 1. Mainichi Shimbunsha, ‘昭南神社’, *Showa History* (1942), vol. 10.

¹ There is a similar essay written with Japanese students in mind entitled ‘日本によるシンガポール占領の未公認の歴史’ (‘The Unauthorized History of the Japanese Occupation of Singapore’), which Professor Masaki Kawashima and Rina Murase helped me produce.

At the heart of Singapore is a forest, and inside that forest, virtually in the centre of the island, lies the ruins of a Japanese Shinto shrine. Singapore Shrine (fig. 1), or *syonan jinja* (昭南神社), was built in 1942, during the three-and-a-half years when the city state came under Japanese rule. It was built mostly by the Australian and British POWs on the island, who also put up a large wooden cross to commemorate their fallen comrades. The shrine was destroyed in 1945, immediately after the Japanese Surrender and the return of the British, where it has remained in ruins until this day (fig. 2). As figure 2 shows, the site is overgrown with forest vegetation. The wooden bridge across the reservoir, visible in figure 1, is now little more than wooden stumps (fig. 3). The area on the other side of the bridge, which can be seen in figure 1, has been taken over by the Singapore Island Country Club, a golf club patronized by the political and business elite of Singapore, including the very top Japanese expatriates.



Figure 2. Jerome Lim, 'The Site of the Syonan Jinja', 2014.



Figure 3. Jerome Lim, 'The Bridge Today', 2014.²

Before proceeding any further, please let me acknowledge that this essay is based on a talk that Professor Masaki Kawashima invited me to give at Nanzan University on October 11, 2014, as part of a project to search for common ground on the wartime past of Japan. I should also plainly state at this point that I am not a historian, but a literary critic. Academic courtesy aside, a little more context might be useful to clarify if nothing else at least where this essay is coming from.³ Under what authority do I, a student of British Literature, presume the right to speak on

² From Jerome Lim, 'Lost Places: The Shrine across the Divine Bridge', *The Long and Winding Road*, <https://thelongwindingroad.wordpress.com/2014/04/07/lost-places-the-shrine-across-the-divine-bridge/> (accessed November 13, 2014).

³ Academics should make transparent their own political and ideological stance whenever possible: 'scholars have worried over ... motives ... for almost two centuries; perhaps it is time we begin to put our own purposes under scrutiny'; Ve-Yin Tee, *Coleridge, Revision and Romanticism: After the Revolution, 1793-1818* (London: Continuum, 2009), 10.

the subject of Southeast Asian history? The rather strange title of this paper probably needs further explanation as well: what do I mean by ‘unauthorized history’, and in what sense is the narrative I am going to provide here on Singapore Shrine ‘unauthorized’?

There has actually been for quite some time now –in fact, since the late 1970s– increased opportunities for literary specialists to contribute to the study of history, and this is in large part due to broad changes in the memorialization of history. In developed countries particularly, people have chosen new and remarkable ways to remember the past. Traditionally, the past is memorialized in sculptures of stone or of metal, and with the invention of print, in books. In both forms, we are typically referred to the lives and deeds of illustrious people, which this memorialization confers not only a kind of immortality but also performs as a guide of sorts to the future by influencing the perceptions of the viewer or the reader. Later on in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, artifacts and buildings of outstanding design, as well as places of natural beauty were designated as important “heritage”. Where the older acts of memorialization were primarily political, the newer forms served an interest that was basically commercial: to take advantage of the rapidly burgeoning tourist industry in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. With the end of the Second World War however, places neither

especially valuable nor beautiful, nor even associated with any individual in particular, were commemorated on notions of common shame or pain as holocaust museums and massacre sites. More recently still, we have preserved mementos to common experiences in time capsules, put the costumes and accessories of film and TV stars in museums, even built the homes of people who do not really exist (e.g. in Nagakute, Japan, Satsuki and Mei's country cottage from Hayao Miyazaki's animated feature film *My Neighbour Totoro* (1988)). Surveying the modern-built historical villages, people dressing up for historical reenactments, and a museum displaying the armchair of a popular TV character, the scholar of American landscape history J. B. Jackson confesses himself 'puzzled by what seems generally to pass for a historical object or monument' today.⁴ Call this vernacular history, a history of everyday life, postmodern, even 'fake' history –the labels are numerous– these contemporary memorials are as significant emotionally as any of the other more traditional monuments to the people who visit them. These cultural trends encourage people not only to memorialize more ordinary experiences, they have also encouraged historians in turn to frame history in terms closer to daily life: as memory, in what we choose to remember, as personal narrative. 'The historicization of memory', as Claudio Fogu and Wulf Kainsteiner

⁴ J. B. Jackson, *The Necessity for Ruins and Other Topics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 89.

point out, can render the past ‘more natural, collectively meaningful, and present’.⁵ Even experiences recollected at second or third hand by the relatives and descendents of people involved in very important events, such as the Holocaust, have been included in the historical archive.⁶ Emotion, daily life, not to say, memory are of course bread-and-butter topics to the literary scholar. Looking at this negatively, it might be said that history is becoming more like literature. On the other hand, this can be taken as a positive development in the sense that students of literature and history could now be said to have more issues in common.

All these trends are well established in Singapore, which has after all reached a level of economic development comparable to Britain, America or Japan. My being a Singaporean is one of Professor Kawashima’s reasons for asking me to join his project, and based on my experience as a Singaporean, I will state that we Singaporeans are in some respects ahead of his common memory enterprise in that we already have a common textbook on our wartime history: *Singapore: From Settlement to Nation* (2007). On the authority of the Singapore government, this

⁵ ‘The Politics of Memory and the Poetics of History’, in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, ed. Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner and Claudio Fogu (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006), 302.

⁶ Under the movement ‘from memory-as-archive to memory-as-duty’, see Michael Dorland’s *Cadaverland: Inventing a Pathology of Catastrophe for Holocaust Survival* (Lebanon: Brandeis University Press, 2009), 187-188.

has to be read by all 14-year-old students in its schools across the country. The narrative provided here is ‘unauthorized’ in that Singapore Shrine –the specific object on which the shared history of Japan and Singapore will be interrogated– receives no mention whatsoever in this official narrative. Indeed, it has never been mentioned in any history textbook produced by the Ministry of Education for the teaching of history. Singapore Shrine can also be seen as ‘unauthorized’ because of the space it physically occupies, which is completely absent of the conventional markers of authority. There are no signs to indicate where Singapore Shrine is, for example, or to identify the ruins –even if you manage to find them– as Singapore Shrine. The place is completely undeveloped and unprotected by the National Heritage Board. Since there is no official inventory, any random visitor could go there and carry off pieces of the shrine without fear of reprisal. Finally, the whole approach adopted in this paper to Singapore Shrine can be understood as ‘unauthorized’ because it operates at the very limits of what can currently be considered to be history. My focus is not only on the vernacular, but the vernacular at its most peripheral: what *we* Singaporeans choose to forget, what *we* choose to misremember, even what we fabricate about Singapore Shrine.⁷

⁷ I’ve written this essay in opposition to the recently expanded drive by the National Archives of Singapore to consolidate not only the past, but also present, otherwise ephemeral cultural moments, which perpetuates the making of history from a hegemonic perspective. I would much prefer a people-directed ‘anarchive’, ‘a dispersed set of objects and records’ (Jonathan Massey

Is Singapore Shrine Important?

Given that Singapore Shrine is ignored by the historical record, it is only fair to call into question the significance that it is being accorded here. It is almost certainly not in any Japanese school textbook either: the only people I have spoken to in Japan who have heard about the shrine are historians with a special interest in Japanese wartime imperialism. So why, of all things from the Japanese Occupation era of Singapore, choose to highlight Singapore Shrine? First of all, despite its exclusion from the authorized historical record, many people in Singapore (including Japanese people living in Singapore) know it is there and feel it to be somehow important. For example, in October 2014, when I looked up the ‘Japanese Occupation of Singapore’ on Wikipedia –which everyone uses, but few historians would dare quote for an academic work– one fifth of the total length was on Singapore Shrine.⁸ What does this demonstrate? As a resource created by the public for the public, it indicates that Singapore Shrine was the single most interesting feature of the Japanese Occupation.

and Brett Synder, ‘Translocal Transmedia Citizenship’, in *Architecture and the Paradox of Dissidence*, ed. Ines Weizman (Oxford: Routledge, 2014), 149) allowing history to develop more through small-group interest, dialogue and cooperation.

⁸ *Wikipedia*, s.v. ‘Japanese Occupation of Singapore’, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_occupation_of_Singapore (accessed October 9, 2014).

Second, Singapore Shrine is officially recognized as a historic site by the National Heritage Board. This is largely due –I suspect– to the cult status it has achieved as one of the most haunted places in Singapore. Almost every Singaporean who has heard of Singapore Shrine believes that Japanese soldiers died there. According to one rumour, they were soldiers who chose to commit suicide at the shrine rather than surrender to the British.⁹ Another rumour has it that Japanese Imperial Guards hid gold stolen from the local Chinese community somewhere near the shrine and they destroyed the shrine and themselves, or were killed, in order to keep its location secret.¹⁰ Whether the shrine was in reality destroyed by the Japanese themselves or by the returning British forces remains unclear. Government media sources such as Infopedia are generally of the first opinion, but proffer yet another explanation: Japanese soldiers burnt down the shrine out of the fear that it would be desecrated by the British.¹¹ Local schoolboys fed on a steady diet of supernatural pulp fiction, like Russell Lee’s bestselling *True*

⁹ For example, Aaron Chan, ‘The Search for Syonan Jinja’, *One° North Explorers*, <http://sgurbex.blogspot.jp/2010/11/search-for-syonan-jinja.html> (accessed November 14, 2014).

¹⁰ For example, Kenny Fong, *Spooky Tales: True Cases of Paranormal Investigation in Singapore* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2008), 120-121. These interpretations are inspired by accounts of Yamashita’s gold, notably Sterling and Peggy Seagrave’s *Gold Warriors: America’s Secret Recovery of Yamashita’s Gold* (London: Verso, 2003).

¹¹ *Singapore Infopedia: An Electronic Encyclopedia on Singapore’s History, Culture, People and Events*, s.v. ‘Syonan Jinja’, http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_236_2004-12-24.html (accessed November 11, 2014).

Singapore Ghost Stories series, would have little difficulty imagining that the vengeful spirits of these fanatical men still haunt the place. After all, the ghosts of Japanese soldiers are stereotypically those who have committed suicide.¹² In 2008, Singapore Paranormal Investigators made a well-publicized outing to scan the site with a range of sophisticated recording equipment. The Supernatural is big business: the Singapore-based website of the Society of Paranormal Investigators currently has more than 6 million hits. Geographically, it is difficult to conceive of a more evocative location in Singapore than Singapore Shrine's for a creepy place.

Last, but not least, the counter-cultural status Singapore Shrine enjoys is continually being reinforced. Photographs and videos are posted by outdoor adventurers who take upon themselves the challenge of finding the shrine. Art groups have gone to the site to stage performances, or made it the subject of their work. Finally, Singapore Shrine has been personally important enough for me to use it for the climactic scene of my novel, *On Donuts and Telekinesis* (2014).

Difficult Heritage

Given that the National Heritage Board has itself acknowledged the historic importance of Singapore Shrine, it is strange, is it not, how it has been left the way it is? Diehard fans of the Supernatural would say that the shrine is cursed. The

¹² See, for example, 'Death by Hara-Kiri' in Russell Lee, *True Singapore Ghost Stories* (Singapore: Angsana Books, 1995), 6:59-60.

explanation offered in these pages is more mundane, which is that it represents what can only be called ‘difficult’ heritage: that is, the shrine has been left the way it is because there is no group willing to come forward to claim it as its own.

The most obvious party that could do something for Singapore Shrine is of course the Singapore government. Unfortunately, it is interested in memorializing the past for two reasons only: as a source of tourist revenue, as in the restoration of Chinatown, or, as in the case of the Civilian War Memorial (Fig. 4), if it reinforces its brand of national solidarity. According to the official record, the Civilian War Memorial commemorates all ‘civilians who were killed ... when the Japanese armed forces occupied Singapore’.¹³ Situated in the historical heart of Singapore bay, it is visited by military personnel on 15 February (the first day of the Japanese Occupation) who remember ‘what can happen to a conquered people’,¹⁴ and, since 15 February is officially designated as Total Defence Day, presumably they are to promise themselves as well never to let Singapore be conquered again. Clearly, the memorialization of Singapore Shrine would do nothing for such a political agenda. It is difficult to see how its development could reap any significant financial

¹³ The words are engraved on the tablet at the foot of the memorial.

¹⁴ Samuel Dhoraingam, ‘Civilian War Memorial (War Memorial Park),’ Streetdirectory Pte Ltd, http://www.streetdirectory.com/travel_guide/singapore/world_war_2_military_site/180/civilian_war_memorial_war_memorial_park.php (accessed October 7, 2014).

reward either, since the majority of us Singaporeans visit historical monuments only when we are made to do so: as part of a school trip, or as military service. This is because, as a people, Singaporeans generally seem uninterested in history. While our government-regulated math and science textbooks are getting thicker and thicker, our government-regulated history textbooks are getting thinner and thinner. For example, when my generation (people now in their 30s or 40s) was 14 years old, we would have read about 6,500 words of text on the Japanese Occupation.¹⁵ Today, the average 14-year-old student reads only 1,500 words of text on the Japanese Occupation.¹⁶

¹⁵ At 13, we had to read ‘The Beginning of a Nightmare’, ‘When Singapore was Syonan-to’ and ‘Lessons from the Japanese Conquest’, in *History of Modern Singapore* (Singapore: Longman, 1984), 147-154. There was an entire chapter dedicated to ‘Singapore During the Japanese Occupation’, in *Social and Economic History of Modern Singapore* (Singapore: Longman, 1985), the textbook we had to read when we were 14.

¹⁶ That is, ‘How did the Japanese Occupation Change the Lives of People in Singapore’, in *Singapore: From Settlement to Nation* (Singapore: EPB Pan Pacific, 2007), 108-117.



Figure 4. Ve-Yin Tee, ‘The Civilian War Memorial’, 2014.

Worst of all, from the government’s point of view, memorializing Singapore Shrine might touch off local sensitivities and give the lie to its pro-business position that Singaporeans have no historical issues with Japan. In 1965, on the request of the president of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the poet Pan Shou wrote a dedication for the Civilian War Memorial that included the following lines (translated by C. M. Wong):

The people of Singapore were subjected to lashing, humiliation, enslavement and extortion. Under the pretext of ‘mass screening’ ... the Japanese Army massacred tens of thousands of non-combatants in secrecy. God was ridiculed. Civilisation was buried and the dignity of mankind trampled. Everywhere tears flowed. Everywhere blood splattered. And everywhere terror reigned.

The intention was to have the dedication carved on the memorial when it was erected in 1966, but this never materialized.¹⁷ Certainly, with respect to the official historical record, the Education Ministry has toned down the strong emotions associated with the Japanese Occupation. My generation would first read about the Japanese Occupation when we were 13 years old, and the first article entitled ‘The Beginning of a Nightmare’ would begin thus:

The Occupation of Singapore by the Japanese was like a long nightmare that lasted for three and a half years. During this period known as the Japanese Occupation, the people suffered and lived in constant fear of the Japanese—the price that a country has to pay when it is occupied by another country.¹⁸

Today, the secondary school student reads about the Japanese Occupation when she is 14 years old, and the first article entitled ‘How Did the Japanese Occupation Change the Lives of People in Singapore’ starts:

The fall of Singapore marked the beginning of a brief but tumultuous chapter of Singapore’s history. Singapore was renamed ‘Syonan-to’ which meant ‘the Light of the South’ or ‘the Radiant South’.¹⁹

¹⁷ National Archives, *The Japanese Occupation 1942-1945* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1996), 185-186.

¹⁸ Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore, *History of Modern Singapore* (Singapore: Longman, 1994), 147.

¹⁹ Curriculum Planning & Development Division, *Singapore: From Settlement to Nation* (Singapore: EPB Pan Pacific, 2007), 108.

The Singapore government has exercised a tight control over the representation of the Japanese Occupation. The last thing it wants is to stimulate the kind of feelings among Singaporeans that could jeopardize its economically lucrative ties with Japan, which is one more reason for it to leave Singapore Shrine well alone.

Another group that could undertake the care of Singapore Shrine would be the people who wanted it built in the first place, that is, the Japanese themselves. It would not be the first time for them to protect an overseas heritage: they've done it before even in Singapore. The largest Japanese cemetery in Southeast Asia housing the remains of Japanese people from as early as the nineteenth century is in Hougang, and –as Ryoko Nakano has reminded me– it is managed by the Japanese Association of Singapore. The fact that the people of Japan have done nothing for Singapore Shrine is instructive. Internationally, the thinking that has given birth to Holocaust museums and massacre sites militates against the memorialization of Singapore Shrine. As Colin Long and Keir Reeves argues, 'the purpose of heritage preservation in the case of places of pain and shame is to commemorate the victims' and therefore 'there is little role for the preservation of perpetrator sites'.²⁰ Though

²⁰ Colin Long and Keir Reeves, "Dig a hole and bury the past in it": Reconciliation and the Heritage of Genocide in Cambodia', in *Places of Pain and Shame*, ed. William Logan and Keir Reeves (London: Routledge, 2009), 78.

belonging to one of the so-called perpetrator nations (Japan, Germany and Italy), most Japanese people would balk at the prospect of being directly associated with the kind of colonial, military past that the shrine represents. In any case, on the occasions when they have chosen to memorialize their own wartime past, it is not their part as aggressor that they wish to remember, but their position as victims, of which the Peace Memorials at Hiroshima and Nagasaki are the outstanding examples. It is highly unlikely that even the most rightwing faction, the *uyoku* activists who tour Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya in all-black ‘sound trucks’ playing martial music and making nationalistic speeches,²¹ would put any money in a project to manage a ruined Shinto shrine more than 5,000 kilometres away, assuming they have heard of Singapore Shrine, and assuming the Singapore government would let such an organization operate on Singapore soil.

The only remaining group who might have a strong enough incentive to do this then would be the Commonwealth faction, specifically the relatives of the estimated 20,000 mostly Australian and British POWs who were involved in the building of the shrine. This remains a distant possibility given the strong anger

²¹ For more information about them please refer to Daiki Shibuichi, ‘The ‘Uyoku Rōnin Dō’: The Lifestyles and Values of Japan’s Contemporary Right Wing Radical Activists’, *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies*, no. 6 [2007], <http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/discussionpapers/2007/Shibuichi.html> (accessed December 9, 2014).

amongst them, which has passed down to their descendants. For example, responding to Joy Loh's blog on 'MacRitchie Reservoir – Syonan Jinja', 'Wendy', daughter of 'an Australian POW, 2/0th [sic] Field Regiment, 8th Division 2nd AIF who worked on [the] construction' recalls how, 'In an attempt at sabotage, POWs carried termites in matchboxes from their camps to the construction site and placed these in the shrine's timberwork'.²² Further down the same comment thread, 'John' writes

The National History Museum [of Singapore] has a video of a military ceremony held at Shonan Jinja running. Its [sic] chilling to see the occupation troops in formation and the donations from Japanese occupation officers. The shrine itself is shameful, having represented a memorial to many of the soldiers who massacred innocent civilians and was built by forced slave labor. Its [sic] an historical curiosity and a small footnote to the brutal occupation of Singapore.²³

Though the POWs were allowed in September 1942 to raise a Christian cross on the site of the shrine for comrades who had fallen in the fighting over the island, most of them would doubt the sincerity of the gesture. The very similar example of wartime largess that took place at Bukit Batok Hill, where the defeated Allied soldiers were also allowed to raise a memorial cross, has generally been interpreted

²² On Explore!@joylohdotcom, comment posted November 30, 2013, <http://joyloh.com/blog/?p=2803> (accessed December 9, 2014).

²³ Ibid, comment posted on December 26, 2012, <http://joyloh.com/blog/?p=2803> (accessed December 9, 2014).

in the English language media as Japanese propaganda.²⁴ Moreover, their relatives would be painfully aware of how these POWs were later sent to work on the notorious Burma Railway.

And thus, Singapore Shrine is left unclaimed and uncared for, with the cause of its destruction at the end of the war and its purpose still completely undetermined. This might not be such a regrettable state actually. Accruing a veritable patina of mystery, it has over time become the only war monument in Singapore that a Singaporean –once she learns about it– might actually want to see. It *is* remembered, even if somewhat darkly in the supernatural tales that Singaporeans choose to spin about the place. I have –as I’ve mentioned– used it in my novel to dramatize two very different perspectives on Singapore history. For Shouma Tay, a rightwing Singaporean boy who reads a few too many sci-fi and fantasy novels, it is a site that recalls the familiar negative stereotypes about Japanese soldiers:

He ... had of course heard of the notoriously haunted wartime shrine that the Japanese had built in the middle of the forest. Towards the end of their brutal reign, rumour has it that General Tomoyuki Yamashita had passed an order to have the gold they had stolen from the Chinese community buried in a secret vault under the shrine. In order to guard

²⁴ Romen Bose, *Kranji: The Commonwealth War Cemetery and the Politics of the Dead* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2006). See also *Singapore Infopedia*, s.v. ‘Bukit Batok Memorial’, http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1224_2008-12-12.html (accessed October 7, 2014).

its location, the engineers had followed what had been done to similar stashes in the Philippines: they entombed themselves by blowing up the access points while they were still in the vault. There were also reports of Japanese soldiers who, refusing to surrender, had gone to the shrine to commit suicide. The thought that the spirits of these fanatical men might still be there, protecting the shrine and its treasure sent chills up his spine. He looked up at the bright blue sky, grateful that nightfall was a long time away.²⁵

To Rei Ogawa, a rightwing Japanese girl, the shrine is a nationalistic reminder of how her people had shattered the myth of European superiority and had given fellow Asians the mindset they needed to free themselves of the shackles of British colonial rule:

There was a great forest in the heart of Singapore, and in the middle of that forest were the ruins of a Shinto shrine. It had been built in 1942 for the spirits of those who had lost their lives in the battle over the island. The British, who only saw the shrine as a mark of humiliation, destroyed it and its bridge across the reservoir when they returned in 1945. The colonial masters wanted of course to go back to the way things were, with the world at their beck and call. But the people they had long dominated were having none of it, and in Singapore as well as much of Asia and Africa they were eventually sent packing.²⁶

As a result of the victory of the ‘60,000 attacking Japanese’ over the ‘more than 130,000 British, Indian and Australian troops’, to quote ex-prime minister Lee Kuan Yew’s *The Singapore Story* (1998), ‘British colonial society was shattered,

²⁵ Ve-Yin Tee, *On Donuts and Telekinesis* (Singapore: Ve-Yin Tee, 2014), 138-139.

²⁶ Ve-Yin Tee, *On Donuts and Telekinesis* (Singapore: Ve-Yin Tee, 2014), 128.

and with it all the assumptions of the Englishman's superiority'.²⁷ Unlike a purely historical narrative, a literary work can not only show different beliefs, but also –as I have done for my novel– dramatize them in the form of characters living, interacting, or coming into conflict with each other.

Admittedly, this novel of mine is not going to be read by very many people. The Internet, through which Singapore Shrine continues to haunt the consciousness of Singaporeans, might itself be taken down or collapse under the weight of its own traffic. Some vandal could conceivably take it upon herself to put a hammer to what remains, given its vulnerable state and the strong emotions it still obviously arouses. What then? Would Singapore Shrine be forgotten? But so what if it *is* forgotten one day? Covered by dense green forest vegetation, visited by almost no one, the remains of its wooden bridge darkly visible in the green waters of MacRitchie Reservoir (fig. 3), isn't it beautiful? When the Japanese, Australian and British soldiers built the shrine in 1942, they cleared a patch of primeval forest thousands of years old that now no longer exists anywhere on the island of Singapore.²⁸ Any development of Singapore Shrine would only repeat this act of

²⁷ Kuan Yew Lee, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Times, 1998), 52.

²⁸ Richard Corlett, 'Vegetation', in *The Biophysical Environment of Singapore*, ed. Chia Lin Sien, Ausafur Rahman and Dorothy Tay Bee Hian (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1991), 135-153.

violence against the forest, and the forest creatures that have since returned to the site. If the day should come when *we* –Japanese, Australians, British and Singaporeans– truly forget the shrine, it would simply return back to the nature it originally and rightfully belongs.

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