This talk will examine how political rule and legal authority were redrafted in Japan and China at the end of World War Two. Pursuing war criminals, collaborators or suspected traitors offered a means to resolve the upturned former imperial hierarchies, dealing with grudges and finding justice to atone for committed atrocities. These moves demonstrated that the new authorities were “just,” a crucial element to bolster domestic and international backing. 

The legal restructuring of East Asia and Japan’s relations with its neighbours in East Asia played a vital function in redressing colonial and imperial power domains in the early Cold War. The transformation of East Asia after the fall of the Japanese empire has mainly been written from a western perspective, owing to the preponderance of postwar American scholarship and the nation’s political dominance. My presentation will offer variations on that theme.

Barak Kushner teaches modern Japanese history in this Faculty and has a PhD in History from Princeton University. He was recently awarded a 2012 British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship which he is using to complete his analysis of the postwar adjudication of Japanese war crimes in China, tentatively titled, "Men to Devils and Devils to Men": Japanese War Crimes and Cold War Sino-Japan Relations (1945-1965). In the summer of 2008 he was a visiting scholar at Nanjing University (China) and during 2009 he was a visiting scholar at Waseda University (Japan). He was a 2008 Abe Fellow and conducted research concerning “Cold War Propaganda in East Asia and Historical Memory.” As a scholar he has written on wartime Japanese and Chinese propaganda, Japanese media, Sino-Japanese relations, Asian comedy, food history, BC class war crimes, and the Cold War. The Thought War, Kushner’s first book, delved into the history of wartime Japanese propaganda. His second book, entitled Slurp! A culinary and social history of ramen - Japan’s favorite noodle soup, (published by Brill/ Global Oriental, 2012) focused on food and history. In March 2013 he will launch a five-year ERC funded research project that will examine the dissolution of the Japanese empire and the struggle for legitimacy in postwar East Asia.