

**V P DUTT MEMORIAL LECTURE**

**Report**

**Japan's Surrender in 1945 and the Remaking of Asia**

**Speaker: Prof. Hans van de Ven  
Professor of Modern Chinese History  
University of Cambridge  
20 April 2022**

The V.P. Dutt memorial lecture on 20th April 2022 was held around the theme of “Japan’s Surrender in 1945 and the remaking of Asia.” The guest speaker for the lecture was Prof. Hans van de Ven- a professor of Modern Chinese history at the University of Cambridge. The moderator for the session was Prof. Madhavi Thampi, while the chair was Prof. Sreemati Chakrabarti, both of whom are renowned former professors from the Department of East Asian Studies, Delhi University.

Prof. van de Ven began by introducing the rationale behind unearthing the implications of Japan’s 1945 surrender on other parts of Asia. The typical Western understanding of Asia’s involvement in the second World War tends to halt at Japan’s surrender. However, the surrender held significant implications for many crucial Asian countries- like China, Indonesia, and India.

At the beginning of the session, the speaker clarified that Japan only surrendered in the war after it was made abundantly clear that Emperor Hirohito and the Constitution of Japan would stay in place. He also defined the key actors in Asia following the surrender as: Chiang Kai-shek in China, Lord Mountbatten and Jawaharlal Nehru in India, and Lt. Gen. Kumakichi Harada in Indonesia, noting their uncertainty-induced reliance on instinct and intuition post the surrender.

The foundation for the unconditional surrender was laid in 1943 by U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt to signal Stalin of the U.S. and U.K.’s commitment to desist his influence in Europe. The speaker commended him as a good administrator and noted that the second purpose of the unconditional surrender was to banish the possibilities of a third world war erupting.

Prof. van de Ven mentioned that the official surrender ceremony in Tokyo Bay was delayed and eventually took place on 2nd September 1945. U.S. General MacArthur accepted the surrender. Furthermore, interestingly the only non-U.S., non-European allied representative present at the ceremony was the Chinese Military Officer- General Hsu Yung-Chang. The Dutch representatives also delayed arriving, and many historians believe their position would have been far stronger had they reached earlier.

The Allied powers celebrated the surrender ceremony as avenging a great defeat. The speaker notes that the European powers held a sense of victory as if to say, “We Europeans are back.” A

personal element was also included for General MacArthur- a descendant of the Perry family- when Commodore Perry's flag was hoisted up during the ceremony. The gathering also featured many G.I. Joe's, and many believe it was to signal that the average American secured the victory.

The Tokyo Bay surrender set off a host of surrenders in other parts of Asia. On 9th September, at 9 a.m, the surrender in China took place. The 9-9-9 symbolism is often understood to be a reference to 11-11-11- i.e., a figure that marks the beginning of the armistice that led to the end of the First World War, to draw an equivalence between the two wars. '9' is also a vital religious symbol, and when spoken thrice sounds like the Chinese word "everlasting" being uttered thrice, which connotes- "Peace must now begin, and it will last forever."

The surrender took place in Nanking with the Chinese representative General Ho Ying-chin and the Japanese representative Lt. Gen. Okamura Yasutsugu. The speaker observed how the ceremony had a large table for Chinese representatives, whereas the Japanese were cramped up at a considerably smaller table. Additionally, it is also interesting to note that the whole surrender was highly choreographed, barring one incident. When the final document was sent back to Ho Ying-Chin, he unexpectedly stood up and received it with both hands. This was perceived as an act of impulsive courtesy and traced back to the fact that both Ying-chin and Yasutsugu were classmates long ago and also talked at length after the surrender was completed.

The speaker then laid out some of the events between Chinese Communists and Nationalists in August 1945. He detailed how Okamura Yasutsugu initially planned to send Japanese troops back home when apprised of the surrender but eventually backtracked. This was to counter the Chinese communist forces, as Japan was adamantly against communism in China. They were counting on Chinese trade in the future to build back their economy- a plan that eventually fell apart with the victory of the communists.

The speaker then shifted to the surrender in Indonesia (then known as the Dutch East Indies). He laid out how, for much of the Second World War, Indonesia was considered a backward country. After the Japanese occupation, the Dutch were also less clued about the happenings in Indonesia- and eventually, what followed was a protracted and chaotic revolution of freedom in Indonesia.

Prof. van de Ven mentioned that the Dutch Acting Governor-General of Indonesia- Hubertus van Mook- was comparatively more liberal than his British counterparts and envisioned creating a future Dutch Empire that consisted of four parts with equal standing. This vision naturally did not follow through but still indicates the Dutch goals in Indonesia.

Meanwhile, two key people involved in the Indonesian Revolution were Sukarno and Mohammed Hatta. Sukarno had been in charge of discussions regarding the development of the Indonesian Constitution since Spring 1945. In August, he and Hatta were imprisoned until they agreed to declare independence- an action they undertook on 17th August.

Finally, the speaker talked about the implications of the Japanese surrender to India. This ties in with the handover of Singapore by the Japanese to the British on 12th September 1945. Lord Mountbatten received the official Japanese surrender. There, he created the impression of how the might of the Allied forces compelled Japan to surrender. However, the truth contrasted these claims- per the speaker. British forces relied heavily on the might of the forces of countries like India- and issue highlighted by Nehru. Indians were displeased at the lack of representation and recognition in this ceremony. Furthermore, the British had bungled up efforts to get the support of the Indian Army and the Subhash Chandra Bose-led INA, leading to various implications for the Indian subcontinent.

The speaker's session was eventually followed by a Question-and-Answer round from the guests. Discussions surrounding the role of Burma in the surrender ensued/ This was followed by a brief discussion on the conflict between the Communists and Nationalists in China. The session finally concluded with an address from V.P. Dutt's daughter- Ms. Anuradha Dutt.

*This report was prepared by Anjane Khosla, Research Intern, Institute of Chinese Studies.*