

War
and
Memory
in
Malaysia
and
Singapore

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War and Memory in Malaysia and Singapore

edited by

**P. Lim Pui Huen
Diana Wong**

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Preface

In October 1995, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies held a workshop on War and Memory in Malaysia and Singapore to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II. With the exception of two additional papers, this volume comprises the papers presented at this workshop.

Interest in the war at the Institute dates back to 1973, when an oral history project on the war and its aftermath was inaugurated, given the value of oral history for this period on which there are few documentary records. The interviews conducted then included those with Mamoru Shinozaki, a Japanese civilian official in the Syonan administration; Yap Pheng Geck, a banker; and Philip Hoalim, leader of Singapore's first political party, the Malayan Democratic Union. This volume is a continuation of this early pioneering work done at the Institute on the war.

In the early interviews, the memories of the élite were tapped. In this volume, the excavation of memory has been extended further, to cover different classes, communities and localities. What is revealed is the multiplicity and complexity of memory; deeply layered and richly textured, because of the complex nature of society in Malaysia and Singapore. The papers also show that memory is contested terrain, and that when the war ends, the battle for memory begins.

Fifty years after the end of World War II, the generation of those who fought in the war and suffered as its victims, is gradually passing. To the new generations, the war is a distant memory passed down from the stories of their parents and grandparents, learnt from lessons in school, or read from books. The reflections on war and memory contained in this volume would thus appear to be timely.

We would like to thank the contributors for the effort put into the revision of the papers after the workshop. This volume is offered as a tribute to two former Directors of the Institute: Professor Josef Silverstein, who was Director from 1970 to 1972, and the late Professor Kernal S. Sandhu, Director from 1972 to 1992, who initiated and fostered oral history work at ISEAS on the war and its aftermath.

The Editors



War and Memory in Malaysia and Singapore

An Introduction

Diana Wong

I

In 1982, a ten-foot-high granite obelisk inscribed with Japanese characters was unearthed at the popular Lido Beach, Johor Bahru. It turned out to have been the site from which the Japanese 25th Army, led by General Yamashita, had launched its final assault in its Malaya campaign some forty years ago. The target was the island across the straits, Singapore, the much-vaunted "impregnable fortress" of the British empire in the Far East. Within two weeks, Singapore fell. In commemoration of those who had given their lives in the battle for Singapore, the granite obelisk had been erected on the site where the attack had been launched. Three and a half years later, British troops returned to accept the Japanese surrender. This proud memorial, cast in stone, to lives lost in a glorious victory, eventually slid into the soft muddy ground of the beach, buried under its own weight, and forgotten (Lim, this volume).

History is written by victors. This old dictum, confirmed yet again in the fate of the mute memorial described above, suggests that history also silences what may otherwise have been remembered. To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) organized a workshop on War and Memory in Malaysia and Singapore in October 1995, from which the chapters in this volume are derived (with the exception of two solicited papers).¹ The lead questions were: why the relative absence of public commemoration of the war in this region (Wang, this volume), what private and popular memories have remained (see, in particular, Abu Talib, Naimah Talib and Lim in this volume) — how, in other words, has the politics of memory been staged with respect to the Japanese Occupation of British Malaya?

The verdict of the historian would appear to be uncontested in at least one point: that the war, as Wang Gungwu observes in his paper, was "a war between empires". The Japanese, in their attempt to dislodge the Western imperial powers from Southeast Asia, were themselves "the last imperialists in Asia" and, after their brilliant conquest of Malaya, had "clearly intended to stay" (Wang, this volume). And yet, with the dredging of memory not otherwise clearly articulated in history books and war memorials, "the" war reveals itself as many, and as different, wars, its meaning refracted through varying subject positions and different temporalities. Several papers in this volume bear testimony to this plurality of meaning and memory with respect to the war.

For the Chinese in Malaya and Singapore, the events which began with the landing of Japanese troops at Kota Bahru in northern Malaya on 8 December 1941 marked not the beginning, but the *continuation* of a chain of events which had begun in China with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1936. The paper by Yeo Song Nian and Ng Siew Ai in this volume, which traces the accounts of war and occupation in Chinese literary works written after the war, brings this clearly into focus. In his paper, Wang, whose parents were Chinese intellectuals born in China and working in the "Nanyang" when the war broke out, writes movingly of how they "chose to submerge their Malayan memories to embrace the larger Chinese collective memory of the Sino-Japanese War".

If the "war between imperialists" was seen as a national (Chinese) war of liberation by the Chinese in Malaya, other, and quite different, scripts of national liberation were being crafted as well. P. Ramasamy's paper in this volume draws attention to the memory of the Indian National Army (INA), formed in Singapore on 17 February 1942 and led by the charismatic Subhas Chandra Bose, whose rallying cry "Challo Delhi" (on to Delhi) electrified the Indian community in Malaya and moved them to contribute gold, property and lives to the cause of liberation of the Indian motherland from the yoke of British colonial rule. "We had sold our lives to his dream and considered it a privilege", remembers a former INA captain quoted by Ramasamy in his paper.

Patricia Lim (this volume) was told by one of her informants; "The Japanese fought our war for us. If they had not done so, we would have had to fight the British ourselves". Abu Talib Ahmad's paper (this volume) plumbs the depths of Malay memory of the war and it becomes evident that General Yamashita's appeal, the day after Singapore's conquest, to "the Malayan people to understand the real intention of Nippon and to co-operate with the Nippon Army towards the prompt establishment of the New Order and the Co-Prosperity Sphere" (quoted in Wong, *forthcoming*) had not failed to resonate. Abu Talib prefaces his paper with a quote from a villager from Yan, a village

in northern Malaya, who laments to a student researcher some forty years after the war: "If only the Japanese had stayed much longer in Yan, they could have taught us more. They were not stingy like the whites. What a pity! They did not stay long in Yan."

Yet even these broad categories to contain the multiplicity and complexity of remembered history are deceptive. Ramasamy's paper draws attention to the divisive class chasm most keenly felt in the Indian community: "The Indian middle class was caught in a situation that demanded total accommodation with the Japanese authorities. It was this accommodation that drove them to perpetrate some of the worst crimes on Indian labour". This memory of hardship and struggle among the Indian working class, a memory marginalized by primarily middle class accounts of nationalist mobilization, is highlighted in Ramasamy's paper. Divergent memories were not only to be found among the Indians in Malaya. Cheah Boon Kheng foregrounds his paper with his personal memory of an uncle who took refuge in his home, and then surrendered himself to the British authorities: "It later transpired my uncle had worked with the Japanese police during the war. Fearing reprisals, he had decided to give himself up to the military authorities". And Lim notes that on a memorial dedicated to troops of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), recovered in Yong Peng in 1994, three of the fifty-six inscribed names were non-Chinese.

For beyond the stirring metanarratives of war and liberation, there are the micronarratives of individual fates and quotidian survival. The "war" as such was of short duration and, as Wang notes, "war for the people...started when the fighting stopped". War memories consisted more often than not of memories of what has become known as the "Occupation" — the period of Japanese rule, or *zaman Jepun*, as against *zaman Inggeris*. The abrupt transition from a non-obtrusive, *laissez-faire* colonial administration to the harshness of a Japanese military dictatorship did indeed leave an indelible mark on the private and public memories of the new subject people. The arbitrariness of rule, ranging from the spleen of the private soldier to the callousness of official policies, engendered a pervasive climate of fear to which all were subject and few could evade.

In Yeoh's study of Singapore (this volume), "force and violence are hallmarks of this short but traumatic era; and the rhetoric of fear, terror and common suffering looms large". Yeoh shows how the Japanese use of spectacle and surveillance imprinted the above register of darkness into the popular imagination, attested to by several other papers (see Wang, Cheah, Yeo and Ng) in the volume as well. The reign of terror instituted by a triumphant military machinery began with *sook ching*, the screening operation in the major cities of the country, from which thousands never returned. The gruesome sight of impaled heads exhibited at public crossroads (Yeoh, this

volume) or market places (Wang, this volume), the brutality of the Kempeitai, the shortage of daily necessities — all have been etched into living memory.

But as with the metanarratives, the micronarratives of daily life under the Occupation are rich in diversity and complexity. For the Malay community in Kuching, the Occupation is not transfixed with a singular stark metaphor, but is remembered in terms of the unfolding of different phases (Naimah Talib, this volume). In the beginning, there was little hardship, but later food shortages arose. Thus, locality mattered, as did temporality. And whilst fear and terror remained unforgettable, other memories also jostled for storage. Abu Talib Ahmad's student researchers found their respondents bursting spontaneously into song — the Japanese songs they had learnt in their youth from the new Japanese administration. The new sense of mission encouraged in the schools (Abu Talib Ahmad, this volume), the new responsibilities entrusted to local élites (Naimah Talib, this volume), the exciting exposure to new environments and experiences in the quest for daily survival (Wang) are memories that have also survived and attest to the fact that everyday life went on, even in extraordinary times.

II

Memories have survived. Yet memory has also been suppressed. The memorial to the Japanese dead at Lido Beach was recovered only by accident in 1982, as was the memorial to the MPAJA dead in 1994 (Lim). And memory can be reinvented, as in the case of school textbooks (see Cheah). The politics of memory in Malaya and Singapore, I argue in another paper (Wong forthcoming), *began* with the Japanese Occupation, whose explicit intention it was to erase all memory of the old colonial order. Within two days of the triumphal Japanese entry into Singapore, the city was re-named "Syonan" (light of the south). Public buildings, such as hospitals and cinema halls, which were sites of mass gatherings as well as points of orientation in the city, were also renamed. Traffic signs were re-inscribed in the Japanese script, as were all other public signs and displays in the city.

The Japanese effacement of place-identity was accompanied by a new time. In Syonan, the clocks were moved forward one and a half hours to follow Tokyo time, and the year 1942 became 2602, the seventeenth year of Showa according to the victor's calendar. As importantly, a new practice of public commemoration was introduced, based on a new calendar of festivities. Just as memory was to be effaced, a new collective memory was to be fabricated. The highlight of the new calendar was the Emperor's Birthday on 29 April, but there were also two special days of commemoration for the people of Syonan and Malaya: one was the day Japan declared war against

the Allied Powers (8 December) and the other when the British surrendered to the Japanese Army in Singapore (15 February). This practice of commemorations, through which a public time and a public space is constituted, and narrational identity established, was an innovative and constitutive feature of Japanese rule.

Seen in this light, much of what has happened since can be termed a politics of *forgetting* (Cheah, this volume). Indeed, it is striking that whereas the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war was observed with great fanfare in many other parts of the world, it passed, with the exception of Singapore, virtually unnoticed in Malaysia (Lim, this volume) and the rest of Southeast Asia (Wong; see also Fujitani et al., eds., forthcoming). In other erstwhile colonies, the memory of war lent itself to the fabrication of an empire-centred script of resistance, loyalty and liberation (of the natives) fashioned by the returning imperialist forces (White 1995). I have argued elsewhere that for Malaya and Singapore, the various and contesting nation-centred narratives of resistance and liberation, as well as the diverse practices of collaboration, which constituted the lived experience of war and occupation, were not conducive to the memorialization of the war (Wong, forthcoming). Using the distinction introduced by Wang between the protagonists and the victims of the war, it is evident that both sets of protagonists, the British as well as the Japanese, chose to forget. So did many of the victims.

What these papers show, however, is that the memories marginalized in the official politics of forgetfulness continue to lead a rhizomous existence within family and community institutions. The Chinese in Johor, through their clan associations, have been commemorating their war dead every year in conjunction with their practice of ancestor worship (Lim, this volume). Within the family, memories have been stored and transmitted, resulting in the "archaeological layers" Wang refers to when he delves into the depths of his own memories. In the villages of rural Malaya, new melodies learnt during the *zaman Jepun* were stored in popular memory (Abu Talib Ahmad, this volume). The public disavowal of the war had submerged, but not erased, memory; indeed, a deep disjuncture between "official" and "vernacular" (Bodnar 1992) memory remained.

III

The "Malayan" memories of the immigrants could be submerged, as Wang notes for his parents' generation, but for the next generation, these memories were to transform *space* into *place*. With the end of the war, a new "Malayan" reality had been created, to which attention could now be turned. Writing of the Chinese, Yeo and Ng note "The war, loss of assets, relatives, and homes,

made them realize their dependence on the land they were living on. Before the Japanese Occupation, the Chinese population in Singapore and Malaya regarded Nanyang as a second hometown. However, such sense of belonging was considerably superficial as their hearts were more to their ancestral homeland — China. The war fostered the bond between them and the land in which they settled as never before. Ramasamy attests to the same “localization of sentiment” (Wong 1993) with respect to the Indian community.

Its immediate aftermath, however, was tragic — the eruption of racial violence for the first time in Malayan history in the period before and after the Japanese surrender (Cheah, this volume; see also Cheah 1983). The political wooing of the Malay community, the mobilizational fervour of the Indian Independence League, the grim struggle of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army — had formed the crucible in which a new sense of ethnic self-consciousness was created, one in which the territorial present defined the basis of communality. The attendant politicization of public life, against the remembered backdrop of betrayal and revenge, unleashed scenes of racial violence hitherto unknown in the country. The divisive impact of the war and its consequent hindrance to nationhood became the definitive reading of the war — and precluded the harnessing of war memory for the national identity project of the post-colonial Malaysian state (for a lengthier discussion, see Wong, forthcoming).

The collective silencing of war memory was broken in 1992 in Singapore, which had separated from Malaysia in 1965 and had since based its fragile sense of nationhood on a narrative of survival (Heng and Devan 1992). On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the commencement of the war, popular memory was rehabilitated and the collective experience of shared suffering and hardship during the war and the Occupation was crystallized into the founding myth of Singaporean nationhood (Yeoh and Ramdas, this volume). Commemorative plaques were installed on sites throughout the island, building blocks for a new narrative of national awakening and identity. A new politics of memory in the service of nation-building drew on the war as its defining moment. This somewhat unexpected, and in the context of the region exceptional, turn in Singapore's contemporary cultural politics underscores the value of the recovery of memory as an intellectual exercise, beyond the ritual demands of anniversary celebrations.

IV

In conclusion, I would like to address two further themes which were raised during the workshop and reverberate throughout the papers: that of memory as method, and that of moral judgement. Clearly, personal memory cannot

be mistaken for historical method. Individual memory is selective, it is biased, it is not representative. The warnings issued in the volume by all the historians (see Wang, Cheah, Abu Talib Ahmad, Naimah Talib) on the selectivity and subjectivity of private memory cannot be over-emphasized. Yet, the official memory that is historiography is selective as well and in that sense, an investigation into the politics of memory, both public and private, can yield substantial insights into the dynamics of power and consciousness in the determination of a nation's past and its understanding of its present. Collective memory is politically and culturally constituted and, *as such* reveals the structures of power and desire which variously sustain, erase and transform it. Tracing the variegated topography and genealogy of official and vernacular memory would help foreground issues of meaning and voice in the cultural politics of national representation.

There remains the issue of moral judgement, which Cheah and Wang highlight in their papers, and which Japan's disavowal of its war-time record in Asia has kept alive. Fifty years after the end of the war, it was felt that searching and unsettling questions regarding the war could and should be raised by a younger generation of scholars, without neglecting the issue of moral responsibility, but without being completely overshadowed by it. The papers assembled in this volume are hopefully a start in this direction.

Note

1. See also the commemorative volume in the Journal of Southeast Asian Studies Special Publication Series: Paul H. Kratoska, ed., *Malaya and Singapore during the Japanese Occupation* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1995).

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Part I
HISTORY AND MEMORY



Memories of War

World War II in Asia

Wang Gungwu

The end of World War II was followed by a large number of histories and memoirs by the protagonists, especially the victors. There were also innumerable novels and films, paintings and photographs to commemorate the heroism of the soldiers and the courage displayed by the victims of war. In time, there were also many depictions of the cowardly and the greedy, the innocent and the guilty. The whole gamut of experience and emotion was recorded in one form or another.

The distribution of such works was uneven. In the field of history, the English-speaking world dominated, with works in French and other European languages making important contributions. Understandably, those who lived in areas where no actual battles were fought would have observed from the sidelines with little to say. But even in the areas that were battlefields, non-combatants had little to contribute. This was particularly true of Asia, where the major theatres of war were China and Southeast Asia, and parts of the South Pacific. The most intense fighting occurred in North and Central China, and also went on for the longest period of time, predating the beginning of the Pacific War by more than four years. Apart from that, the Burma and New Guinea campaigns lasted longest and produced the greatest number of war casualties. For most of Southeast Asia, the actual fighting was brief. War for the people there was largely a problem of grim survival and more or less painful adaptation after the Japanese Occupation.

Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that memorable accounts have been limited to the combatants, notably in New Guinea, Burma and, at least in terms of strategic miscalculations, also British Malaya. For the rest, some dramatic personal experiences did go on record, and some novels and short stories were set during periods of Japanese Occupation, but they were few. Even among the major protagonists, the record is variable. The British, Americans and Australians produced their histories early, including official

histories complete with volumes of selected documents. The Chinese, on the other hand, were preoccupied with their civil war which, after the victory of the People's Liberation Army over the Nationalist forces in 1949, overshadowed the much more complicated story of the Sino-Japanese War. It was not until the 1980s that serious histories began to be written about it. As for the Japanese, as the vanquished in 1945, they ignored the war for the first two decades. Their answer to their defeat was to put their heads down and concentrate on national recovery. Only when they had proved themselves in peace, with most remarkable achievements in economic growth, did they return to assess the events that led the country to the catastrophic decision to attack Pearl Harbour and conquer Southeast Asia. Once begun, however, a flood of books has appeared about the Pacific War. They have varied from rationalizations that stress the fact that Japan was forced into the war to a few fierce exposures of Japanese atrocities. The controversies aroused over the behaviour of the Japanese armies towards non-combatants, the victims of their cruelties, have opened up old wounds without satisfying many of the peoples who had suffered from the war.

In Southeast Asia, however, there have been relatively few attempts to commemorate the war or its end. The world-wide coverage of the fiftieth anniversary of VE day and VJ Day in 1995 produced little response in the region. This has been much commented upon elsewhere and needs no further treatment here. I have made no systematic study of the War in Southeast Asia, but have always been fascinated by its impact on my family, my friends in Malaya (Malaysia and Singapore), my view of war and peace, and most of all on my understanding of historiography and contemporary history. What follows, therefore, is not an attempt at history-writing, but is largely confined to my own perspective on the function of memory and how memory influences the exercise of moral judgement.

Let me begin with my own experiences of memory. We all know how selective memory is. That is why historians are reluctant to rely on it. But if contemporary documents have not survived, and official memory is selective in predetermined ways, the arbitrary setting down of hundreds, if not thousands, of memories would be invaluable in their own ways, if not serving also as a corrective to officially sanctioned remembrances. From my personal experience, I know that there is much to be careful about. My own memory of World War II in Malaya is not reliable. I lived through it from the age of eleven to fifteen. Some bits of the Japanese Occupation years remain very vivid, but they are obviously fragmentary and peripheral to the larger picture. What I do have, however, is something like a selected memory of other people's memories. Nevertheless, on the basis of these fragments, it is possible to present a picture of the war and illustrate some of the constituents of what World War II in Asia might have meant for particular peoples.

My own memories of the war are limited to a small area of the Kinta Valley around Ipoh, in the state of Perak. Except for a few Japanese soldiers and officials, the three and a half years were spent almost entirely within the local Chinese community in the town, at that time of about 100,000 people. Ours was a claustrophobic view of a few isolated families struggling to survive under living conditions which continued to deteriorate as the war dragged on. From time to time, our lives were enlivened by violence and drama. I attended, unbeknown to my parents, a public execution by the Japanese of people whom we were told were robbers. Another time, when I minded a stall in the market, my friends and I sat for four days opposite a public display of three recently chopped off heads of criminals. All of us were very frightened, but displays like these confirmed the stories of other executions, including those who came to be accepted as "heroes" and "patriots" among the Chinese.

Most of my friends did not go to school but studied privately wherever possible. For myself, there was little to read except some classical Chinese literary and philosophical texts which the Japanese did not object to. Through my father, who was made a librarian in the Education Department, I had access to a collection of popular novels left by British expatriates, most of whom had escaped south to Singapore and were eventually locked up in concentration camps there. These books ranged from thrillers and romances to detective and science fiction. I read hundreds of these in two years, and have never lost a taste for them since. My English improved, but my view of Western civilization was strongly coloured by the works of writers like Edgar Wallace and P.G. Wodehouse, to name two of my favourite writers at the time.

Two other memories were etched deep inside me. We had sheltered for some months at the beginning of the war in a timber camp in Setiawan and some caves by tin mines near Gopeng. There I had my first encounters with groups of Chinese labourers. The timber workers had come from Fujian, but most of the miners were Hakka males who had recently come from China. They were rough, strong and kind and introduced me to a view of the world which I came across again among urban labourers in Ipoh itself. Many of them were later rounded up by the Japanese to work for the war, but others slipped off into the jungle to join resistance groups, which ultimately became the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA). Later, my father taught Chinese to a tin miner's children and we moved in with them. The mine electrician had built a secret radio receiver. I was given the job of listening to British and American news broadcasts every day and reporting to the mine owner. By that time, we no longer believed in Japanese propaganda about the progress of the war. British and American propaganda we took to be nearer to the truth. I had a vague idea then of how dangerous it was to listen to secret broadcasts, but the memory of having that contact with the outside

world excites me to this day. It reminds me that, for most of the people I knew, the war was not about Malaya. It was about China and about who should control Asia.

After the war, I listened to many older people remembering the war and these gathered in my mind to fill certain gaps but leaving many more blanks which I found difficult to fill. I later read some of the books and essays that were largely memoirs of the hard years under the Japanese. The range of other people's memories grew broader and I learnt a great deal about topics of which my circle of family and friends had no direct experience. Thus, I am inclined to believe that everybody's memories are primarily collections of memories, their own as well as those which came from people willing to tell others of their reminiscences. Such varieties of memories are not, of course, brought together all at once. They can come at any time and at different stages of our lives. For myself, I have continually been refreshed through the decades by new attempts by others to remember this, that, or the other, about those war years.

Inevitably, therefore, there are many layers of memories, something akin to archaeological layers, each being laid on top of earlier ones. In themselves, they can produce confusion and contradictions and it would be foolish to depend entirely on them. It is hard to have a sustained or systematic view of the war through such means. It is interesting that people in Southeast Asia do not seem to be keen to remember the war. Compared with the range of writings by the Europeans about war in Europe, it is obvious that the people in this region either do not wish to remember, or do not feel as intensely about their experiences. An attempt to understand why, of course, would be worth exploring. In recent years, however, there seems to have been more interest in remembering. Why is there the delayed reaction and what is its significance? It seems therefore that we not only select what we want to remember, but some have also de-emphasized the war and put off remembering it for many decades. The first question to ask, it would seem to me, is "Who remembers?"

I am conscious of my experiences here and would like to begin with my own ambivalence, the wavering between wanting and not wanting to remember. For me, it had much to do with my origins. I was born in Surabaya when Indonesia was still the Netherlands East Indies, and brought to Malaya as a very young boy. At the time of the war, both my parents were Chinese nationals. They were born in China and travelled on Chinese passports and I had a Chinese passport too. Apart from what I remember of the war, my strongest memories have come from my parents. They were both in their thirties. Their war experiences had been fearful and filled with anxiety and they thought we were lucky to come out alive. Understandably, their memories were negative ones. Afterwards, they were determined to return to China to resume their lives and start me on a new life there and, largely for that reason,

chose to submerge their Malayan memories to embrace the larger Chinese collective memory of the Sino-Japanese War. Thus, at a very early age, I learnt that one's memory depended on the importance one placed on one's past, and on what one thought the future would hold. This has led me to ask who remembers and why.

My father was a *huaqiao*, a good example of an "Overseas Chinese", who first came to the Straits Settlements and the Malay States in the 1920s as a schoolmaster. After a spell in Java, he returned to Malaya. When the Pacific war broke out in 1941, he was working as an inspector of Chinese schools in the British protected state of Perak. There was no Malaysian or Malayan identity at that time, and it would not have occurred to him to think in terms of such an identity. He belonged to a small group of Overseas Chinese who had been educated at universities in China and were regarded as intellectuals. In that context, intellectuals were expected to be nationalistic and to him, nationalism was Chinese nationalism. Given that background, it is not surprising that his remembering would be as an Overseas Chinese intellectual whose nationalism pertained to China and whose views about the Japanese were not much different from those of a Chinese in China in the middle of the Sino-Japanese War. It is important to put these views in context. And it need hardly be said that his memories very much influenced my own.

The war in Malaysia, therefore, was an extension of the war in China for my parents and their friends. The terror that they and their friends felt was related to the fact that Japan was an enemy in China, more than that it was an enemy of the British in Malaya. It was a terror that infused all aspects of their memories of the Occupation. It was also part of a collective memory of all *huaqiao*, especially of those people involved in the China Relief Fund who had worked hard and systematically since 1937 to collect funds for China. For them, Japanese atrocities had already occurred in China. Images of those atrocities were vivid in their minds long before the Japanese occupied the British colony and the protected Malay states.

Furthermore, many Chinese in Malaya had come from China since 1937, some with personal memories of what the Japanese had done. Certainly, the whole of the Chinese community in Malaya were fully aware of Japanese atrocities in Nanjing and elsewhere. Even as a child, I knew of them through reading the illustrated magazines which my parents subscribed to. Although some of what I remember today would have come from what I read afterwards, many of the photographic representations of the atrocities in China that are still in my mind come from my childhood. And we know how widely circulated those photographs were among all Overseas Chinese communities years before the Japanese arrived.

There were all kinds of fear. Possibly the greatest fear was that of being contaminated by association with the Japanese, the fear of being seen as a

collaborator. This fear was greater than that of being exposed as being sympathetic with anti-Japanese movements. There were many anti-Japanese groups among the Chinese. We tend to remember them as supporters of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) or the MCP component of the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army (the MPAJA), but the anti-Japanese movements were not all communist. Many were simply nationalist. These included members of the Chinese Nationalist Party (the Kuomintang), and other nationalists who were anti-Japanese before 1941. My memories include stories of the non-communists who were equally anti-Japanese — not only those who were killed in the towns but also those who had fought in the jungle.

At the time, one war zone was hard to separate from another, but there were aspects in one which had nothing to do with another. A good example is what happened during the invasion of Malaya. What most Chinese felt about the invading Japanese was very much heightened by what was happening in China. They remembered only too well what their relatives in China had told them. It did not have to be north-central China where the Japanese had been especially ferocious. Provinces such as Fujian and Guangdong, from where most Chinese in Malaya and their descendants originated, had not seen a great deal of fighting, but the stories of deprivation, cruelty and fear were no less dramatic and memorable. As I recall, there was a pervasive sense of Chinese nationalism that had been transported a long way and was not well articulated, but no less intense for that. Indeed, the nationalism was in many ways more intense outside China, because it was highlighted by a more sophisticated and accessible mass media. Compared to people living in a small village in China who might not have known much about what was happening — and there were many parts of China where the villagers had no experience of war at all — the Chinese in Malaya had a much more vivid picture of the Sino-Japanese War through a propagandistic and relatively efficient news network. The kind of information available to people at the particular time forms an important background to who remembers, why they remember, and what they select to remember afterwards.

What about the memory of the Chinese as colonials? Not all of them thought of themselves as colonials, but many had developed a close relationship with the British colonial administration, as did many Malays, Indians and others in Malaya. Unlike my parents, I personally had more vivid memories of the war as a colonial than as a Chinese. I had studied at a colonial school with teachers from Britain and had been introduced to British and Commonwealth history. My schoolmates came from different communal groups and what we had in common was the British and colonial connection.

What kind of memories do colonials have about a war in which they were victims and, in some respects, part of the booty of war? The question we have to ask is: whose war was it? For most people in Malaya, the war was

between the British and the Japanese. It was a classic imperialist war. Japan was the last of the Great Powers and the first modern Asian empire. It is not clear if the Japanese ever realized that they were the last imperialists in Asia. All the other imperialist wars had already been fought by the nineteenth century. Bit by bit during the early twentieth century, the still empty parts of the map of the world were coloured in. But here were the Japanese belatedly trying to change the shape of Asia. Whether they were fully aware of it or not, they were the last imperialists in Asia.

In that context, what we had was a war between empires. For the Japanese, it was almost like Japan versus all the Western empires in Asia. The only exception were the Vichy French in Indochina who were allies of the Japanese. But in fact, the French gave them little help. For Malaya, and later Burma and India, it was the British empire. But there were also the Dutch and the Americans elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Because it was a war between empires, the memories of the empire builders and those of the victims cannot be of the same quality, or the same level of intensity.

We are confronted with different kinds of memories. I have already mentioned that the Japanese relationship with the Chinese was a very special one and was not directly relevant to Southeast Asia. The Sino-Japanese War can be said to have started as far back as 1931 with the invasion of Manchuria, or if one were to go further back, the struggle over Shandong province during World War I, and even right back to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95, with the cession of Taiwan to the Japanese empire. The relationship between the two peoples was so deep-rooted and intense that it had a special kind of aura for both the Chinese and the Japanese. To that extent, the Chinese as victims in Malaya were a qualitatively different kind of victim. They were victims not of Japan's war in Malaya, but much more of Japan's war in China.

The Malayan Chinese were thus part of that war whether they liked it or not. The tragedy was that even the many Chinese who cared nothing about the war in China were caught in it simply because they were of Chinese origin. The Japanese did not distinguish, when they shot and arrested the Chinese, whether they were born in China or were local-born third, fourth or fifth generation of Chinese descent. This certainly had an enormous psychological impact. It did not matter how long one had been away from China, or whether one cared for China or not, all Chinese were at the receiving end of the war and would be treated the same. If indeed someone was merely of Chinese descent, but was Malay-speaking and proud to identify with Malaya, he was suspected of being pro-British and equally an enemy of the Japanese empire. The Japanese made no distinction whether a Chinese was a Chinese patriot or not; all Chinese faced the same kind of terror and fear. The effect of this on the collective memory consolidated the sense of Chinese nationalism and forced a Chinese cultural identity on everyone, no matter how long the Chinese had been in the country.

Thus, in Malaya with its many different communities, there were several kinds of victims. The Indians, for example, were colonials twice over — colonials in British India arriving to be colonials in British Malaya. Unlike the Chinese, they were offered a future. The Japanese promised to be their allies in their efforts to liberate India from the British. The Indian National Army (INA) was the vehicle of that alliance. Professor Ramasamy's paper in this volume reminds us of the fact that those Indians who had been involved in the INA were very proud of it. I remember that some of my friends were disillusioned and disappointed afterwards. Their memories have also become parts of my mixed collection of memories of the war. The supporters of INA were victims of a dubious ideal, perhaps also of Japanese deception. Unlike the Chinese, however, theirs was a future-based deception. As victims of a future illusion, they were quite different from the Chinese who were victims of past wars, and an ongoing one that was brought from China and recast in local terms.

If we look at the war as one between empires, then the Malay people were the truly innocent victims. They had nothing to do with China and India, and only their leaders had anything to do with the British. What the Japanese promised them was also futuristic, rather like that promised the INA, but it had no beautiful ending on the horizon because the Japanese clearly intended to replace the Westerners as imperialists in Southeast Asia. They were there to stay.

The human resources of colonial Southeast Asia could provide no real opposition to the Japanese, who could, therefore, hope to stay for a long time if they wanted to. There was no real part for the indigenous peoples of Southeast Asia except to be conquered. Thus, their memories of the war have to be placed in that context. Malaya was in a most exceptional position. Given the complicated constitution of the Federated and Unfederated Malay States and the Straits Settlements, and with the three major layers of an almost pan-Asian population, it would have produced the most varied set of memories of all the Southeast Asian territories. Yet there was nothing at the time or immediately after the war to draw these memories into a common pool for the commemoration of a shared experience.

I have not included the British troops, the Australian troops, and those Eurasians who had identified with the Europeans in Malaya. They were protagonists rather than victims. And, distinct from the Chinese who were historical enemies, they were actual enemies of the Japanese. But some of them too were victims, those who did not support imperialism but had persuaded themselves that they were in Asia to bring civilization to backward peoples. By this, I do not mean only the missionaries of the Christian church who had been doing their charitable and humane work for centuries, long before the invention of imperial expansion. Among the secular social

workers, teachers, engineers, doctors, and other professionals were also some who were dedicated to humanity, to science and knowledge. In war, this counted for little. All of them ended up as prisoners of war in concentration camps, or worse. Many of them have recorded their memories of the war. Their stories belong to imperial history and the history of global conflict and have rarely made an impression on other groups of victims in the region.

In short, the example of Malaya simply reflects the fact that there were several distinct kinds of victims of the Japanese invasion and occupation of Southeast Asia. The various types of memories, and the distinctive quality of these memories have to be calibrated at discrete points around the region in the context of the dramatic and historic transformations that followed. The national independence that had seemed only remotely possible before 1941 had become inevitable, and only a matter of time by 1945. The beneficiaries of imminent liberation from colonial rule scrambled to position themselves for statehood. So much had to be done all at once that there was little place among the new nationalist leaders for remembrance, or even recrimination. They looked forward with enthusiasm and dedication to the new Asia that would come about because of the Japanese invasions.

Let me turn now to the question of moral judgement. There is a distinction between moral judgements made by victims and participants, on the one hand, and moral judgements made by historians, on the other. There is also a qualitative difference between historical judgement and moral judgement by historians. Are these statements valid when we look at World War II in Asia?

The moral judgements of the victims would have been both immediate and deep: the anger, the outrage, the indignation, the emotional and passionate pleas for justice. There were a few published examples of such judgements among the Chinese in Singapore and the Federation of Malaya for the first five years after the war. They seemed to have lost meaning and relevance as the struggle with the Malayan Communist Party merged into the larger success of the Chinese Communist Party on the Chinese mainland. Elsewhere, local nationalist movements dominated all developments, and the Chinese found that their bitter memories about their treatment by the Japanese were of no importance in the new context. Those who had looked to China found that there was now little interest in the past as the People's Republic urged them to concentrate on its brilliant future. In any case, moral judgements about the war by victims far away on the periphery were relegated to the realm of deep personal resentments and anecdotal memories that soon began to fade.

None of the indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia shared the sense of outrage and indignation which the Chinese displayed. This was partly because the Japanese had been skilful in the discriminatory policy they had devised to support the claim that they had launched the war to rescue the local peoples from Western colonialism. Many new nationalist leaders were

grateful for the opportunities and help offered to organize themselves for independence, whatever the ultimate purpose that Japan had in mind for them. There were frustrations and disappointments that were remembered, but nothing so negative that could overshadow the prospects of nationhood to which they could look forward. Nothing could be as emotionally galvanizing as the contribution towards self-esteem which the Japanese had made against the imperial pretensions of the Western powers.

The only exception was in the Philippines where there was sustained anger against Japanese occupation among Filipino nationalists and a long drawn-out controversy about collaboration and resistance. This was because the Americans had prepared the national leaders for independence, and the Japanese had little to offer that would have gained them Filipino gratitude. Nowhere else in Southeast Asia would there have been peoples who believed that the British, French and the Dutch would willingly give independence to local nationalists. Interestingly, the few memoirs that did appear after the war were written mostly by those who had suffered at the hands of the Japanese because of their colonial loyalism. But, in comparison with the Chinese, all other peoples in the region behaved more like minor victims, and moral judgements were mild if not perfunctory. It would seem to me that the range of post-war judgements does reflect to some extent the underlying reality of the war in Southeast Asia.

However, there were strong moral judgements by the protagonists in the war. Moral condemnation by the victors of Japanese cruelty was plentiful, notably by British and Australian prisoners of war. As a manifestation of a world war, that had its place. In the region, however, the impact was temporary. Of much greater significance than the histories and memoirs, than the war trials and the peace treaties, than the reparations and the compensation debates, was the delayed reaction within Japan to what the Japanese did during the war. The fact that the reaction was long delayed and highly politicized, that the Japanese nation was divided between those who fervently wanted to remain unapologetic and those who were deeply regretful, even ashamed, tells us more about the problems of memory and moral judgement than many of the early writings on the subject.

For example, both the judgements by some Japanese and from all the victims were emotional and absolute. The two issues of Japanese scientists using humans in their experiments in Manchuria and elsewhere, and that of the comfort women of Korea, China and Southeast Asia, have been revealing. After decades of neglect, the judgements came out loud and clear. The memories have not been blunted by time. If anything, some have been sharpened by the many frustrations in getting a hearing. These examples confirm that certain kinds of memories are timeless for participants, especially for the victims.

What about the judgement of historians? The modern professional historian has been trained to collect all the facts and weigh all the relevant factors with great care before forming a judgement. The memories of victims and protagonists alike are but a small part of the evidence. The fact that these memories may be one-sided, passionate and subjective has to be dutifully discounted. In addition, many of the memories contradict one another and can be shown to be inaccurate and wrong after comparisons with other kinds of documents.

There are also many kinds of historians. There are those who write on behalf of their countries, and those who write on behalf of a smaller group or community, or with reference to the fate of an ethnic minority. Yet others set out to write as objectively as possible and without prejudice, writing, as it were, for humanity or posterity. They hope that humankind might benefit by learning from the lessons of the past. They would prefer to call their judgements historical rather than moral, but it would be difficult to escape the moral discourse that underlies any judgement of human conflict on such a large scale.

Everyone will be quick to recognize the political ramifications of an issue, like rewarding the victors and punishing the defeated. Judgements about who were the victims of war and who were guilty of assaults on those victims and, if guilty, to what degree, would be harder for historians to agree on. Matters such as these are easy to politicize. Historians who write in the context of the nation-building process, for example, may be expected to be selective in a particular way about the memories they bring to their writings. A national historian sees it as his duty to contribute towards nation-building. In the end, however, we are all human beings and we have different degrees of detachment from events and from what happened. And it would be very difficult to find a historian in Southeast Asia today who can be professional, objective, and scientific about the war, especially about the period of the Japanese Occupation in Malaya.

I want to end with a little anecdote which I found interesting and unforgettable. A colleague and I were travelling around South Korea in 1967 and went to a famous mountain resort in the southern end of the peninsula. We spent the evening dining with a group of young Koreans. In the room next to us were some older Korean women who, in the course of the evening, began to sing. To our surprise, they sang Japanese war songs which I remember learning when I was a boy in Malaya during the Occupation. When they heard the songs, my young Korean friends were outraged. They were too young to have lived under Japanese rule and had grown up after the liberation of Korea. But the intensity of their revulsion at hearing the Korean women singing Japanese military songs with gusto and obvious nostalgia was palpable. They were hurt and also felt humiliated.

I was struck by their disgust. The young Koreans acknowledged that they had not suffered under the Japanese and had no personal memories of what the Japanese had done. What they had were collections of other people's memories which were being used to construct a Korean national identity. Remembering Japanese brutality and hating them for their efforts to destroy Korean culture was the key to Korean nation-building. The important lesson was never to be conquered or be bullied by the Japanese ever again. Every young Korean was taught to stand up to the Japanese, to resist and fight them on all fronts. This was not easy to do. After the war, the Japanese supported the United States in helping South Korea's economic recovery and there was much to learn from the Japanese experience.

The disgust that I sensed among the young Koreans was understandable. Their rejection of things Japanese was a contrast to the willingness of the older Korean women to remember Japanese war songs. It reminds us how memories can be selectively perpetuated for many generations. They might be reconstructed at different levels and for different purposes. They can even be used so effectively that later generations can remember more vividly than those who had lived through the events. This tells us something about memory and its uses. The kinds of history-writing that concentrate on the construction of new political identities may find the emotional power of direct memories, especially those of victims, particularly invaluable. The fact that some countries revive memories of the war and others do not itself needs attention. The uneven use of war memories in different parts of Asia shows that these memories can still be a political force for nation-building.

CHAPTER 2

Memory as History and Moral Judgement

Oral and Written Accounts of the Japanese Occupation of Malaya

Cheah Boon Kheng

Introduction

In remembrance of the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, I shall begin by briefly narrating some of my recollections as a child, between 1943 and 1945, when I was between four and six years of age, and lived with my aunt (who was my foster-mother) and her fifteen-year-old daughter in an upper-storey cubicle of a shophouse in Jalan Campbell, Kuala Lumpur. Except for rare occasions, I seldom went out of the abode and only watched the outside world on the street below through the grilled bars of the room window. The few occasions were an air-raid alert, which forced us all to get into an underground shelter behind the shophouse, and a visit to Chinatown, which meant walking through the back alleys and streets on the banks of the Klang River. In my mind's eye I can still behold the remaining charred and jagged walled structures of the riverside Hongkong and Shanghai Bank building, with its roofs gone, bombed out by warplanes.

What I remember most about the war is that people suffered from severe social and economic hardships, especially shortages of foods and other things, and everyone tried to survive. Our main diet was often tapioca or sweet potatoes, gruel, salted fish, and bananas, but rarely meat. Once we were invited by our neighbours to eat "meat", which my aunt took but denied me. It turned out to be cat meat. My aunt said that the neighbours had caught two cats, put them in a sack and killed them with several heavy blows of a stick.

Night time was always shrouded in darkness, as no lights were allowed. People tended to talk in whispers. Plain-clothes detectives were known to frequent the shop below, and the occupants lived in dread as they never knew whether the men were looking for any one of them.

I often looked down from the room window to see Japanese soldiers marching along Campbell Street with their rifles slung on their shoulders, or their officers playing *kendo* in the Harrison and Crosfields building at the junction of Jalan Ampang. Once we left Kuala Lumpur to visit my parents in Fraser's Hill, where my father worked as a clerk in the District Office. There at a coffee shop to which my aunt had brought me to buy pancakes, I saw a drunken Japanese soldier strike her with the butt of his rifle, as he had taken an exceptional dislike to her. Fortunately, she was not severely injured, but a report was later lodged with his superiors. As the war neared its end, my aunt's daughter went to work as a waitress in G.H. Cafe in Jalan Mounbatten, supplementing the meagre allowance my parents sent to my aunt. Then, the war ended and people rejoiced.

When the British troops returned, some of them marched into Jalan Campbell distributing packets of sweets and foodstuffs to children. One night my uncle, his wife and daughter, who was of the same age as me, showed up and occupied the empty cubicle next to ours. Their stay was surrounded by mystery. During the two months they were there, my uncle never went out. We were told not to divulge his presence to strangers. Then, one day a British uniformed soldier showed up on a green motor-cycle and took him away to Pudu Prison. It later transpired that my uncle had worked with the Japanese police during the war. Fearing reprisals, he had decided to give himself up to the military authorities. During this period, Campbell Street was extremely busy, especially with the "jungle folks" — the anti-Japanese "Three Stars" guerrillas — who had come out to the town in large numbers. Wearing their three-cornered caps and khaki uniforms, they marched or moved about in lorries with Sten guns or machine guns mounted on the top of their vehicles. People were unsure about them. Some called them heroes, while others said they were killers who would enter homes and forcibly abduct people who had collaborated with the Japanese. We heard terrible stories of what they had done to their victims.

These are some of the main pictures that I can recall about the wartime period as they remain vivid in my memory. Briefly, they register suffering, hardships, fear, and terror. Most adult memories of the war have more varied and richer experiences than my childhood memories, as Patricia Lim has shown in her survey of autobiographies dealing with the wartime period.¹ But in all these memories about the Japanese Occupation there is one outstanding, unforgettable feature which it aroused in most people: fear and terror. Although as a child, I never knew the full extent of the atrocities and violence which the Japanese Army committed on the people in Malaya, I did sense the dark and oppressive atmosphere of the regime. Those who dismiss the Japanese Occupation as being no different from other war situations are in danger of making an over-generalization, and thereby failing to understand

the special significance that this event has for many people. While comparisons are necessary for a wider perspective, it is also important to understand and see events within their own context.

In this chapter, I present a brief survey of oral and written accounts of the Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore and discuss why moral issues have been in the forefront recently in the public discussions and ceremonies commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II. Japanese Prime Minister Muruyama's unambiguous public apology on 15 August 1995 for Japan's actions during the war reflected how important this issue of morality has been.

The Moral Overtones of War

The literature on World War II is extensive. It is probably only through general summaries and analyses that we can grasp its variety and complexity. I shall divide the literature in so far as it relates to Malaya simply into two broad categories: (a) academic studies; and (b) primary sources relating to the war, such as memoirs, which have provided the basic materials for the academic studies. Moral judgements seem to abound more in the second category than the first. The second category comprises roughly four types of materials:

1. Mainly British and other Allied official histories of war, wartime official reports, war memoirs of military personnel, war crime tribunals' reports, and accounts of prisoners of war;
2. British, Allied, and locally written memoirs/oral recollections of individual citizens;
3. Local reports of community organizations, such as the Kelantan Burma-Thailand "Death Railway" Malay Workers Association, or the Social Committee of the Christian Federation of Malaya, which investigated and compiled lists of missing persons in 1945;
4. Local and foreign newspaper reports.

Malaysian, Singapore, British, and other Western scholars, especially historians, have had to sift through these rich source materials to establish the truth of what had actually happened. In most cases, these sources themselves have narrated how particular events occurred, where and when they occurred, what the consequences were and the various experiences which individuals and groups went through. In fact, many of these sources are in narrative form and can be regarded as real histories as well. What distinguishes the academic studies from these sources is that the former are aimed at investigating, interpreting and establishing some problems or truths in a more scientific way.

The English historian E.H. Carr, while he was critical of the historian becoming "a judge, especially a hanging judge", who assigns to himself/herself the right of judging a historical actor or an event as either good or bad, nevertheless did not deny the historian the right of making moral judgements if he/she is prepared to do so with an even-handed balance:²

Historical facts presuppose some measure of interpretation; and historical interpretations always involve moral judgements — or, if you prefer a more neutral-sounding term, value-judgements. History is a process of struggle, in which results, whether we judge them to be good or bad, are achieved by some groups directly or indirectly — more often directly than indirectly — at the expense of others. The losers pay. Suffering is indigenous in history. Every great period of history has its casualties as well as its victories. This is an exceedingly complicated question, because we have no measure which enables us to balance the greater good of some against the sacrifices of others: yet some such balance must be struck.

History has never been kind to aggressors and tyrants. Thus, in using terms like "aggressors," "atrocities," "massacres," "reign of terror," "high-handed actions" or "sinister motives", one is inevitably making a value-judgement, and making such judgements in history is a controversial issue. There are those who believe that historians — especially practising professional historians in universities — should not indulge in it, while there is probably an equal number who believe otherwise.³

The former would also probably cite the case of the ancient Greek historian Thucydides, who wrote *The Peloponnesian War*⁴, a war in which he fought as a general, but whose account is regarded as being so fair, balanced and unbiased that he cannot be accused of supporting any side, including his own. Arguing against this are those who believe that no historian, not even Thucydides, can be thoroughly objective, for no historian can detach himself completely from the age and the society in which he lives, nor avoid the use of language which is not completely free of value-judgements. Nevertheless, the historian should try to write the best possible history, which must be as "true" as possible.

Very few historians, especially war historians, have been able to achieve such a high degree of objectivity. If it is difficult to expect belligerents in war to be fair and objective in their respective accounts about the other side, it would be nigh to impossible to expect such objectivity from the victims of war. They, more than anyone else, would not hesitate to hand down moral judgements.

But the history of a war is like a battlefield. The task involves not merely the telling or retelling of a story of how victory was won by one side, or how defeat was suffered by the other, but it means fighting the war all over again

in one's mind. In most people's memories, it is usually man's suffering or man's inhumanity towards man that stands out, as the ongoing Bosnian war currently testifies.

The themes of suffering, fear and terror dominate most of the personal memories, both oral and written, of people who lived through the Japanese Occupation. On this occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war, it is essential to establish these common experiences that the Japanese Occupation holds for the multiracial communities in Malaya and Singapore, and assess its impact. From my study of this period, I cannot help but conclude that the Japanese Occupation had produced more negative than positive effects for Malaya and Singapore.

The Impact of the Japanese Occupation

In the last twenty-five years, the Malayan campaign has attracted the greatest interest among British and other Western historians of World War II. The Japanese 25th Army's military victory over the British armed forces in a seventy-day campaign was so shocking that many books and articles have been written to explain how and why Britain suffered such a humiliating defeat. But the story of victory and defeat has always been accompanied by the horrible accounts of Japanese cruelties towards the prisoners of war (POWs) and the local population.⁵ It is the memories of the wartime Japanese treatment of British and other Allied POWs which have partly caused two Japanese Prime Ministers — first, Morihiro Hosokawa in September 1993, and then Muruyama on 14 and 15 August in 1996 — to admit Japan's guilt and express "profound remorse" and "apologies".⁶

A small group of Western, Malaysian and Japanese scholars, however, have been more interested to find out whether the Japanese Occupation had made any significant impact on Malaya. Did it bring about any major changes to Malaya's multiracial society? Most scholars generally agree that the Japanese Occupation was "an event of near cataclysmic proportions in its armed violence and political disruption," and played an important role as a catalyst in ending Western colonial rule in post-war Southeast Asia.⁷ Unlike in Burma and the Philippines which were granted independence by Japan, Malaya's national awakening was aroused more slowly as the Japanese did not allow the Malay nationalist movement a free hand. They feared a premature flare-up would be detrimental to Japanese interests. Scholars have debated whether the Japanese Occupation marked a transformation or merely an interruption of British rule in Malaya.

The Japanese scholar, Yoji Akashi, has been most enthusiastic in advancing the transformation theory, arguing that the Japanese administration

had imbued the Malay civil servants and the Malay nationalists with self-confidence and a militant spirit to take on the British on their return.⁸ The "new élites" thesis has been the key argument of scholars who advocated the transformation idea, but it appears to be true only in the case of Indonesia, and with some qualification, in Malaya, but not in the other countries of Southeast Asia. While my own study does not reject the "new élites" or transformation theory for Malaya, I have found that the overall effects of the Japanese Occupation have been more negative than positive, especially in the area of race relations. This is because the Occupation saw the outbreak of one of the worst Malay-Chinese interracial conflicts in the country, which started in April 1945.⁹

The following is a general survey of some observations of the social and political impact of the Japanese Occupation in Malaya and Singapore, based on current studies available, but these are, of course, not comprehensive and subject to modification:

1. Collaboration was present among all races, but as Willard Elsbree has rightly observed, had there been equal proportions of Chinese and Malays in the resistance as well as in collaboration, "the bitterness which came in the wake of the occupation would not have had such a pronounced racial tinge".¹⁰
2. Although Japanese policies did not deliberately foster racial conflict between the Malays and Chinese, the policies had this effect. Repressive measures against the Chinese led to the formation of a Chinese-dominated resistance movement (the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army, or MPAJA). Japanese "pro-Malay" policy created an undercurrent of resentment and distrust among the Chinese towards the Malays, and Malay co-operation made them appear to be a chosen instrument of the Japanese.
3. As witnessed by the *sook ching*, or large-scale massacres of the Chinese carried out by the Japanese, the Japanese adopted an anti-Chinese policy, under which the Chinese were the most persecuted and oppressed of the three major ethnic communities in Malaya and Singapore because of their strong and vehement anti-Japanese sentiments and resistance before and during the war.
4. The Japanese Occupation led to three undercurrents of political consciousness among the Chinese community: (a) Chinese nationalism; (b) communism; and (c) a Malayan loyalty. The last arose because for the first time the Chinese had to make a commitment to Malaya, to lay down their lives in defence of their families, properties and rights, something they had not been asked to do before the war. The war also tarnished the standing and credibility of the pre-war traditional Chinese leaders who were either forced to collaborate with the Japanese in the Overseas

- Chinese Association, or flee to other countries, so that when the war ended, their places were quickly taken over by young militant leftist Chinese, who were critical of both groups.
5. Indian nationalism was promoted and exploited by the Japanese as part of their plans to invade British-occupied India. But until the formation of Subhas Chandra Bose's Provisional Government of Free India on 21 October 1943, thousands of Indian estate labourers were conscripted for despatch to the Thai-Burmese "Death Railway", and the economic hardships they endured were identical to those of the Malays and Chinese.
 6. The British first organized a resistance movement among the Chinese in the early stages of the war, and only belatedly among the Malays in the latter stages of the war; there was no noticeable resistance movement among the Indians because of their greater involvement in Chandra Bose's Indian National Army.
 7. Japanese wartime economic policies created not only monopolies, smuggling, and black markets but also rampant corruption, a social disease which persisted right into the post-war period.
 8. Important demographic and settlement patterns occurred, with large-scale movements of thousands of Chinese towards jungle fringes and Malay Reservation areas to live and "grow food" for their own survival. These Chinese squatters were eventually resettled during the period of communist insurgency, better known as the Malayan Emergency (1948-60), as their jungle-fringe settlements were easily used as food and recruitment centres by the communist insurgents.¹¹

The range of questions relating to the Japanese Occupation which have attracted the attention of researchers is quite wide. I cannot do justice to this area of studies here. State-by-state case-studies of Japanese administration in Malaya have also been undertaken by many university undergraduate students. But other socio-economic questions which still deserve detailed studies relate to propaganda, newspapers, youth, women's organizations, agriculture, popular culture, and the role of the Indian, Eurasian and Bornean communities.¹²

History Textbooks

The Japanese Occupation period has been incorporated into the history textbooks of Malaysia, but the emphasis has recently changed. For example, in the basic secondary school textbook, *Malaysia Dalam Sejarah*, volume 2, for Form Two, which had been in use for twelve years until 1990, a whole chapter, comprising 27 pages, was devoted to the period. It dealt with the rise of

Japanese militarism, their occupation of Manchuria and China in 1931–39, the reasons for their expansion into Southeast Asia, their attack and defeat of British forces in Malaya, Japanese military rule, the role of the Kempeitai, economic and social hardships, and the respective Japanese policies towards the three major communities — Malays, Chinese and Indians. The role of the Malayan Communist Party and its guerrilla force, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army was given sufficient space. On the Kempeitai, students were told:¹³

Various forms of torture were used to extract confessions. Even those who were innocent were forced to admit they had done wrong. Because of this, the Japanese Occupation was a dark and fearful period for the people.

Regarding Japanese policies towards the respective communities, the textbook narrated that the Japanese were harsh towards the Chinese, killing "hundreds of them", while their treatment of Indians was "better" (*lebih baik*) and their relations with Malays "good" (*baik*).

However, in the new history textbook for secondary schools, *Sejarah Tingkatan 3*, for Form Three, which was introduced in 1990,¹⁴ more emphasis has been given to the Japanese military victory over British forces in the campaign for Malaya, and its contribution to the awakening of Malay nationalism. The book discusses the form of Japanese military administration, its education and economic policies, and hardships during the Occupation. However, the discussion on the reactions of the different communities in Malaya towards Japanese rule is short and shows that there was resistance and resentment from all sides. The MPAJA is given only one line, while the Malay guerrillas in Force 136 are described in greater detail. There is no mention of the Japanese massacres of Chinese in the *sook ching* in Singapore and southern Malaya.

People's Memories of Japan's Black Record

I shall now discuss the category of oral and written accounts of the Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore by private citizens. In most of these accounts about the war in Malaya, Japan emerges, like Darth Vader in Stephen Spielberg's film, *Star Wars*, as the dark, evil force. I need only refer to a few such personal accounts which are quite representative of individual sufferings at the hands of the Japanese: Sybil Karthigasu's *No Dram of Mercy*;¹⁵ Ahmad Murad's *Nyawa di hujung pedang* (Life at the edge of the sword);¹⁶ Tan Thoon Lip's *Kempeitai Kindness*;¹⁷ and N.I. Low's *When Singapore was Syonanto*.¹⁸ These books convey the moral outrage that their authors felt against their Japanese tormentors. Tan Thoon Lip's story is about how he was tortured by

the Kempeitai in Singapore, while Karthigasu's and Ahmad Murad's accounts direct their attacks specifically towards Sergeant Eiko Yoshimura, the head of the Kempeitai in Ipoh, who was brought to trial on 10 February 1946 before the Perak War Crimes Tribunal. Yoshimura was subsequently convicted for brutally ill-treating civilians in his custody, among whom was Sybil Karthigasu, and hanged. There are many more such accounts of tortures and atrocities by Japanese wartime officials, which would be too numerous to list, but suffice it to say that they are all memories which have come to haunt the post-war governments of Japan. Japan's post-war amnesia is a self-admission that it wishes to forget this dark image of itself.

Such a generalization may be countered by those who wish to argue that some good deeds were also performed during wartime Japanese rule. It is undeniable that in several memoirs, there are accounts of a few kind Japanese individuals like Mamoru Shinozaki,¹⁹ or the former students of Thio Chan Bee,²⁰ but their deeds cannot whitewash the black Japanese record. Most of the personal wartime memories are so critical of the Occupation that they constitute a moral indictment which historians cannot but take note. Even Singapore Chinese leader Yap Pheng Geck, while praising Shinozaki's deeds and his memoirs, has this to say about the Japanese regime itself:²¹

I have yet to come across any book which objectively portrays the life of the people during the Japanese occupation — a people who despite untold hardships and sufferings kept up their spirit and their faith that the reign of terror could not last, that the tide of battles must turn and that they would live to see deliverance. Shinozaki must have been sympathetically aware that there was no welcome for Japanese rule in Singapore. His story of Syonan, I think, comes very close to such a book.

It is a timely reminder that people's memories of "a reign of terror" can never be erased from history.

Remembering is important, but equally important is forgetting. What one nation remembers, another chooses to forget. Japan's amnesia about its role in World War II needs to be understood, just as we need to understand why the peoples of China, Korea, the Philippines and others in Southeast Asia cannot forget what Japan did to them.

Japan's Amnesia and the Moral Issue

Japan's amnesia has been confined to the negative and darker aspects of its own role in the war — firstly, as the *aggressor* for launching its attacks on 8 December 1941, on the beach-head of Kota Bahru in northeastern Malaya, preceded by an attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbour without a

declaration of war. Secondly, Japan's amnesia is also related to the issue which has been discussed earlier: what its troops did in the territories which they invaded and occupied — the atrocities, massacres and other Draconian, punitive measures. This official act of forgetting was maintained by the Japanese Government for about forty years until 1982 when the textbook crisis broke. Until then, a young generation of Japanese had grown up without knowing the truth of Japan's wartime role. Prior to the textbook crisis, the Japanese Government had refused to discuss the issue publicly. The controversy related to the version of Japan's wartime military role in Japanese school history textbooks which seemed to whitewash Japan's record. The issue drew both Japanese public and world-wide attention, especially that of two East Asian countries — China and South Korea.

Before the crisis, Japan's Ministry of Education had played down or glossed over its army's wartime role; Japan was portrayed not as the aggressor, but as a victim of circumstances. This amnesia even extended to former army general staff officers in their memoirs. While they were content to talk about military campaigns, victories, their own fame, experiences of governing occupied territories and shame in military defeat, they, however, often stopped short of recalling the darker aspects in which they and their troops had been involved, such as acts of killing, violence and extortion.

Of these memoirs and the official histories which deal with the Malayan campaign and the subsequent Japanese occupation of Malaya and Singapore, Henry Frei has pertinently observed in a brief survey of Japanese written accounts of the war,²² "As in Tsuji's work,²³ the compilers drop their pens when they reach the surrender of Singapore." This is because the massacres of Chinese, better known as the *sook ching* [purification], or in Japanese, the *shuku sei* operation, in Singapore began immediately after the Japanese victory. Between 6,000 (Japanese count)²⁴ and 50,000 (Chinese count)²⁵ Chinese in Singapore and southern Malaya were killed in these operations. Just two days before 15 February 1942 — the date of the fall of Singapore — Japanese troops had committed the massacres of some 400 patients and staff at Alexandra Military Hospital soon after their forces captured Kent Ridge Heights, not far from where the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies building stands. This episode has been well narrated in the memoirs of a Malaysian medical doctor, T.J. Danaraj.²⁶

Yet, it would not be true to say that all the former general staff officers suffered *total* amnesia about their own role or that of the Japanese troops in Singapore and Malaya. A former Japanese commander, Lt. General Manaki, has described the 25th Army's massacres of Chinese in Singapore and Malaya soon after its victory over the British forces on 15 February 1945 as a "dark blot" on the military administration, although he was reluctant to go into the gory details.²⁷ Another top army man, Lt. Col. Fujiwara Iwaichi, has said that

by the atrocities which the Japanese army had committed in Singapore and Malaya, Japan "lost a golden opportunity to show Asians that as an Asian power, she was a kind liberator and friend, who would treat them better than the European powers."²⁸ Of the *sook ching*, Fujiwara wrote in his memoirs:²⁹

There was no room for the Japanese Army to counter-argue the charge of the inhumane murders in which countless Chinese were executed indiscriminately on the beaches, in rubber plantations, and in jungles without investigation or trial. There was no justification for the massacres even if some Chinese had fought against us as volunteers and collaborated with anti-Japanese elements.

Since the textbook crisis, however, younger Japanese and concerned scholars, who yearned to learn the truth about Japan's wartime role, have visited Malaysian villages and towns to investigate Japan's wartime record. Many of them have revealed details of Japanese massacres and atrocities to the Japanese public in several books and newspaper articles.³⁰ While Japan has every year remembered the atom bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima on 6 and 9 August 1945 respectively, in which the Japanese people suffered, the sufferings which Japan had inflicted on others during the war have, however, gone unnoticed. It is only in this year's commemorative ceremony that the Mayor of Nagasaki chose also to remember those who had been killed by Japanese troops in their occupied territories during the war.

The reasons for Japan's forty-year amnesia have to do with the immediate post-war developments in East Asia — which delayed the settling of accounts between the East Asian countries — the two Koreas and China — and Japan. Japan was not defeated militarily in the battlefield but by two atom bombs. The end of the war saw Japan's economy and lands devastated and occupied by American troops. Japan dealt with the demands for reparations with the victor Western powers, but it did not deal directly with the peoples of the East Asian and Southeast Asian countries which its troops had occupied. War crimes trials of many Japanese commanders, junior officers and soldiers were held in Japan and in other countries. This may have seemed punishment enough to the Japanese. But China and Korea were still divided countries which were soon to experience civil wars and had no time to deal with Japan over compensation for the wartime occupation of their countries. As the Cold War heightened, the United States realized that it needed Japan as an ally. Soon, the Korean War broke out and involved both the United States and China on either side of the belligerent parties. This delayed further the settling of accounts between Japan and the East Asian countries, China and Korea, which in recent years have been in the forefront in demands for apologies and settlement of Japanese wartime activities in their respective territories.

War Crimes Trials and Reparations: Exorcism

In Southeast Asia, the war crimes trials of Japanese military personnel, such as General Yamashita in Manila and other commanders in Singapore and Malaya, did go some way to diffuse the psychological trauma which most peoples in these territories suffered. But the demand for compensation and apologies for wartime Japanese acts went on unabated. In Singapore and Malaya, these campaigns reached their climax in 1963 when both territories merged to form the Federation of Malaysia. On 13 September 1963, the Confederation of the Chinese Chambers of Commerce in Malaysia, including Singapore, passed a resolution to claim M\$10 million from Japan for each state, totalling \$130 million, as compensation for the "blood-debt" suffered by victims in Malaya. The governments of Malaysia and Singapore agreed separately to bring their "blood-debt" claims to the Japanese Government. The latter, however, argued that both Singapore and Malaysia were under British rule during the war, and therefore both governments did not have the right to make further claims. Both governments, however, rejected Japan's reply and pursued their respective claims.³¹

Finally, as the campaigns grew in intensity, Japan agreed to make a gift and a loan of S\$25 million to Singapore. Japan also agreed to present Malaysia with M\$25 million for the purpose of purchasing two ocean-going vessels from Japan, which Malaysia was willing to accept. After protracted negotiations, then Malaysian Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, agreed to accept the M\$25 million gift as the final and complete settlement of the unpleasant events of World War II. The Tunku signed the memorandum of understanding with the Japanese Ambassador. In Singapore, a memorial to the civilian victims of the Japanese Occupation was unveiled on 15 February 1972 by then Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, on a four and a half acre piece of land donated by the government and whose building costs were financed by donations collected by a committee under the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce. These gestures helped towards purging many of the "wartime ghosts" which haunted the peoples of Malaysia and Singapore.³²

Politics of Memory of the War

The war crimes trials and Japanese settlement of the reparations issue with Malaysia and Singapore may, therefore, be regarded as having gone some way to assuage the pain and bitter experiences of the peoples of Malaysia and Singapore who had suffered during the war. Thus, although state commemorative ceremonies were more marked in Singapore than Malaysia, this did not mean that most people had forgotten about the war. Remembering

also brought pain. Some people still had memories that were too unpleasant to be recalled, and did so reluctantly, as the English-language newspaper the *Star* disclosed in its weekly series of oral recollections of individuals who had lived through the Japanese Occupation. The series of four-page articles began in mid-July and climaxed around the date of the anniversary in August,³³ although later in October it started another series of secondary school students' accounts and interviews of old people's memories of the war.³⁴ The Penang Chinese newspaper, *Kwong Wah Jit Pau*, also held a photographic exhibition on the war at its premises.

On 25 October at a symposium entitled, "The Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1942-1945" [*Pendudukan Jepun Di Tanah Melayu, 1942-45*], apparently held to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war, several Malay personalities remarked that the Occupation had been a "catalyst" to achieve Malayan independence, and should not be viewed negatively. The former Chief Secretary to the Government, Tan Sri Abdullah Salleh, said that although there were Malaysians who had fallen victims to the Japanese, yet the Japanese had inspired the anti-colonial spirit. Today, Malaysia used Japan as a model of industrial development, he said.³⁵ On the night of 2 November, the Malaysian King, Tuanku Jaafar, attended a fiftieth anniversary gathering of war veterans, their families and Armed Forces personnel at the Stadium Negara. It was reported that some Chinese war veterans also attended, although their former military organizations were not identified.³⁶

Some observers have attributed the low-key mood on the fiftieth anniversary largely to the attitude of the Malaysian Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Although his government did not lay down any policy on the issue, it was recalled that Dr Mahathir in early 1994 had told the visiting Japanese Prime Minister Muruyama that he felt there was no need for Japan to keep apologizing over its conduct in the war. This was seen as being sympathetic to Japan with whom Malaysia currently enjoys a warm political and economic friendship. Dr Mahathir is said to be a popular figure in Japan. For about a decade, starting from 1981, Dr Mahathir had adopted the "Look East" policy to learn from Japan, South Korea and Taiwan their strategies to economic success.³⁷ In addition, Japanese direct investments in Malaysia during the latter part of this period had risen spectacularly. This shift was due largely to the rise in the value of the yen and the increasing costs of labour and production in Japan itself.³⁸ Since business and cultural relations between Malaysia and Japan were good, it was believed that politically the Malaysian Government would not welcome any criticisms or cause embarrassment to the Japanese. Moreover, despite Japan's reluctance to join the Malaysian-proposed East Asia Economic Caucus, and the slow pace of Japanese manufacturing firms in carrying out technology transfer to their Malaysian partners, Japan's trade and investments were considered so important that it was felt that nothing should be done to harm existing ties with it.

The local press presented the fiftieth anniversary celebrations as a mainly Western affair, reflecting it as a concern of the United States, Britain, Australia and New Zealand, whose wartime troops had suffered much at the hands of the Japanese Army.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have been concerned to show that the issue of morality is part of the memory and history of World War II. I have also attempted to show how Japan's amnesia had placed it outside of morality, or of a moral order. The moral judgements on Japan's wartime massacres and atrocities which exist in countless oral and written accounts of the peoples of East Asia and Southeast Asia, including Malaysia and Singapore, have now been acknowledged to be justified. Japan's acknowledgement of moral responsibility for these wartime acts shows that the moral issue cannot be removed from history.

Moreover, in Malaysia the official memory of the war is also tied up with Malaysia's internal and international politics. Malay political primacy requires an agenda to show up Malay wartime roles and experiences over those of other communities, and accord recognition to Japan's wartime support of Malay nationalist aspirations. Although Chinese experiences of suffering, hardships and brutality at the hands of the Japanese Army cannot be denied, the government is determined not to remember and turn them into martyrs or victims of Japanese atrocities and the communist-dominated anti-Japanese Chinese guerrillas into heroes. Consequently, for the purpose of strengthening its economic ties with Japan, with whom it has been on very good terms, the Malaysian Government, therefore, refused to play up Japan's wartime "bad guy" role and is content to forget it. Instead, it was more concerned and vocal about the Serbs' "ethnic cleansing" of Bosnian Muslims during the Bosnian War, and consistently urged the world not to forget it.

The campaign in the 1960s for Japanese payment of "blood debt" money, which eventually led to a negotiated settlement in 1963 between the Japanese Government, on the one hand, and both the Malaysian Government under Tunku Abdul Rahman, and the Singapore Government under Lee Kuan Yew, on the other, did go some way to assuage the moral anger of the Chinese and other communities in the two territories. In the post-war period in Malaysia and Singapore, war crimes trials of Japanese soldiers and officers had also been held. But it was the Tunku's acceptance of the 1963 settlement as "final and complete" which may also account for the fact that the case against Japan is now being regarded by most people in Malaysia as closed. Furthermore, on the special occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war, the

Japanese Government accepted moral responsibility for the atrocities its troops had conducted during the war. This openness and readiness to accept moral responsibility makes it easier now for others not only to forgive and forget, but for the Japanese people themselves to face and accept the historical truth about Japan's dark role during World War II, about which the rest of the world had already known.

Notes

1. See P. Lim Pui Huen, "Memoirs of War in Malaya", *Malaya and Singapore During the Japanese Occupation*, edited by Paul H. Kratoska, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Special Issue (Singapore, 1995), pp. 121–47.
2. E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Pelican, 1980), p. 79.
3. Within pre-war and post-war British historiography, the debate over historians making moral judgements was quite heated. Lord Acton was known for making overt moral judgements, while Herbert Butterfield and A.J.P. Taylor strongly opposed the practice. For Herbert Butterfield's critique of moral judgements, see his book, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1950), pp. 107–32.
4. See Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, translated by Rex Warner (London: Penguin, 1972).
5. The best-known account is that by Lord Russell of Liverpool entitled *The Knights of Bushido: A Short History of Japanese War Crimes Illustrated* (London: Corgi Books, 1967). The book, which has gone into several reprints, describes Japanese atrocities perpetrated in the last war, particularly to POWs, including murders, mutilation, vivisection and even cannibalism. See also Hank Nelson, *Prisoners of War: Australians Under Nippon* (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1985).
6. See the report, "Japan's first formal apology", *New Straits Times*, 16 August 1995.
7. The best overview of the debate is given by Alfred W. McCoy in his introduction to a volume of essays which he edited, entitled *Southeast Asia Under Japanese Occupation*. Monograph Series No. 22 (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1980).
8. See Yoji Akashi, "The Japanese Occupation of Malaya: Interruption or Transformation?" in *ibid.*, pp. 65–90.
9. See Cheah Boon Kheng, "The Social Impact of the Japanese Occupation of Malaya (1942–1945)", in *ibid.*, pp. 91–124. See also my book, *Red Star Over Malaya*, 2nd. edition (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1987), Introduction, p. xiv, in which I argue that when compared to the number of people killed and the areas affected during the post-Japanese surrender interregnum of 1945, the May 1969 race riots in Malaysia pale into insignificance.
10. W.H. Elsabee, *Japan's Role in Southeast Asian National Movements, 1940–45* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 149.
11. See Victor Purcell, *Malaya: Communist or Free?* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1948),

- p. 73; and Kernial Singh Sandhu, "The Saga of the Malayan Squatter", *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 5 (1964).
12. Such historical studies have been undertaken at the National University of Singapore as well as in most Malaysian universities. The Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang has an oral history project on the Japanese Occupation of the northern Malay states of Perlis, Kedah, Penang and Perak. Dr Stephen Leong of Universiti Malaya and Dr Abu Talib Ahmad of Universiti Sains Malaysia have taught courses on the Japanese Occupation of Southeast Asia.
 13. See, M. Thambirajah, *Malaysia Dalam Sejarah*, Vol. 2 (Kuala Lumpur: Federal Publications), p. 181.
 14. Written by Sabihah Osman, Muzaffar Tate and Ishak Ibrahim, and published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1990, pp. 1–20.
 15. First published in 1954 and then republished in 1983 by Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur.
 16. Published by the author and printed at Khee Meng Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1959. Although Murad's story is presented in a semi-fictional form, many of the Japanese names are those of real persons who served in Perak.
 17. Published by Malayan Law Journal, Singapore, in 1946.
 18. This book was published by Eastern Universities Press Sdn Bhd., Singapore, in 1973 and was largely based on an earlier book entitled, *This Singapore*, jointly written with H.M. Cheng, and privately printed and distributed in 1947. It was reprinted by Times Books International in 1995.
 19. Shinozaki was an officer of the wartime Singapore Municipality who risked his life to help many people from being arrested and detained by the dreaded military police, the Kempeitai. See his memoirs, *Syonan — My Story: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore* (Singapore: Asia Pacific Press, 1975).
 20. Thio was a schoolteacher who had taught Japanese boys in pre-war days, one of whom was Joseph Nanao Tsutada, who returned with the invading Japanese Army to Singapore. He issued a protection certificate to Thio to ensure that he would not be harmed by Japanese troops. See the account in Thio's autobiography, *Extraordinary Adventures of an Ordinary Man* (London: Grosvenor Books, 1977), p. 37.
 21. See Yap's introduction to Shinozaki's memoirs, *Syonan — My Story*, p. xii.
 22. See Henry P. Frei's article, "Japan Remembers the Malayan Campaign", *Malaya and Singapore During the Japanese Occupation*, edited by Paul H. Kratoska, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Special Issue (Singapore, 1995), pp. 148–68.
 23. This English version of his work first appeared as *Singapore: The Japanese Version* (Sydney: Ure Smith Pty Ltd., 1960). Oxford University Press reissued it as a paperback in 1988, re-titled *Singapore 1941–1942: The Japanese Version of the Malayan Campaign of World War II*.
 24. The figure of 6,000 is given in Shinozaki, *Syonan — My Story*, p. 25.
 25. The Chinese figures are found in Li Tieh Min, et al., *Ta chan yu Nan-ch'ao (Ma-lai-ia chih pu)* [The World War and the Overseas Chinese in Nanyang — The Malaya Section], (Singapore: Singapore New Nanyang Publications Company on behalf of the General Association of Nanyang Overseas Chinese, 1947); and Chen Su Lan, *Remember Pompong and Oxley Rise* (Singapore: Chen Su Lan Trust, 1969), pp. 185–87, and 271, which cites the figure of 50,000.

26. T.J. Danaraj, *Japanese Invasion of Malaya and Singapore: Memoirs of a Doctor* (Kuala Lumpur, 1990). See Chap. 15, "The Massacre at Alexandra Military Hospital."
27. See Yoji Akashi, "Japanese Policy Towards the Malayan Chinese, 1941-1945", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 1, no. 2 (September 1970): 61-89.
28. In an interview with me in Tokyo, February 1976.
29. General Fujiwara Iwaichi, *E. Kikan: Japanese Army Intelligence Operations in Southeast Asia during World War II* (Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1983), p. 193.
30. See Henry Frei's article, "Japan Remembers the Malayan Campaign", in Kratoska, op. cit., pp. 148-68. Among Japanese intellectuals who have begun to scrutinize the history of the Malayan campaign more critically are historian Ienaga Saburo and schoolteachers Kobayashi Masahiro and Takashima Nobuyoshi, all of whom have written books detailing "the Chinese killing fields at the end of the Malayan campaign" based on their own field trips and investigations in Malaya.
31. See Chua Ser-Koon's Introduction to the collection of Colonel Chuang Hi-Tsuan's papers which she edited, entitled *Malayan Chinese Resistance to Japan 1937-1945 - Selected Source Materials* (most of the papers are in Chinese), (Singapore: Cultural and Historical Publishing House Pte Ltd., 1984), p. 87.
32. Ibid.
33. See the *Sunday Star*, 16 July, 23 July, 30 July, 6 August, and 14 August 1995.
34. See the issues of the *Sunday Star*, 23 October, 29 October, 5 November 1995.
35. See *Utusan Malaysia* report, "Kedatangan Jepun pemangkin kesedaran politik", 26 October 1995.
36. See *Utusan Malaysia*, and the *New Straits Times*, 3 November 1995.
37. Wendy A. Smith, "Japanese Cultural Images in Malaysia: Implications of the 'Look East' Policy", in *Japan and Malaysian Development: In the Shadow of the Rising Sun*, edited K.S. Jomo (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 335-63.
38. See Makoto Anazawa, "Japanese Manufacturing Investment in Malaysia", in *Japan and Malaysian Development: In the Shadow of the Rising Sun*, pp. 75-101.

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Part II
COMMUNITY AND MEMORY



CHAPTER 3

The Malay Community and Memory of the Japanese Occupation

Abu Talib Ahmad*

Introduction

Kalau Jepun lebih lama di Yan mereka boleh mengajar kita bermacam-macam. Mereka tidak kedekut macam orang putih. Sayang! Mereka tidak lama di Yan. Banyak mereka lakukan untuk penduduk Yan.

Kalau dibandingkan dengan British, bukan depa [mereka] peduli sangat tentang kampung kita.¹

World War II and the Japanese Occupation evoked different reactions (and memory) from the various races in Malaysia and from different social stratas within each racial group. In varying degrees, all races were subjected to Japanese brutalities and atrocities although for various reasons the ethnic Chinese bore the brunt of the Japanese physical, and often deadly, assaults. For those who survived the period, the experience and the lessons, if any, will be difficult to forget. Few of them would forgive the Japanese or their local, more opportunistic, clients. Many Chinese belonging to the older generations, if not most of them, still refuse to meet Japanese nationals. It was only recently that Japanese scholars, including a colleague of mine, were able to interview survivors such as those from the Parit Tinggi (Kuala Pilah) massacre.² The case of an old Chinese gentleman in Penang who, to this day, refuses to use any Japanese products, an action that must be extremely difficult in the present borderless world of Japanese consumer goods, is perhaps an isolated case but one that should be respected if only for his conviction. Then there are those who hold warm memories of the period, the atrocities and the deprivations notwithstanding, such as many Malays of the older generation who still remember *Kimigayo*, the Japanese national anthem and other songs as well as phrases in Japanese that they had picked up in their school days.

This chapter attempts to look into the memory of the war and the Occupation which affected the Malay community, particularly the ordinary Malays. The discussion, done on a very selective basis and based on equally selective memory of the participants, will focus on six aspects, namely, school days and songs, forced labour, *jikeidan* (self-defence corp) and village mobilization, Malays and the grow-more-food campaign, Japanese policies towards Islam, and a micro study of Yan district in Kedah, referred to at the beginning of this chapter.

Since the 1970s a steady stream of memoirs and autobiographies of prominent Malay leaders in various fields have been issued. These published accounts do make references to the period and its significance to Malaysian history, if only indirectly, as well as their subjects' personal career after 1945. Yet there are also those which discuss the period as if it was irrelevant and inconsequential, something that should be forgotten and dismissed out of hand.³ In those cases when the social and economic conditions of 1942–45 were dealt with, the coverage often did not delve into the lives of those ordinary Malays who had to face the Japanese rule in their own way, very different from Abdul Razak Hussein, then a government official in Pahang (later Tun Razak who became Premier) or Abdul Samad Ahmad, a journalist with *Perubahan Baru* (the new name of the pre-war newspaper *Warta Malaya*) and radio broadcaster in Kuala Lumpur. I am not saying that both were oblivious to the plight of the Malay masses during this period, as both of them did discuss the socio-economic situation and its impact on the ordinary Malays. Nevertheless, Abdul Samad's wedding *kenduri* (feast), held at both the bride's place in Hulu Langat and at the groom's house in Kelang was certainly "luxurious" compared to the weddings of other ordinary Malays at the time! To fathom the memory of the ordinary Malays one would have to interview them or, in the case of this paper, utilize studies such as those undertaken by student-researchers that were, wholly or in part, based on memory and reminiscences. Most of these are yet to be published.⁴

As a focus of research, the Japanese Occupation has managed to attract a fair amount of scholarly attention from undergraduates, either in the form of academic exercises or the much shorter academic exercises which students prefer to call mini-theses, most of which remain unpublished. These studies do not depart substantially from the already established framework. They do, however, pose challenges to the many accepted assumptions supported by a wealth of documentary, and especially oral evidence. One such study that has left an indelible imprint in my mind, partly because of its recent origin, is Hamdan Mohd Ali's "Sejarah Hubungan Etnik di Bekor, 1940–46 (Satu Kajian Kes Perselisihan Kaum Pada 6 Mac 1946)" [History of Ethnic Relations in Bekor, 1940–46 (A Study of the Racial Clashes of 6 March 1946)].⁵ Among other things, Hamdan highlighted the issue that Malay support for the MPAJA

(Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army) during wartime was no guarantee that the same Malays would be spared from retributions in the racial violence that broke out in early 1946, and the involvement of Japanese soldiers in fomenting racial violence in the Bekor (Kuala Kangsar district) incident.

Equally interesting and valuable are the much shorter papers written for a history course, "HST 422: The Japanese Occupation of Southeast Asia," that I have taught at Universiti Sains Malaysia since the late 1980s. These short studies were written mainly, though not exclusively, based on oral evidence. They cover a range of topics traversing a wide geographical area, racial groups and different stratas within each racial group. Some of the specific issues discussed include the wartime media and Japanese propaganda, forced labour within and outside Malaya, language teaching and learning, life in the villages and estates, and one case of a *bumiputera* (son of the soil) woman in Sabah who was forced to become a sex slave to the Japanese, besides the usual social conditions and economic deprivations experienced by the local population. This paper utilizes mainly this last type of material besides the published studies, memoirs and archival materials located at the Johor Archive.

School Days: *Kimigayo*, *Saikere* and Songs

School Days and Students

Dalam dasarnya tidak ada apa dilakukan oleh Jepun dalam soal pendidikan apatah lagi membawa perubahan pesat dalam bidang ini melainkan satu perubahan ialah berkumandangnya nyanyian-nyanyian dalam bahasa Jepun oleh murid-murid sekolah.⁶

In the numerous short studies that I have read, school days managed to hold a special place in the memory of those within the 60–66 age group. Student researchers who interviewed members of this generation often took note of the excitement shown by respondents when they were asked to comment on various aspects of their school life under the "rule of the *samurai*". Quite often, some of them would burst into impromptu humming of a few bars of Japanese songs. One student researcher even managed to come back with some of these songs on tape!

All these students during the Japanese Occupation remember the rigid discipline of *Kimigayo*, *saikere* and *raijo taiso*. Daily at eight (Tokyo time) on every school day, the students and their teachers and other employees of the school would congregate at the school field which served as the assembly hall. Standing stiffly and facing east in the direction of Tokyo and the Imperial Palace, they would sing *Kimigayo*, followed by *saikere*, or taking a deep bow

towards the Imperial Palace as a mark of reverence to the supposedly divine Showa Tenno, and lastly to undertake *rajio taiso*, or mass light exercise, to the accompaniment of catchy music.⁷ These were new experiences for the students but an enjoyable one and performed just like it was done in Japan before and during the war. Elsewhere in Perlis, *Kimigayo* was followed by other patriotic songs, often sung with gusto by the students and less so by the more mature teaching staff.⁸ This does not imply that teachers remember less. On the contrary, many of them could still recall some of the songs much better than their students; they could even remember some of the lyrics and their meaning.

In the regimented school life, discipline was of paramount importance. And so was respect — respect for the teachers, for the elders, and for the Japanese. All actions and words were aimed at instilling *Nippon seishin* (literally translated, and now universally accepted, as Japanese spirit). Students were constantly lectured on *seishin* and what it meant in class and outside school. They were reminded to do things in the proper manner so that they became mechanical. In the classroom, they had to stand upright when answering a question, when asking permission to leave the room, when informing the teacher of their return to class, or when they went for gardening and physical exercise.⁹

So what did they learn, other than discipline and *seishin*? Firstly, they were taught Bahasa Melayu (Malay language), arithmetic, hygiene and writing in Rumi and Jawi (Malay written in the Roman and Arabic) scripts — just as in pre-war days. The new additions were *Nippon-go* (Japanese language), a hasty replacement of the English language, gardening, *taiso*, and plenty of songs. In sports, *sumo* (Japanese wrestling) and Japanese-style tug of war were introduced, which became a feature at student *taikai* (sports meet) that were regularly held.¹⁰ Very often, *Nippon-go* was taught by Malay teachers who were slightly better than their students, who were taught basic grammar and the rudiments of reading and writing, mainly in *katakata*, before progressing to *hiragana* and the more difficult *kanji* (Chinese characters). *Katakana* was used extensively in textbooks, especially for the elementary and intermediate levels. Gardening was a new addition and its introduction reflected the Malayan Military Administration's (MMA) double-pronged objectives in food production campaigns, with the immediate one, to produce more food for Malai (Malaya), and in the long term, to produce a more dedicated cadre of farmers to serve the Co-prosperity Sphere. Schools were required to provide plots of land for their students, even at the expense of disfiguring the school field. Before the start of each gardening session, students were to sing the relevant patriotic songs such as the following:

Kami orang Tani
Buat kerja hari-hari

*Tanam ubi keladi
Untuk makan petang pagi
Orang tani orang mulia
Orang yang dicinta
Orang yang menurut segala perintah
Maju, maju.¹¹*

As the Occupation dragged on, the realities of war, with its shortages of food, clothing and medicine, began to affect school life. Diseases and malnutrition took a heavy toll on attendance. Never mind that those who made it to school came in tattered clothing; it was just impossible to be otherwise! Many children dropped out of school to help their families in food production, to work as labourers to supplement family incomes, or were kept at home by their parents to minimize costs.¹² For the Malim Nawar Malay School, Zaharah Hamzah found only about 8–10 students, out of the initial 40, who remained in school at the end of war.

Teaching Staff

How do teachers remember the same period? Most teachers continued their pre-war vocation because of several reasons, such as economic need, a sense of patriotism to keep the school system functioning for the benefit of the rural Malay children, and coercion. Undeniably, economic pressure was the most important factor. The 71-year-old Kidam Saamin, then barely 20, told Safie Ibrahim that he was attracted to continue teaching because of the rations provided, on top of the RM60 monthly salary, which consisted of rice, salt, prawn paste (*belacan*), and cigarettes. For non-smokers like him, the cigarettes could be disposed of in the black market for a handsome profit.¹³ Those with large families had to take on other jobs, especially planting padi to supplement their income. In remote Pasir Mas (Kelantan), and especially in schools that had a small student enrolment, teachers took turns to come to class, and worked as part-time farmers on other days so as to supplement their income.¹⁴

Teachers were also encouraged to learn *Nippon-go*, and many were required to attend regular language classes. If some complained of coercion by their respective principals and the education office, others did so out of personal interest. In the northern state of Perlis, Kangar town became the centre for Malay teachers in their state to acquire *Nippon-go* by attending afternoon classes a few days a week. Quite often, what they learned in one afternoon was later imparted to their students the following day. That is why, as recorded by Izani Ibrahim, the students claimed that their teachers were only slightly better than them as far as *Nippon-go* was concerned. Others such as Mohamad Haji Hashim, from the Beseri Malay School in Perlis, were sent

to Alor Setar to acquire *Nippon-go*. Besides language, this former teacher and his group had to take part in military drill daily at 1.30 p.m. to acquire *seishin*, and were taught the *silat* (Malay art of self-defence). At the end of the four-month course, students were examined in Bahasa Melayu, composition, arithmetic and *Nippon-go*, and each awarded a certificate accordingly.

In Melaka, Kidam Saamin acquired *Nippon-go* at the Koa Kunrenjo (East Asia Training Institute), then based at the Kubu Malay School. He was one of the fifty odd trainees in his batch who were taught *Nippon-go* as well as given lectures in Japanese on discipline and *seishin*. Kidam still remembers two of his teachers. One was a Japanese lady who had converted to Islam and took the name Maimunah (Munah San), and the other was Abdul Ghaffar Baba (Ghaffar San), who became a prominent Malay politician after 1957 (among other things, he was a Chief Minister of Melaka). In his recent autobiography, the former Deputy Prime Minister did not elaborate much on his stint at the Kunrenjo.

Teachers who came from Perak, or who were teaching in that state at the time, could still remember their training days at the Ipoh Shihan Gakko (Ipoh Normal School), then located at the Ipoh Convent. This school offered two courses, the six-month course, mainly for youths with potential, and the three-month course, mainly for teachers. In both courses, students had to undergo intensive *Nippon-go* lessons, military drill and the cultivation of *seishin*. Trainees for the three-month course were provided with a monthly allowance of RM20 and dormitory accommodation. At the beginning of their course, they had to take an oath.¹⁵ What the oath was about is unclear as none of the student researchers solicited further details. Perhaps the respondents had forgotten what it was! The teachers were required to master *Nippon-go* besides being taught subjects like arithmetic, music and grammar. After three months, they were each given a certificate. One of them, Hashim Yeop of Ipoh, was from the fourth batch and he graduated on 1 May 1944. This 73-year-old former teacher still reverently keeps the certificate awarded to him on that May day and was kind enough to provide a copy to student researcher Norishah Mat Din.

Perhaps the experience of another Ipoh Shihan Gakko graduate, Mohd Nazir Naim, is most unique, an experience he still remembers to this day. Born in 1916 in Kelang, Selangor, Mohd Nazir later studied at the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC). He was a teacher at the college when the Japanese 24th Army rolled into Malaya after 8 December 1941. He did not go back to teaching immediately after the Occupation: he only did so after the failure of his fish business. He was later assigned to the Kuala Kangsar Malay School and selected to attend the Shihan Gakko. Mohd Nazir's arrival at the school was certainly memorable. He arrived with his head shaved in fulfilment of a vow he had made earlier, and this pleased the Japanese

instructors enormously who shouted "*Nippon Seishin Ippai!*" (full of Japanese spirit). Each day before class, students were required to undertake gardening. A normal day's work would include *Nippon-go* lessons, Japanese songs, and lectures in Japanese on various aspects of the administration. *Nippon-go* lessons took up most of their time but they were also required to take up sports that included *sumo*, *judo* and *kendo* (Japanese fencing).¹⁶

Mohd Nazir's teaching life was actually a series of courses which he grudgingly went through. Upon graduation from the Ipoh Shihan Gakko, he taught at Kuala Kangsar but was soon recalled by his recent Alma Mater to assume a teaching position. His specialization was mathematics, and one of his colleagues, and also room-mate, was Hamdan Sheikh Tahir, a product of Clifford School (Kuala Kangsar) and Raffles College (but disrupted by the invasion) who had joined the teaching staff earlier (Tun Hamdan is presently the Governor of Penang). Mohd Nazir recalled that teachers were given responsibilities rotated on a weekly basis, during which they also acted as the principal. For that particular week when he was on duty, every day he had to address the school assembly, in Japanese of course, immediately after *Kimigayo* and the flag-raising ceremony. The speech would touch on the need of the trainees to observe rules, punctuality, and personal hygiene. To check for grammatical errors, he would ask Hamdan to go through the speech the previous night. Mohd Nazir remembers that discipline was strictly enforced regardless of the students' background. He also recalled that he tried to be fair to all.

After six months at Ipoh, Mohd Nazir (and Hamdan) were ordered to attend the Singapore Shihan Gakko, although the course was not very different from the one in Ipoh. After Singapore, he was directed to the Kajang Shihan Gakko, where he studied for another three months. He remembers the life in Kajang as much more regimented, where students were not allowed to go home even on weekends, as in Ipoh or Singapore. They were served food similar to those served to the Japanese staff and were barred from bringing in food acquired during their weekend sojourns to the town. Kajang was also memorable for its strict discipline: its gardening classes had to be taken seriously as it formed an important component for the cultivation of *seishin*. After Kajang, Mohd Nazir was scheduled to go to Tokyo but the surrender on 15 August 1945 saved him from another lengthy separation from his family.

What about teaching in school? The subjects taught — Bahasa Melayu, arithmetic, hygiene and writing — were essentially a legacy of the pre-war period. However, there were additions to suit the time, in particular *Nippon-go*, gardening, *taiso* and plenty of songs, both in Japanese and Malay. Teachers were required to provide supervision in gardening, and they were also encouraged to work their allotted plots. Hajah Embun Haji Ali adamantly

refused to do her bit as she was convinced it was merely for the benefit of the Japanese.¹⁷ Like their charges, teachers also had to take part in the trinity of *Kimigayo*, *saikere* and *rajo taiso*. One of them was publicly slapped by a Japanese officer because he was a trifle slow in his *saikere*, despite the fact that teachers were generally a respected lot under Japanese rule.¹⁸ As for *Nippon-go*, the teachers do recall that their students were able to pick up the language fairly quickly.

As for religious instructions, former teacher Mustafa Abu Bakar of Perlis recall that religious teachers were given freedom to continue instruction on Islam, but *Nippon-go* had to be taught too. This 80-year-old ex-teacher also recalled the mushrooming of religious schools in Arau (Sekolah Agama Alawiyah), and *pondok* schools at Bohor Mali, Kuala Perlis, Sanglang and Tambun Tulang. *Kimigayo* and *saikere* were compulsory even for religious schools, although enforcement was perhaps less rigid.

Songs

In schools, Japanese as well as Malay songs were an integral part of the educational landscape. Teachers were taught these songs which they later imparted to their students. Many teachers, including the recalcitrant Hajah Embun, still remember at least a few bars of these songs, while Muhyiddin Dato' Habib was even better — he could remember all of "Fuji san" (Fuji mountain) and "Aikoku no Hana" (Flower of Patriotism). In fact, this 67-year-old former teacher from Perlis still keeps a small book that contains fifteen Japanese songs that he used to teach to school children during the Occupation. He was kind enough to provide a copy to student-researcher Shaballah Zainal Abidin. Through these songs, children, as well as teachers, were taught *seishin*, patriotism and respect for the Japanese soldiers.

Safie Ibrahim had interviewed three former students, all from the same village and who had all learnt *Nippon-go* in Jasin, Melaka. According to them, Japanese songs were easy to remember and very appealing to the young. For them, it was these songs that made school life enjoyable. Safie was mildly surprised when he found the three informants falling into an impromptu rendition of some Japanese tunes during that particular interview, perhaps to impress him. Some student researchers managed to note down the songs (in Roman script), although I found most to be unintelligible Japanese. As Hajah Embun recalled, teachers did not pay much attention to correct pronunciation: some semblance of a similar sound would suffice. In Sungai Acheh, Province Wellesley, 73-year-old (in 1991) Ibrahim Cheek, the local *jikeidan* chief, was convinced that a mastery of these songs would help in his dealings with the Japanese. He tried to learn these songs, including *Kimigayo*, from the village

children.¹⁹ Through these songs, children (and adults too) were taught to ape Japan and the Japanese, and to despise the West. From his three informants, Safie Ibrahim recorded the following song:

Awalah Inggeris — Amerika
Musuh diseluruh Asia
Dia mahu membodohkan kita
Dengan bersukaan hatinya
Hancurkan Hancurkan, musuh kita musuh kita
*Itulah Inggeris dan Amerika.*²⁰

Songs, especially Malay songs, were an important component of the Japanese propaganda machine that was targetted at the masses, especially the rural Malays. These propaganda activities were handled by the Junkai Sendentai (Travelling Propaganda Corp). In Perlis, one such corp was headed by a school teacher and its star performer was also a teacher.²¹ The group travelled within Perlis and to Kedah, Penang, Perak, and even across the border to Siam. Abdul Latif, the star of the team, could memorize thirty Japanese songs at one time, thus endearing himself to the Japanese. As recorded by Shaballah, this former teacher could still sing two of them, "Tokyo Undo" (Tokyo exercise) and "Haru ga Kita" (Spring has come). The group would often hold shows on auspicious occasions, such as the Emperor's birthday and after the harvest, in school fields. These songs, Japanese or Malay, sought to glorify Japan, to justify the presence of its soldiers in this country, and to denounce British colonialism. The following is an example of such songs:²²

Apa British buat
Tanam getah
Tidak boleh makan
Mesti tanam padi
Boleh makan
Jepun pandai
British bodoh.

As these songs were sung, a Japanese soldier would keep changing pictures that were projected on a screen so that the audience would not miss the intended message. Abdul Latif also performed short sketches, each 20–30 minutes in length, spiced liberally with songs. Both sketches and songs had to get clearance from the army censors. In essence, the songs praise the *Nippon Jin* (Japanese) and denounced the West, especially Malai's previous colonial master. As there was no other entertainment in those days, the travelling shows proved to be extremely popular in the rural areas, despite its intrinsic propagandistic nature.

Forced Labour

The forced labour issue, perhaps the most controversial aspect of the Occupation for the rural Malays, is still very much alive in the memory of those affected. From the numerous short studies and published accounts, two types of forced labour could be identified. The first type is related to the construction of the Burma-Siam railway (Death Railway) undertaken between late 1942 and early 1943. The railway traversed 450 kilometres of dense, inhospitable jungle and rugged terrain. It is estimated conservatively that 250,000 labourers, mainly from Southeast Asia, including 60,000 from Malaya (including Chinese and Indians) besides the 60,000 prisoners-of-war (668 of them Americans),²³ were co-opted, in most cases by force, deception and coercion. As a result of the atrocious working and living conditions, together with the inhospitable climate, 25 per cent of them perished, with most never given a decent burial. The second type, more prevalent and often overlooked, is related to labouring within the peninsula, mainly for army-related construction or agricultural projects. It could be semi-permanent or temporary but, like the first type, direct and indirect coercion was used by the Japanese and their local proxies — the *penghulu* (head of a circle of villages or *mukim*, but in Kelantan, the village chief is also known as *penghulu*), village heads and chiefs of the local *jikeidan*. In the numerous short studies, student researchers wrote of the labourers who remember vividly how they were co-opted, the long journey to the work sites (in the case of the Death Railway labourers), working conditions, life in the camp, as well as Japanese brutalities and atrocities that knew no bounds. For the record, they never differentiated or were aware that some of these “Japanese” were actually Koreans. For those who attempted to escape, the experience was equally traumatic. A few recall of the heart-breaking moments when they had to leave behind incapacitated colleagues just to save their own skins.

*Forced Labour: Type One*²⁴

For the first type of labourers, the controversy and the ordeal began right from the beginning — the method of recruitment. Those involved recall the massive use of deception and coercion undertaken by the Japanese army, with the connivance of the *penghulu* (village head in Kelantan) and the *penggawa* (known as *penghulu* elsewhere in Malaysia). Alias Salleh, 71 years old in 1994, recalled that he was taken by the promise of good treatment, proper food and clothing, mail services, and an attractive salary. Prospective candidates were informed that the “tour of duty” would last only three months, after

which they would be sent home, at the expense of the Japanese Imperial Army. However, force and coercion were later used extensively when the initial euphoria, if any, turned sour. Village pranksters and so-called "bad hats", such as the 17-year-old Setapa Mat Daud of Tanah Merah, or those in the bad books of the *penghulu* and *penggawa*, became obvious targets. Lads like Kassim Mohamed, also from Tanah Merah, and Abdul Rahman Yusof, from Machang, "volunteered" to go in the place of their fathers who were too old to go, besides existing family commitments.

The long and difficult journey from their villages to the work sites at the Siam-Burma border served as a harbinger of the nightmare that was to befall these unfortunate lads. The train journey from Kelantan was memorable for all; they were herded like cattle in freight coaches, and the doors were locked from the outside so as to prevent possible escape. At various stops along the way, they were served rice gruel with a curry of salted fish and salted Chinese radish. Some did try to escape but the summary Japanese treatment of those who failed in such attempts effectively discouraged the others. All of them were given a medical examination, not quite like the kind that we are accustomed to, either in Kelantan or at Bangkok. If the train journey was unbearable, the last leg from the rail terminus to the various camp sites was worse, with the weak and sick abandoned in the inhospitable jungle to face certain death.

Camp life and the working conditions were atrocious and the rampant Japanese brutality made life extremely dangerous. The labourers were provided with very basic working tools such as axe, matchet, handsaw and *changkul*, with which they had to cut down trees, turn these into logs and planks, transport them to the required sites, carry out earth works and construct bridges and embankments. Accidents occurred quite frequently and for the Japanese army, life was cheap. Haji Hassan Abdul Samat reminisced how he had to watch helplessly as two of his mates, from the same group that left Pasir Puteh, literally wriggled to death after they accidentally fell into a deep rocky ravine. The 70-year-old Haji Hassan himself hurt his chin in another accident that caused a permanent scar. For him, the scar serves as a grim reminder of his wasted youth. Labourers were expected to work like machines all day. No wonder that the railway was completed in six months instead of the scheduled eighteen months! Any appearance of slackening and stopping for a breather was brutally dealt with. Wan Soh Wan Yaakob, a 17-year-old from Pasir Mas must have thought luck was on his side when he was given a porter's job to carry rice and other provisions to the various camps. Like the others, he was not spared a physical assault when he fell under the weight of the heavy rice bag as a result of a clumsy move. The labourers recalled that they were paid a salary of 1-10 baht, but none told the student researchers what happened to the money. Perhaps money was of secondary

importance to these labourers who were more preoccupied with staying alive at that time.

Camp accommodation was primitive at best, consisting of thatched huts with a raised bamboo floor. It was overcrowded, and the ground was always damp and at times muddy. Despite the chilly nights, blankets were never provided. Every day they had to eat the same food consisting of salted fish and vegetables such as water pumpkin. Some recall being able to cook their own food while others had to consume canteen food prepared by Indian cooks. Meat was a luxury, and as pork was the usual fare served, its consumption was out of the question for Malays. Skin diseases were a common ailment and could even prove fatal. Outbreaks of water-borne diseases, such as dysentery, particularly during the dry season, were common, with malaria a perennial killer. The sick were not given adequate medical attention; very often the labourers had to resort to rudiments of traditional medicines. The serious cases among the sick were segregated in a separate hut, often with other half-dead bodies, only to be left to die. For 16-year-old Idris Bulat from Pasir Mas, the only consolation was that in the camp he was in, those alive were allowed to administer the proper last rites to their dead friends.

Under the existing conditions, it was not uncommon for the labourers to try to escape even if it meant escaping into the unknown jungle. Mat Ali Saud, then a lad of 17–18 years, planned his escape with nine others from Kelantan. As he told student researcher Mohd. Norizan Yunos in 1994, it was a very risky undertaking and certain death awaited those who were caught. Nevertheless, his group did reach its final destination, although he could not remember exactly when this took place. Haji Hassan Abdul Samad and his group of ten, also from Kelantan, had killed a Japanese guard to avenge the death of a friend. This group had a much more difficult time. Among other things, they had to flee from pursuing captors and cross a river infested with hungry-looking crocodiles. One of them was badly wounded by Japanese gunshot and had to be left behind, much to the regret of Hassan and his mates. The group later broke into two, so as to ensure greater mobility, and hence a greater chance of success. Hassan and three others in the group managed to reach a Thai village in the vicinity of the Kwai River. For six months, they stayed in this village working the rice fields of their hosts before drifting southwards to Pattani, where they stayed for three months until the Japanese surrender. Haji Hassan and his three friends finally made it home in December 1945. In the interview with Yasmin Hashim, he did not say what happened to the other group. For those who stayed behind, their agony ended with the surrender. Most of them, such as Hashim Yop from Raub (Pahang), were later repatriated by Allied troops at the end of 1945 and reached home in 1946, while a few stayed behind and settled down in Thailand.

Forced Labour: Type Two

Life for the second type of labourers, by any standard of decency, was hard and also one of agony. Most of them were from the rural areas and they had to perform a diversity of tasks as required by the Japanese army. For Kuala Pilah district in Negri Sembilan, the construction of an airfield required an estimated 3,000 labourers, who were provided by all racial groups from all over the state. For the Malays, the selection was made by the village head, who had to provide ten labourers from each village. Their ages, as Arifin Osman found out, varied from 20 to 70 years. They were divided into groups, with each group assigned only a specific task.²⁵

The proposed Kuala Pilah airfield, measuring 3.2 kilometres in length and 1 kilometre in width, was constructed in a rubber plantation that belonged to the pre-war Dunlop Rubber Estate. To expedite construction, labourers were exploited to the maximum. They were required to use their own tools, such as axe, machette, handsaw and *changkul*, besides the necessary cooking utensils. For the duration of their "tour of duty", all had to live in make-shift accommodation. Personal hygiene was poor and as the water supply was obtained from a nearby well, outbreaks of dysentery were common, while malaria was an ever-present threat to all.

Roll-call took place at six o'clock in the morning, and work started promptly at 7.00 a.m. The morning toil lasted until 1 p.m., when 30 minutes break was given for lunch. Work resumed immediately after lunch and lasted until 5.00 p.m. A roll-call, to ensure that no man and tools went missing, ended the day for these labourers. Arifin recorded that there were three elephants and a tractor at the site, but these were sparingly used. The presence of 4-5 gun-toting Japanese guards/soldiers ensured that none of the labourers attempted any escape or played truant. Once the tree cover was removed, the labourers had to work in the hot sun. The workers were divided into three big groups, with two groups working at any one time, thus providing the third with much needed respite. For all their hard toil, the labourers were paid a daily wage of RM4.00, a pot of poor grade rice, a small piece of salted fish, one potato and one sweet potato, which many saved for their families. In the end, the project was never completed because of the Japanese surrender.

For Kampong Repoh, a Malay village in Kangar, the exploitation of village labour was much more systematic, with the chief of the local *jikeidan* contributing a crucial role. In Perlis, all villages had to contribute labour to cut timber at the Bukit Chabang forest reserve. For each village, a tour of labour duty would last for a week during which they had to live in a tent provided by the Japanese army. The army also provided basic necessities such as rice, coffee and salt.

In 1989, Mohd Yusof Mohammed interviewed four of the Repoh villagers who had been forced to go to Bukit Chabang to cut timber for the army.²⁶ According to them, on the first day, they and their fellow villagers had to walk the 15-kilometre journey from their village to Bukit Chabang, accompanied by the *jikeidan* chief half of the way to ensure that none tried to escape. At Bukit Chabang they were divided into work teams, with each team given any one of the following tasks: to cut down trees into timber, to carry timber to the nearest railway line, or to lift timber into the wagons, all done by using physical strength. The informants also recalled how they had to search for that extra ounce of strength just to avoid possible physical assault by the ever watchful Japanese guards. Save for a short lunch break, the labourers had to toil from dawn to dusk. As for meals, they took turns to do cooking chores, which must be very simple and basic. Yet for all their toil, they were not paid in cash or kind! They were lucky if the Japanese gave them matches.

At other times, the same villagers were required to contribute labour to plant and harvest padi at the Kampong Baru agricultural station about 5 kilometres away. As for their specific duties, these were arranged by the local *jikeidan* chief but they had to work under close Japanese supervision. Kampong Repoh villagers never enjoyed the fruits of their labour as the entire harvest was taken by the Japanese army.

After the harvest, the villagers were required to weave mats from padi stalks (perhaps the soldiers missed the *tatami* or mats woven from rice stalks very much). The number of mats required from the villagers, who were divided into groups, was again set by the local *jikeidan* chief. This mat-weaving was no easy task, especially when each had to be 8–12 metres long. For ropes, the villagers improvised by using the dried/semi-dried skin of banana trees. As a result of the heavy and systematic demands on their labour, the Repoh villagers had no time to work on their own fields. To live, they resorted to smuggling rice, salt, sugar and matches. It was a risky undertaking but under the existing circumstances, a necessity. The informants did not say as much but it was possible that these activities were known to the village *jikeidan*.

Jikeidan and Village Mobilization

*Segala perbuatan yang dilakukan oleh penduduk Kg. Sungai Acheh seperti mencuri dan bergaduh tidak lagi dilakukan kerana adanya kawalan siang dan malam. Orang semua merasa takut menerima hukuman dari Jepun.*²⁷

An important aspect of the Occupation was the mobilization of Malay youth (*pemuda*), especially from the rural areas, for the Japanese war effort. This took various forms, such as the *giyu gun* (volunteer army), *giyu tai* (volunteer

corp) and the *heiho* (auxilliary corp), the army's labour corp. These were military and quasi military in nature, and especially the *giyu gun* and the *giyu tai*, were able to attract a fairly good response from Malay youth.²⁸ The *jikeidan*, on the other hand, was formed soon after the Japanese occupied Malaya, in almost all states in the peninsula and affected a wide spectrum of the rural Malays especially. Its main purpose was the maintenance of law and order through villagers spying on fellow villagers, much like in Japan during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. The total number for the whole of Malaya is unknown. In Penang, it was estimated that their number in 1943 was about 3,400.

Sungai Acheh, a small village about 6 kilometres from Nibong Tebal, Penang, was one of the many villages in which the *jikeidan* made its presence felt. The members were selected by the village head from men between 20 and 45 years of age. Their main task was to ensure village security at all times and, for this purpose, it was the duty of Ibrahim Cheek, the *jikeidan* chief, to provide a roster for guard duties. He had to ensure that all members were given a fair allocation, and discharge their duties with discipline and in the proper manner.²⁹ Siti Zubaidah was unfortunately unable to find out the actual number of the Sungai Acheh *jikeidan*. If the case of Parit Santo village in Batu Pahat is any indication, the number in Sungai Acheh could have been 25–33 per cent of the local population. In Parit Santo, a village of about 60–70 people, the *jikeidan* members totalled 24 men.³⁰

Members of the *jikeidan* were not paid a salary. Instead, they were provided with an allowance in the form of rice (enough for a week's consumption for the average Malay family), two packets of cigarettes (Minami and Koa brands), cloth which was of a coarse quality, and a small token in cash. Members were encouraged to learn *Nippon-go*. As Siti Zubaidah Kassim found out, some of those from the Sungai Acheh *jikeidan* could still remember some phrases of the language. In Perlis, *jikeidan* members were required to practise military drill once a week, which was held at a field near the present Kangar General Hospital. *Jikeidan* chiefs like Omar Abdullah of Kampong Repoh were required to practise the drill daily, during which they also received the various instructions and orders that had to be implemented at the village level.

The main function of the *jikeidan* was the maintenance of law and order through a systematic surveillance of villagers (and outsiders) by fellow villagers. The *jikeidan* also undertook the enumeration of the village population, keeping a close scrutiny on all the goings on in a particular village, and to report to the authorities any form of anti-Japanese/anti-establishment activities, including hoarding rice even for personal consumption. Members were also required to undertake guard and patrol duties armed with a whistle and a truncheon. In Parit Santo, Abu Bakar Maana, a *jikeidan* member, witnessed a robbery while on duty and, after taking down the necessary details, reported

the matter to Shah Salleh, his chief, who duly informed the authorities. The culprit was immediately apprehended and interrogated. He admitted to the crime in the face of the overwhelming evidence, and was duly beheaded.³¹ Towards the end of the war, the Japanese in Batu Pahat-Air Hitam became worried about a possible British landing by gliders. To prevent such a occurrence, the Parit Santo *jikeidan* was ordered into the jungle to collect logs. These logs, 10 cm in radius, were planted 10 metres apart in the open spaces, especially around Air Hitam.³²

Equally important was the role of the *jikeidan* in village mobilization. I have already described this at length when discussing forced labour in the village of Repoh. Omar Abdullah, the *jikeidan* chief, in performing his multifarious duties, was assisted by two deputies. Omar was selected for the job because of his friendship with one Hamid who was the most senior Malay officer in the Kangar Police.³³ Omar certainly did not let down his employer/master and he mobilized the entire village for an assortment of projects, all for the benefit of the occupying army and to the detriment of local interests. Omar's success was due to the judicious use of the psychology of fear — the fear of Japanese punishment — and coercion.

The Sungai Acheh *jikeidan* was equally successful in mobilizing village labour for the benefit of the Japanese army. Firstly, its members were required to ascertain that each family in the village contributed "bottle cases", which was set at 50 cases per household. Nobody really knew what these cases were used for but they had to be of a certain size (12 inches by 17 inches), and woven from a type of leaves noted for its thorns. In the second case, *jikeidan* members were mobilized to ensure each household contributed a bale of sambau grass (*Eleusine indica*) to be used as fodder for the army's horses. Both tasks made use of unpaid labour, not even in banana notes, and the villagers, especially the women-folk had to be persuaded and often threatened by the *jikeidan* chief to obtain compliance. Yet the *jikeidan* members themselves were not free from aberrations. In the case of Ibrahim Cheek, he allowed, and most probably took part in, the smuggling of rice to Sungai Acheh in order to alleviate the rice shortage during the latter part of the Occupation. This enabled rice to be bought at a lower price than in the open market. Until the Japanese surrender, Ibrahim was never found out. For this "concern", the villagers, such as 62-year-old (1991) grandmother Cheek Osman, had a good reason to express their undying gratitude.³⁴

Malays and the Grow-More-Food Campaigns

The grow-more-food campaign was launched during the early part of the Occupation, and was intended as one of the measures to combat inflation

and black-marketeering, as well as to prepare Malaya for an eventual complete isolation and blockade by the Allies. Chin Kee Onn has given an excellent overview of the subject based perhaps on inside information.³⁵ Two important characteristics stood out. One was the method used, which ranged from persuasion to a spirited public campaign to outright use of coercion and blackmail. The other characteristic was the somewhat lukewarm attitude and disinterest shown by Malaysians, including the Malays, towards this campaign. In the early part, the MMA (Malayan Military Administration) undertook Home Gardening competitions, which gave special awards to productive farmers and agricultural exhibitions — all meant to stir the public interest.

It was during the early phase that Malaysians, including the rural Malays, were exhorted to plant vegetables and food crops like tapioca, yam, sweet potato, maize and other crops "that are filling and energy giving" in available open spaces around their houses. There is an interesting booklet issued by the Agricultural Department in 1942 in Jawi, ostensibly meant for the Malays, that provided information on the various garden crops deemed suitable to the Malayan climate and their mode of cultivation. Nevertheless, the whole campaign was never well-received by the local population and in the end, the MMA had to resort to coercion and blackmail. Chin Kee Onn neatly described the situation in the following words:

But the public response in the first two years is nonchalant. When the authorities became openly annoyed, the public acquiesced, but with undisguised half-heartedness. The authorities got disgusted. Rice rations were reduced. That was not enough. Sugar, salt and coconut oil ration was also cut.³⁶

Like other races, both urban and rural Malays took part in the grow-more-food campaigns although there were indications that they were not popularly received. It is also evident that the Malays were not spared from both direct and indirect pressure so as to obtain their participation in the campaign. In Balik Pulau, Pulau Pinang, for instance, the Agricultural Department, or Norinka, was headed by a Malay named M.N. Noordin and, under this energetic officer, the department had done a commendable job to enlist rural Malays from the Balik Pulau area to as far as Bayan Lepas to be involved in the grow-more-food campaign. According to a study, the Norinka tried various means to help the rural Malays to increase food production, such as by distributing subsidized farming implements and selling padi seed at the cheap price of 5 cents a *kati* (two-thirds of a kilogram).³⁷ As a result of the co-operative efforts of these Malays, approximately 100 acres of land were planted with the Horai and Taiwan strains. In groups of thirty, these local farmers took turns to rid the field of pests. Then there were other Malays, the extremely

industrious ones, also from Balik Pulau, who were given awards for their labour. Rohaini Kamsan, for instance, cited the case of a 76-year-old grandmother who worked on her two-acre plot unassisted in order to support her three grandchildren who had recently lost their father. For her industriousness, the old lady was given a certificate and other presents, most likely food parcels and cloth, which were handed to her by the Penang governor himself.

On the whole, the Malay support for the grow-more-food campaign was lukewarm, despite the involvement of Malays in the various farming colonies such as Bintan island (for those from Singapore) and Bertam Estate (for those from Penang island) except perhaps in Yan district, which will be discussed later. Thus, to solicit continuous Malay support for the programme it was necessary for the MMA to resort to various means. A popular and effective method was to use the institution of the sultans. The Sultan of Perak and the Sultan of Johor, who, according to Chin Kee Onn, had their own successful farms, were prominent in these campaigns. The Sultan of Perak, for instance, took to the pulpit during the *Aidhil Fitri* (the festivities marking the end of fasting in the month of Ramadhan) of 1942 in Kuala Kangsar's Ubudiah Mosque to urge Malays to work harder in order to achieve self-sufficiency in food production, by working on the land rather than to depend on imports as in the British period.³⁸ In Penang, during an *Aidhil Fitri* prayer in 1944, held at the Kapitan Kling Mosque in Pitt Street, the *Imam* (head of the mosque) sought to impart a similar message to the Malay-Muslim congregation by urging them to give their fullest co-operation in the ongoing campaign to increase the production of food and livestock for personal consumption.³⁹ The Penang *Chokan* (Governor), who was present on the same occasion, must have had good reason to be satisfied. The Penang MMA also attempted to use the Malay Association to assist in getting the Malays in Penang to take an active part in the campaign.⁴⁰ Again we have no information regarding how members of this association sought to persuade their Malay brethren to heed the Governor's call, which was made during the association's official launch.

As discussed in various studies, the grow-more-food campaign in the end proved to be a failure. According to Gumbang Pura, who had studied rural Penang during this period, a number of reasons were responsible for this failure, namely, the exploitation of farmers by Japanese firms and *kumiai* (trade associations), farmers leaving the agricultural sector by joining Japanese-sponsored military organizations since soldiers were reasonably well treated in terms of basic needs like food and clothes, and the failure of various experiments ostensibly to improve the lives of the farmers, such as oyster cultivation off Tanjung Tokong and Tanjung Batu on Penang island.⁴¹

Japanese Policies Towards Islam

Japanese policies on Islam have already been discussed by two eminent scholars, Professors Yoichi Itagaki and Yoji Akashi.⁴² Their assertions that there was a policy of non-interference on Islamic matters is partly correct, and interestingly it found agreement with many if not most of the Malays who had lived through this period. As Akashi has indicated, Japanese policies towards Islam could be seen in two distinct phases, one before 1943 and the other after 1943.

The first phase was characterized by a lack of any coherent policies towards Islam or the Sultan, who was the head of the Islamic faith in the confines of their respective states. This had led to very serious abuse, notably to mosques in numerous places on the peninsula. Then the Islamic Enactments of the various states, which in the past had proven to be effective in arresting the decline of Islamic morality among believers and upholding the basic religious precepts, became unenforceable because of the various restrictions imposed by the indifferent MMA. Similarly, religious officials were also prevented, unlike before 1942, from conducting religious courses and talks unless they obtained prior permission from the local police.

However, after 1943 there was a marked change in Japanese policies towards Islam, as manifested by the holding of an Islamic conference in Singapore in April 1943, which was attended by religious leaders from Singapore, Sumatra and all the Malay states, including Penang and Melaka, and the holding of another conference in Kuala Kangsar in December 1944, which was attended by all state Islamic leaders except those from the four states ceded to Thailand, that is, Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Trengganu.

Moreover, after 1943 the MMA was more sensitive to the plight of the Muslims and their faith, at least on the surface, and this was evident by the promulgation of certain days of the Muslim calendar as holidays for Muslims (and Malays mainly), such as the first day of *Muharram* (Muslim New Year), *Aidhil Fitri*, *Aidhil Adha* (festivities celebrating the Haj and the sacrifice of Abraham), the tenth day of *Muharram*, and even the religiously irrelevant *Mandi Safar* (bathing to purify the soul). Senior officials were also required to attend religious celebrations, and as I have discussed elsewhere,⁴³ the attendance of non-Muslims on such occasions at the mosques brought more negative impact, besides rendering such events a farce. Unknown to the Japanese, many Muslims simply could not reconcile themselves to the need for them to bow to the Imperial Palace while still on their prayer mats, necessitating a 180-degree turn from the direction of the Ka'aba in Mecca, or to listen to the Japanese *Chokan* making political speeches from inside the mosques.

So what are the memories of the Malays regarding Islam and Japanese policies towards Islam? There are those who can still recall the abuses that the Japanese had inflicted on mosques in Penang, Pahang and Johor.⁴⁴ Perhaps the cases in Kluang district in Johor were more serious, necessitating the State Religious Affairs Department to ask for notices, printed in Japanese, from the *Chokan's* office, emphasizing the sanctity of mosques, to be distributed to the various districts in the hope that the Japanese soldiers would observe proper decorum whenever they were in the mosque precinct.⁴⁵

However, it was the second phase that drew favourable comments from Malays who had lived through this period. Akashi, for instance, had noted the favourable reactions of the Sultan of Perak. The Sultan of Trengganu, Tengku Ali Sultan Sulaiman had an equally favourable memory on the same matter.⁴⁶ Tengku Ali was satisfied with the concern the MMA had shown towards Islam. As evidence, he cited the proliferation of religious and Arabic schools, instances of Japanese soldiers meting summary punishment on those who failed to attend Friday prayers, the collection of the *zakat* (tithe) became more organized, Muslims were given holidays to celebrate religious and not-so religious festivals, and Muslims in the state were allowed to go home after 2.00 p.m. during the fasting month. Similar sentiments were also expressed by the State *Mufti* who was in charge of the day-to-day administration of the Islamic Affairs Department. Elsewhere in Perlis, there were also ordinary Malays who shared a similar view regarding the Japanese contribution to Islam, and as evidence they cited the proliferation of religious and Arabic schools in this northern state. Perhaps it was not known to many Malays that the more established religious schools, notably the Maahad Il Ihya Assyariif of Gunong Semanggol and Madrasah Al-Ulum Al-Syariah in Bagan Datoh (both in Perak), were left in a limbo because of the wartime conditions. It is also possible that the Japanese authorities were suspicious of such "radical" schools, notably Maahad Il Ihya Assyariif, which was located not far from Taiping.⁴⁷

There were also Malays who were more critical of the Japanese, especially regarding the way their religion and mosques were being used for propaganda purposes. Then there were others who pointed to the declining religious morality among Muslims especially in the urban areas, a phenomenon they blamed on the Japanese period. A teacher from Ipoh, while not denying the political significance of the Occupation, noted that "Malays at that time were really lost in their religious orientations. Their record in terms of upholding religious precepts was abysmal. Only a small minority kept alive the tradition of group praying at the mosques."⁴⁸ Similar sentiments were echoed by a religious leader in Perak in early 1946 when he noted "the erosion of the spirit of Islam" which was very much in evidence among Malays in the immediate post-war period.⁴⁹

An interesting observation in the various published accounts is the description by participants of how mosques were being used for propaganda purposes. Perhaps I should quote a speech made by the Penang *Chokan*, Lt. General S. Katayama on the occasion of the *Aidhil Fitri* prayer held on 12 October 1942 at the Chinese Recreational Club field in Georgetown, as understood by a Malay-Muslim named Baba Ahmed.⁵⁰

On this occasion, Katayama emphasized the necessity for the Malays to change their ways. He noted that politeness and patience were two inherent traits of the Malay race, and he believed that it was possible that because of these intrinsic traits, the Malays were easily colonized by Britain. Katayama then exhorted the Malays to change their racial traits, that is, not to be polite and patient. He called on the congregation to do so straight away and not to wait until the following day to do so. The *Chokan* took pains to stress to his listeners that the world of exploitation and repression was over. In the new world under Japan, Katayama insisted, Malays must be more aggressive and more dedicated in all their endeavours. To cap the morning charade, according to Baba Ahmed, the whole congregation shouted "*banzai*" three times, although not with the same gusto as members of the Japanese Imperial Army, before dispersing.

More recent studies on Islam during the Japanese period indicate that the Islamic faith as practised by the community of believers or *ummah* was in a sorry state at the time. Shamsuddin Abdul Kadir, using rather limited documentary evidence from the Johor Archives, had examined various issues confronting the *ummah* in Johor, such as the lack of interest shown by Muslims in performing Friday prayers, the sale of lotteries by the Religious Affairs Department, Muslims openly disregarding the fasting month by eating in public in broad daylight, the high percentage of divorce among Muslims, cases of Muslim women cohabiting with non-Muslims, including Japanese soldiers (and perhaps civilians too), and Muslims distilling toddy from palm trees in order to earn more money.⁵¹

With regard to the sale of lotteries, it is certainly difficult to fathom the reasoning behind this activity by the State Religious Department. Perhaps it was based on the erroneous assumption that its evil could be checked by the department, which is misleading as even the assistant *kathi* (officer who supervises religious affairs, such as marriages at the district level) of Muar was a compulsive gambler who was later dismissed by the department. It is also possible that the department was forced by the MMA, in the same manner that the department was forced to collect donations from Malays for the erection of a war memorial for Japanese soldiers who allegedly died fighting for Malaysians.

My own research on Islam during the Japanese rule utilizing documents that had been consulted by Shamsuddin and others that he had overlooked

(even in the same file), corroborated what has been discussed above. I believe the same sorry picture of Muslim decadence and deterioration in upholding the basic tenets of Islam could be found in the other states of the peninsula. If this was so, then it would make a mockery of the Malay memory that has been discussed thus far regarding Islam.

To highlight an inherent flaw in the memory of participants, perhaps one could refer to the December 1944 conference on Islam held in Kuala Kangsar mentioned earlier. In his autobiography, Tengku Ali recalls that a delegation from Trengganu, which included Ibrahim Fikri, a pre-war KMM member, and in the post-war period, an UMNO leader and Chief Minister of Trengganu, attended the conference. This is erroneous, as the available record shows only delegates from Johor (3), Selangor (2), Negri Sembilan (2), Pahang (3), Singapore or Syonan (2), Melaka (2) and Penang (2) who converged on Kuala Kangsar. It is quite possible that Tengku Ali had confused it with the April 1943 conference that was held in Singapore, in which the participation of a delegation from Trengganu was corroborated by Japanese documents.⁵²

Coming back to the 1944 conference, it was certainly an important event for Muslims, yet there is no memory of it in any of the published materials thus far. This is not surprising when one looks at the minutes of the proceedings of the three-day conference (13–15 December).⁵³ The delegates did raise some pertinent issues which were crucial to the well-being of the *ummah*, such as the need for uniformity of the important dates in the Muslim calendar, like the beginning of fasting in the month of *Ramadhan* and *Aidhil Fitri*, the need to establish a Supreme Islamic Council for Malaya, the setting up of an Islamic high school (perhaps a prelude to an institution of higher learning), the need to punish Muslims of Penang, Melaka and Singapore who had flouted Islamic laws, as was done in other states according to the Islamic Enactments, requesting the MMA to take firm action against Muslims involved in gambling, asking the MMA to allow Muslim soldiers and policemen to fast during *Ramadhan* and religious teachers or *ustaz* to be given opportunities to give lectures on Islam to these soldiers and policemen. Delegates also unanimously supported Selangor's call that Muslim civil servants be given time off for prayers, 2.00–3.00 p.m. for *zuhur*, and 1.30–3.30 p.m. for Friday prayers. But these were conservative issues, besides being the only issues, allowed under the existing circumstances as the MMA had very clearly indicated to the religious élites that religion should never be politicized. Ironically, no one, not even these élites, was brave enough to question, less so to prevent the Japanese from using Islam for their own propaganda purposes.

Coming back to the issues that were raised at the 1944 conference, the Malay delegates did pay an unduly high price just to obtain Japanese support. In the first place, all delegates had to take a pledge of loyalty to the Showa Tenno (Showa Emperor, or Emperor Hirohito) and the Japanese empire; they

also became more and more identified with the Japanese war effort, including praying for a quick end to the war, with Japan emerging as victors. The delegates also had to make a courtesy call on the *Gunshireikan* (commander-in-chief) who was garrisoned in nearby Taiping. In that brief visit, the highest ranking Japanese military officer sought to remind delegates of three important issues. These issues and, more importantly, the way it was put across to the conservative Malay élites reflected how Islam was being used and abused by the MMA.

For the first issue, the *Gunshireikan* reminded delegates that the teachings of the Quran, as revealed to Muhammad, were similar to the Japanese indigenous religion, or Shinto (Way of the Gods). He also stressed that, in essence, all religious teachings were the same: the problem, it seemed, lay with the teachers whom he noted "would determine the rise and fall of religion including Islam". He reminded the teachers to comprehend fully the message of the Quran, and that they should pay much attention to the way they lived and how they must provide a commendable religious leadership.

Equally significant was the second issue, namely, the alleged similarity of the Quranic revelations, as written in verse 112 (the *surah* or chapter was not mentioned), and the personality of the Tenno who was descended from the sun goddess, or Ameterasu Omikami Sama. To his bewildered guests, the *Gunshireikan* went on to elaborate that the Emperor was the embodiment of the thoughts of the most powerful god and at the same time imbued with godly spirit. Since time immemorial, the Japanese people had never questioned their Emperor, especially when the Emperor was descended from one family. Consequently, Japan was fair to all, powerful and succeeded at all times in its endeavours, with the holy Emperor becoming the focus of national reverence. The *Gunshireikan* then pointed out the similarity of the Quranic verse mentioned earlier to the sacrifices that the Japanese had undertaken for their Emperor. That was why, according to this officer, Japanese soldiers, because of their loyalty to their god (or gods), could overcome all odds and defeat any enemy even if they had to face enormous numerical odds and other disadvantages. In this respect, he stressed that the true spirit of Japan was similar to the true spirit of Islam.

However, it was the third issue that was the most controversial, and that perhaps caused much uneasiness among the delegates which included royalty and religious élites or *ulamas*. It served as a warning to the Malay élites of the futility and danger of using religion for political purposes except in those cases condoned by the MMA. The *Gunshireikan* told his conservative Malay guests to treat the existing war as a holy war, an argument that is testament to Japanese wartime propaganda ingenuity. The guests were reminded of the early period in the spread of Islam in the Arabian peninsula when the chosen Prophet Muhammad had to overcome enormous odds to spread the teaching

of the Quran on very infertile terrain. As part of the process of spreading the faith, holy war or *jihād* was unavoidable against infidels in the various parts of the peninsula. Yet, despite this early success, Muslims were later trampled upon and colonized by the West, especially Britain and the United States. Consequently, Western materialism came to the forefront in human life instead of religion, such as during the glorious days of Islam. Therefore, according to the *Gunshireikan*, the situation facing mankind was similar to the time of the Prophet, that is, the time of *jahiliyah* (religious and moral anarchy). He then stressed that Japan under the Showa Tenno was undertaking a holy war, a *jihād*, to save mankind from rapacious Britain and the United States, and Muslims in Malai (Malaya) must play their part. He said, "the existing holy war is protracted and costly in terms of the lives lost; the gains are big, and so are the losses." He urged the delegates to understand this well. In ending the meeting, the *Gunshireikan* expressed the hope that with his guests' proper leadership, the Muslims in Malaya would survive the existing war and would understand better the teaching and message of the Quran. The conservative élites were only allowed to leave after the *Gunshireikan* issued a stern warning on the futility of using religion for political purposes.

With that sort of tirade by a senior Japanese military officer, one wonders if there were any Malay delegates who were willing to record that particular encounter, or even to recall the 1944 conference as a whole. As has been noted earlier, I have yet to come across anything published on the wartime period that gives an in-depth account of the 1944 conference, except perhaps that of Akashi, who did not refer to these minutes. In the end, we are left with no memory of one of the most important events relating to Islam that took place during the colonial period.

Yan District: A Special Case?

In the various short studies that I have consulted, informants were asked to comment on the impact of the Occupation. In Kuala Selangor, for example, E'ajis Jaafar has brought to our attention a road built during the Japanese period that linked the towns of Kuala Selangor and Sekinchan (the old road). This road was built by local labour — E'ajis did not enquire what kind of labour, but it is not inconceivable that forced labour from the surrounding villages were conscripted — using very rudimentary road-making technology. To smoothen the surface, clay and mud were formed into a sort of cement, and spread on the road surface which was then baked by burning coconut leaves for a few days. Aptly, this road was referred to by the locals as "jalan Jepun" (Japanese road) and was used by all traffic, perhaps with a little difficulty during the wet season.⁵⁴ Farmers like Osman Kassim, then 29 years

of age, must have found the road useful (and so did other locals) although the road was originally constructed for strategic purposes and had nothing to do with helping farmers in the first place.

In general, informants were able to see both sides of the picture, although on balance there seemed to be a shift towards a positive evaluation of the Occupation. The following all too familiar comment by Ibrahim Cheek, the Sungai Acheh *jikeidan* leader, is certainly a fair assessment of the period as far as the Malays were concerned.

Zaman Jepun inilah telah mengajar kita (orang Melayu) untuk menjadi lebih rajin, orang jahat, tak berani jadi jahat, semangat sayangkan negeri mulai ada kerana Jepun selalu menyedarkan orang Melayu akan hak di tempat sendiri.⁵⁵

Now coming back to the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, attributed to Abu Bakar Rejab who attended school during the Japanese period, it certainly triggered a chorus of skepticism. Teh Koon Hoo was skeptical of such a claim initially but he changed his position later. Teh, born and bred in Yan, arrived at his conclusion after intensive interviews that he patiently conducted with fourteen Yan residents, comprising twelve Malays and two Chinese (his relatives/clansmen).⁵⁶ Their ages varied between 95 and 63 years (in 1994), and in terms of occupation, included four farmers, two fishermen, two teachers (one school headmaster and the other a religious teacher, *ustaz*), two housewives, a policeman and the rest, labourers. Was I skeptical? I was and am still unrepentant, despite the fact that Teh Koon Hoo has completed a more detailed study of the same area using both oral and documentary evidence.⁵⁷ But let us take a look at Yan in the way Teh and his informants saw it, and assess whether Yan was really a special case, or otherwise.

The Yan district that formed the focus of Teh Koon Hoo's study comprised Yan town, which was (and still is) the administrative centre of the district, and its surrounding villages which together formed *mukim* Yan, traditionally administered by the *penghulu*. As the town was also the district capital, the District Officer had his residence in Yan. Before 1942, Yan, as at present, was a rural area with an estimated population of 4,000–5,000. According to the respondents, which Teh diligently recorded in his study, the only visible mark of "development" was the Yan-Guar Chempedak road, initially a dirt road but was improved in the 1920s and macadamized in the 1930s. Equally important for Yan was the sea (and river) link with Kuala Kedah (and hence, Alor Setar) and Penang. Efficient and cheap, this link provided relatively easy communication and a stimulus to whatever trade there was in Yan, between Yan and the outside world. Respondents had claimed that Yan was neglected by the British, a claim that Teh faithfully recorded in his study. In many ways,

Yan was no different from other rural areas in the peninsula before the Occupation, although, in fairness, the neglect was due to the policies of both the Kedah élites and British officials.

Kedah, including Yan district, was in Japanese hands by the second week of December 1941 and remained under Japanese rule until the state was ceded to Bangkok on 20 August 1943. As in other areas, the MMA did not change the administrative structure of the district. The previous district officer, Tengku Zainal Abidin, the *penghulu* and the village heads, except one who died a natural death in early 1942, were all retained. Farmer Ismail Tajuddin, 75 years old in 1994, and police pensioner Hassan Haji Mahmud, reminisced that these local officials did not abuse their positions. To the best of the informants' knowledge, no one from Yan was forcibly conscripted as "Death Railway" labourers; the sole case from Yan went on a strictly voluntary basis.

Like other districts, Yan was not spared from Nipponization through the education system. Sekolah Laki-Laki Yan (Yan Boys School) was renamed in the usual Japanese fashion (then and now) as Yan Dai Ichi Shogakko (First Primary School). Abu Bakar Rejab was one of those who attended this school. He remembers the rituals of *Kimigayo*, *seikere*, and *rajo taiso* and two of the Japanese who taught *Nippon-go* at the school — Tanaka San (*sensei*?) and Kagashi San (*sensei*?).

However, it was in the agricultural sphere that the Occupation left an indelible imprint on the respondents' minds, and on Teh too. At Telok Chengal, 5 kilometres away, an agricultural school was established and youth, including those from Yan, were sent there to learn the latest agricultural techniques. Those residing along the Yan-Guar Chempedak road were encouraged to plant papaya, banana, sweet potatoes, tapioca and even cotton, the last crop causing much chagrin to Malay district officers like Tunku Abdul Rahman.⁵⁸ Respondents, as recorded by Teh Koon Hoo, still remember that day when they were introduced to double cropping. How can they forget it when the Governor, Lt. General Sukegawa, after a speech of encouragement and distributing padi seeds to the villagers, went into the *sawah* (padi-field) to provide practical instructions, assisted by two agricultural officers. It was a symbolic gesture but it was a great spectacle for the villagers who were present. It was the first time in their memory that they had witnessed such a high government officer going into the *sawah*. Even the district officer, a son of Sultan Abdul Hamid, had to follow his example, doing something that he had never done before.

For the *mukim* of Yan, 5 *relongs* (one *relong* is about three-quarters of an acre) of padi land along the coastal strip between Kuala Yan and Titi Bakong was selected as an experimental plot for the villagers to acquire practical knowledge of double cropping. Japanese agricultural officers provided instructions on all aspects of cultivation, including upkeep of the field, details

of which were meticulously recorded by Teh Koon Hoo. To ensure a high yield, irrigation was improved with the construction of a dam along the Sungai Tandop, as well as three irrigation canals in the area. The Japanese also introduced to the villagers the use of the water-wheel (*suisha*). The dam and canals were constructed by village labour; nobody among the respondents complained of coercion. Instead, it was a co-operative effort. Pests such as certain types of tortoises were a problem and the Japanese had to offer cash rewards to children to tackle this problem.

What about the yield? Teh Koon Hoo recorded a remarkable increase from 12 gunny per *relong* to 24–30 gunny, representing a 200 per cent increase per year, with double cropping. The increased padi output, his informants reaffirmed, was never confiscated by the army; the army only took the harvest from the 5-*relong* common field. Farmers were also encouraged to undertake single cropping of padi, especially in areas that were formerly swamps. Villagers were asked to plant vegetables around their houses, and only in this last instance did Teh report that coercion was used on the locals.

In other aspects, the Occupation saw the mushrooming of cottage industries, such as rope and gunny making, which incidentally also took place in other parts of the peninsula. Rope-making, for instance, was taught to students (and possibly villagers too) at the Dai Ichi Shogakko. Teh Koon Hoo also mentioned the construction of the Yan-Singkir road, which linked Yan to Merbok and Tanjong Dawai. Labour for its construction was provided by 477 villagers within the *mukim*. Teh Koon Hoo did not record any coercion, because, as he put it, it was completed through a co-operative effort (*gotong royong*).

What about Japanese atrocities, which was common in other parts of the peninsula? Here we have some interesting observations by the locals. According to Hassan Haji Mohamed, a former police reservist during the Japanese period, the brunt of Japanese atrocities was directed at those who had done wrong. Others claimed that it was the Malay policemen who abused their position and power while Japanese officers, they claimed, were oblivious to the negative actions of their subordinates. Teh Koon Hoo's informants gave a few names, such as Datuk Yob, Mat Zin and Haji Medad, as the locals who terrorized the villagers. Even if the Japanese knew of the wrongdoings committed by their subordinates, I am doubtful if positive action could have been taken regarding these excesses, unlike in the early days of the Occupation.⁵⁹ Other than this, Teh's informants remember the period as one of security characterized by a new awareness and confidence among the Malays, especially the youth, who after 1945 assumed the mantle of local leadership. The period also saw the emergence of a new orthodoxy within the *pondok* schools associated with religious teachers who adamantly refused to go along with Japanese practices, such as *saikere*, which they believed was un-Islamic.

Ku Mahput Ku Abdullah, a former *ustaz*, remembers his teacher Haji Hussein Che Dol who had attempted to cultivate anti-Japanese (anti-infidel) feelings among his students. It is significant to note that after 1945 Haji Hussein Che Dol became the chairman of the Kedah Malay Association, and the Kedah Ulama Association.

Teh Koon Hoo's concluding remarks aptly summarize the extremely positive evaluation of the Japanese period by his informants, which I quote in full below.

Walaupun tempoh masa tidak sampai 2 tahun pendudukan Jepun di Yan, mereka telah membuktikan kesungguhan mereka untuk membawa kebaikan dan faedah besar kepada masyarakat Yan terutamanya dari segi pembangunan ekonomi, sosial dan insan[?]

Ini bermakna pentadbiran Jepun jauh lebih tinggi nilainya daripada pentadbiran British. Kesederhanaan cara hidup Jepun telah memberi teladan yang tidak kompleks berbanding dengan gaya hidup orang British yang begitu "canggih" dan berpura-pura. British dengan sikap halus serta lembut dan licik hanya berjaya mendodoi dan memukau anak pribumi untuk terus hidup dalam ilusi. Di sebalik kekasaran dan kekerasan tentera Jepun terselit falsafah agong yang mendidik kita tentang perlunya berusaha, bekerja, berdisiplin dan berdikari untuk membangunkan insan, masyarakat dan negara.⁶⁰

The preceding discussion would lead us to believe that Yan district was indeed, in the eyes of the informants and Teh Koon Hoo, a special case compared to the other areas. In many ways, it may have been so, although taking the colonial period and Malaya as a whole, I am less inclined to see it as such. It is too short a period, in the case of Yan, to enable us to make any meaningful comparisons. Moreover, the skepticism is related to the function of memory and its contribution to history and historical research, which is touched on in the concluding remarks.

Coming back to the assertion made by Teh Koon Hoo and his informants, my doubts and reservation have a strong basis in the form of an important study on Kedah agriculture by Azahar Raswan Dean, entitled "Penguasaan Ekonomi Kedah oleh Tentera Jepun semasa Perang Dunia Kedua, 1941-45" (The Control of the Kedah Economy by the Japanese Army, 1941-45), an academic exercise submitted to the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, in 1984.⁶¹ This local study on the Kedah peasantry, which was also consulted by Teh, was based on both documentary evidence and oral sources, and convincingly indicate the extraordinary competition between two Japanese firms, Mitsubishi and Daimaru, which were given the rice monopolies in Kedah, and the state Agricultural Department, for the peasants' produce that ultimately had a disastrous impact on the peasantry.

Overall, Azahar provided a picture of decline in padi cultivation in Kedah, in terms of the total acreage planted with padi, total output and the yield per acre (or even per *relong*).⁶² It was also shown that the introduction of double-cropping, including in Yan district, was a failure because of a host of problems, such as lack of irrigation and the small cultivated area involved, the fragility of the Taiwan padi strains against local pests, insects and local weather changes, the inadequate supply of seasonal farming labour, and perhaps the most important factor, the attitudes of the local farmers themselves, who perceived double-cropping as alien and an intrusion to the established routine of padi cultivation. Yan district, an important area of padi cultivation next only after Kota Setar and Kubang Pasu, had also experienced floods in November 1942 and drought in the following year, which greatly affected the annual padi harvests in the district. Unknown to Teh Koon Hoo, Yan was also experiencing a loss in plough cattle, just like in the other districts. As Azahar showed, the culprits responsible for this were the two Japanese firms and their compliant local agents.

By 1945, the condition of the peasantry was really bad. According to Azahar, these Malays reacted in the way best known to them — by refusing to cultivate padi other than for their own family consumption. Azahar correctly saw this phenomenon as a form of peasant protest against Japanese economic exploitation. Interestingly, the Kedah Agricultural Department was aware of this, as indicated by the following observation by the chief agricultural officer, who wrote, "the subject of padi production as I hear unpleasant rumours that many padi planters have made up their minds to plant only sufficient for themselves and no more, and that in Kubang Pasu large areas of tenanted *bendang* (rice fields) have been returned to the owners, because cultivators were unwilling to go on with the land on account of the loss of interest."⁶³

Thus, by the time of the Japanese surrender in August 1945, 42,650 acres of *bendang* had been left abandoned. One agricultural officer explained it thus: "the people [were] so sick of the Japanese high-handed action that they refused to plant padi more than their own family requirement." For the record, similar sentiments were expressed by Malay peasants in Seberang Perai, a district in Province Wellesley bordering Yan in the north, and Krian, an important rice growing region in Perak. In both the latter areas, double-cropping of padi ended in failure.⁶⁴

Other Aspects of the Occupation and Malay Memory

As has been noted earlier, the discussion on Malay memories of the war and the Occupation has been done on a very selective basis both in terms of the subject matter and the kind of memories that still remained with the

participants. There are other equally interesting aspects of the war that evoke different memories among Malays, such as by those fighting on the British side through the FMS Volunteer Force, Malay Regiment, and Force 136, those who were involved with the various military and semi-military organizations sponsored by the MMA, Malay perceptions of the Kempeitai (Military Police) atrocities, and Malay reactions regarding the transfer of the four states to Thailand in the latter half of 1943.

Some of the above have already been discussed elsewhere. Profesor Wan Hashim Wan Teh, for instance, has done extensive research on Force 136's Malay section, using various sources, including the memories of participants, even those from northern Perak.⁶⁵ Incidentally, Wan Hashim, whose immediate family member was also involved in Force 136, was born and lived his childhood days in this tranquil rural area. North Perak, in particular the Lenggong-Grik area, also saw some of the major skirmishes between Force 136 members and the Japanese Imperial Army. These heroic exploits provided inspiration for the novel *Lt Nor Pahlawan Gerila* (Lt Nor the Guerilla Fighter), a novel that I first read in secondary school in the later part of the 1960s.⁶⁶ Despite their loyalty to the British imperial cause, these war veterans are now an almost forgotten lot living their lives as settlers in government land schemes. Rightly, they feel disappointed with the British Government for the alleged neglect of some of its most loyal citizens in Malaya before 1945.

The case of Ismail Babu, who retired as a major from the Malaysian Armed Forces, is perhaps the most interesting that I have come across for he was involved in almost all of the above organizations, that is, he worked for both the British and Japanese.⁶⁷ Ismail was born in Batu Gajah in 1919 and he joined the Malay Regiment in 1933. He was involved in the defence of Malaya and Singapore and fought bravely with his soldier mates before the capitulation of Singapore on 15 February 1942. After disbandment, he found work with a Japanese company in Taiping. Later, he joined the *Giyu tai* (volunteer army) in 1943 and was given training in Kuala Lumpur before he was absorbed as a regular in the Japanese army. He served this army very well and saw action against the MPAJA in the Taiping-Kuala Kangsar area. Nevertheless, this did not satisfy him and he left the volunteer army towards the end of the Occupation to join Force 136 in Kedah. In his memoirs, Ismail provides a photograph of himself and Force 136 mates in British military fatigues. He also wrote on what he did at the time of the surrender in Kuala Nerang, Kedah.

With regard to Kempeitai atrocities, the Malays emerged in a better position compared to the Chinese. But this does not mean that they took lightly the atrocities perpetrated by the Kempeitai or its local agents. In fact, Malay accounts and novels written about the war often sought to depict the plight of the Malay villagers who were at the mercy of fellow Malays who had

attained a higher status, and power, by aligning themselves with the Japanese secret police and the Kempeitai. In his autobiography, Mohd Yusof Ahmad, who served as district officer for Alor Gajah during the Occupation until his detention by the Kempeitai, noted the actions of this group of locals. Mohd Yusof provided a graphic account of his relationship with the local Kempeitai chief whom he would avoid by every possible means, his subsequent arrest and interrogation by this dreaded military police, and the atrocities that were inflicted on what he called the cream of the Melaka pre-war intellectuals then being held in Melaka jail. Despite his imprisonment — he did not mention direct physical torture but rather indirect ones — Mohd Yusof did not harbour any malice against his captors.⁶⁸ Perhaps there were other Malay administrators who suffered a similar fate at the hands of the Kempeitai, but Mohd Yusof is the only one that I am aware of who has had his experiences published.

Other Malays have also described the Kempeitai atrocities in their memoirs. Tan Sri Abdul Hamid Bidin, a former chief of the Malaysian Armed Forces, refused to join the Kempeitai as its agent because the nature of the job was not to his liking, especially as the Kempeitai was synonymous with atrocities.⁶⁹ Tun Sardon Jubir, an important UMNO leader from Johor, Cabinet Minister and later Governor of Penang, worked in the Johor judiciary during the war. He commuted daily from his house in Singapore in order to avoid the Kempeitai and the equally dreadful informers. Sardon took pride in saving scores of innocent lives who were victims of the Kempeitai.⁷⁰

Sometimes Malay reactions to these atrocities were expressed in a very novel manner. Baba Ahmed, a Malay-Muslim from Penang, had his diary published by his son under the title *Penaklukan Jepun: Sukan Duka di Georgetown*. Of interest to us are the titles of the various chapters. For instance, chapter two is entitled "1942 — Tahun Kengerian" [The Cruel Years] while chapter three is entitled "1943 — Tahun Kesenggaran" [The Terrible Years], indicating the author's abhorrence of Kempeitai atrocities. Significantly, Baba Ahmed ended chapter one with a detailed discussion on Kempeitai atrocities that had reached the ears of the Penangite. He went on to discuss the infamous "water treatment" that was arbitrarily meted out to those suspected of being a British spy, a communist, or anti-Japanese.⁷¹ Elsewhere, this government servant, who was employed at the General Hospital, mentioned the case of a fellow Indian-Muslim named Mohammad Khan who died in the Penang prison from torture by the Kempeitai after being falsely accused.⁷²

We also get glimpses of the Kempeitai atrocities from a novel written by Ahmad Murad Nasaruddin, entitled *Nyawa di Hujung Pedang* [Life at the edge of the sword]. Ahmad Murad worked as the chief editor of the Japanese-sponsored *Perak Shimbun*, and the book was probably based on his personal experience. The book describes the hero Yazid who was betrayed to the Kempeitai because of petty rivalry and incessantly tortured by the Ipoh

Kempeitai chief named Yoshimura.⁷³ Equally poignant is the story as depicted in P. Ramlee's movie *Sarjan Hassan* (Sergeant Hassan), where the Kempeitai was portrayed in the person of a local Malay.⁷⁴ Ramlee, who spent his early years in Penang during the Japanese period, must have been inspired by what he saw in Malaya (Penang) under Japanese rule. In Yan, the Malays recalled less of Japanese atrocities but more of the local Malay clients, especially those in the police and the informers.

The cession of the four Malay states of Trengganu, Kelantan, Kedah and Perlis to the Thais in the latter part of 1943 was certainly an important event during the Occupation but, surprisingly, it has never been examined seriously, at least from the Malay side. There is also very little information on the subject. Mohd Isa Othman, in his study of the Japanese Occupation of Kedah, did not touch very much on the reactions of the Kedah Malays other than the formation of Saberkas, a co-operative of the Kedah government officers, which was both anti-Japanese and anti-Thai. Elsewhere, Mohd Isa wrote of the close relationship between the Kedah élites, such as Tunku Badlishah (the regent) and his brothers Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tunku Yusof, with Bangkok.⁷⁵

Elsewhere, we do get glimpses of Malay reaction to the cession among the Trengganu aristocracy and élites. Tengku Ali, the wartime Sultan of Trengganu, could not hide his disappointment with the Japanese, especially when the Malay rulers were not consulted on the matter.⁷⁶ Instead, the rulers were merely informed of the matter by Prime Minister Hideki Tojo during the Japanese premier's visit to Singapore in July 1943. Tengku Ali got the impression that the transfer was an order from the Japanese Emperor, and therefore had to be obeyed! The Sultan expressed uneasiness as they were more accustomed to doing business with the Japanese. There was also fear regarding the status of Islam under Thai rule. There were pockets of resistance when Trengganu was officially declared a part of Thailand, and in July 1943 the ruling élites decided to send a protest note to Bangkok if Kedah, Perlis and Kelantan agreed with this plan. None of these states ever did and the matter died a natural death, especially when Bangkok gave assurances to its new Malay subjects that there would be no interference in Malay customs and religion, while the various State Councils were allowed to function again. However, this did not prevent Mohd Asri Muda, a prominent PAS politician and Chief Minister of Kelantan after 1957, to quit the teaching profession in disgust as he had now to teach both Japanese and Thai.⁷⁷

The Malays in the other states reacted differently to the issue. Abdul Razak Hussein, then employed in the Temerloh and later Bentong District Offices, recalled the prevailing Malay disappointment. According to the former Prime Minister, the transfer was a betrayal to the Malays that left him bitterly

disappointed with the Japanese. That was why, William Shaw wrote in 1976, "when he was approached by representatives of the anti-Japanese Malays in early 1945, Razak readily joined the group".⁷⁸

Concluding Remarks

The discussion in this chapter is based mainly on unpublished short studies undertaken by student researchers who had made extensive reference to the memories and reminiscences of the Malays who lived through the Occupation in various parts of the peninsula, but also on published accounts and archival materials. Memory, undeniably, has its niche in historical research and in our understanding of the past. It also provides an understanding of the past with a "personal and human touch", not that the "impersonal records" from the archives that historians find extremely reliable are lacking in such attributes. Except for forgeries, documents provide us with an accurate picture of a particular situation at a certain time and its mood. This brings us to the crux of the matter and the inadequacy of memory as a tool of research to reconstruct the elusive past.

As the preceding pages have amply shown, the memories of the participants are woefully inadequate not just in relation to time but also in its inherent, selective bias. Events that are pleasant, important and sometimes traumatic are more remembered than others which are equally important from a wider historical perspective. On the discussion on the Japanese policies towards Islam and the case of Yan district, I have shown the inherent flaw and inadequacy of memory as a tool of research. We are also aware of the differing perceptions (that is, different memories) of the same events, as in the case of Tunku Abdul Rahman and Fujiwara Iwaichi regarding the "abduction of Sultan Abdul Hamid" in early December 1941 while travelling from Alor Setar to Penang.⁷⁹ Equally interesting are the different memories regarding the initial treatment of the Chinese in Alor Setar, as recorded in Fujiwara's memoirs and that recorded by a local named Jagar Din, showing that inherent memory lapses and selective bias are not strictly a Malay phenomenon.⁸⁰ But this does not rule out the usefulness of memory. It might be at "odds with history or much more incomplete than history, which in itself can never be complete", but memory nevertheless, in its special way, has its usefulness and must be continuously nurtured.⁸¹ In the case of the Malays, this is especially so as, unlike the Chinese which is discussed by Patricia Lim elsewhere in this book, they did not construct memorials which can often serve as stark reminders of the past.

Notes

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1. The translation reads as follows, "If only the Japanese did stay much longer in Yan (Kedah) they could have taught us much more. They were not stingy like the whites. What a pity! They did not stay long in Yan. They had done a lot of things for the people of Yan. Compared to the British, they (British) could not care less for our village". Teh Koon Hoo, "Kedatangan Jepun di Yan, 1941–43 (Satu Kajian Sepintas Lalu)" [The Arrival of the Japanese in Yan, 1941–43 (A Brief Survey)] (Term paper for "HST 422 The Japanese Occupation of Southeast Asia", History Section, School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1994); hereafter cited as HST 422 Paper.
2. Mori Takematsu, *Ajia Taiheiyo Senso* [Asia, The Pacific War] (Tokyo: Shueisha, 1993), pp. 254–55.
3. See, for instance, William Shaw, *Tun Abdul Razak: His Life and Times* (Kuala Lumpur: Longman, 1976); Mohd Yusoff Haji Ahmad, *Decades of Change: Malaysia (1910–1970)* (Kuala Lumpur: Pesaka, 1983); A. Samad Ahmad, *Sejambak Kenangan* [A Bunch of Memories] (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, 1963); Abdul Aziz Zakaria, *British Japanese and Independent Malaysia: A Memoir* (Kuala Lumpur: Intan, 1989); Mejar Ismail Babu, *Kisah Seorang Perajurit* [The Story of a Soldier] (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, 1990); Ahmed Baba Ahmed Meah, *Penaklukan Jepun: Suka Duka di Georgetown* [The Japanese Conquest: The Joys and Sorrows in Georgetown] (Kuala Lumpur: Media Indah, 1992); Victor Morais, *Lord President Suffian: His Life and Times* (Kuala Lumpur: The Law Publication, 1987); Cecilia Tan, *Tun Sardon Juhir: His Life and Times* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1986); Alias Mohamed,

- Ghaffar: A Biography* (Kuala Lumpur: Pelanduk Publications, 1993); General Ibrahim Ismail, *Have You Met Mariam?* (Johor Bharu: Westlight Sdn Bhd., 1984); and Zabha, *Tan Sri Haji Mohamed Noah* (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Melayu, 1976).
4. *Pendudukan Jepun di Tanah Melayu: Kumpulan Esei Sejarah Malaysia oleh Pelajar-Pelajar USM* [The Japanese Occupation of Malaya: A Collection of Essays on Malaysian History by USM Undergraduates], edited by Paul H. Kratoska and Abu Talib Ahmad (Pulau Pinang: School of Humanities, 1989) is an attempt to publish some of these essays. It is hereafter cited as *Pendudukan Jepun di Tanah Melayu*.
5. Unpublished academic exercise, School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1995.
6. The translation reads as follows, "In its policies the Japanese did not do anything in the field of education, what more of bringing rapid changes in this field except the widespread teaching of Japanese songs in schools". Zaharah Hamzah, "Keadaan Pendidikan di Tanah Melayu Sepanjang Pendudukan Jepun, di antara 1942 hingga 1945" [Education in Malaya during the Japanese Occupation from 1942 until 1945], HST 422 Paper (1994). The informant was a 75-year-old ex-teacher, Hajah Embun Haji Ali, who had taught at the Malim Nawar Malay school in Perak during the entire Occupation period.
7. Safie Ibrahim, "Zaman Jepun di Kampong Kesang Tua, Jasin, Melaka: Antara Kegembiraan, Keduakaan dan Pengajaran" [The Japanese Occupation in Kesang Tua Village of Jasin, Melaka: Between Joy, Sorrow and the Lessons], HST 422 Paper (1994).
8. Shaballah Zainal Abidin, "Pendidikan dan Nyanyian di Zaman Jepun di Perlis Sebagai Satu Propaganda" [Education and Songs during the Japanese Occupation in Perlis as Propaganda], HST 422 Paper (1994).
9. Safie Ibrahim, *op. cit.*
10. Shaballah Zainal Abidin, *op. cit.*
11. Safie Ibrahim, *op. cit.* The song is translated as "We are peasants, we worked every day to plant yam and tapioca so as to be able to eat morning and evening. Peasants are honourable people, who are loved and who obey orders, forward, forward".
12. Zaharah Hamzah, *op. cit.*
13. Safie Ibrahim, *op. cit.*
14. Izani Ibrahim, "Sistem Pendidikan di Zaman Jepun: Tumpuan di Daerah Pasir Mas, Kelantan" [The Education System during the Japanese Occupation: Focus on Pasir Mas District in Kelantan], HST 422 Paper (1994). See also Zainah Arshad, "Keadaan Sosio-Ekonomi Pekerja-Pekerja Kerajaan (Guru) dalam Masa Pendudukan Jepun" [The Sosio-economic Condition of Government Servants (Teachers) during the Japanese Occupation], in *Pendudukan Jepun di Tanah Melayu*, pp. 144-53.
15. Norishah Md Din, "Jepun Berusaha untuk Menjadikan Bahasa Jepun sebagai Lingua Franca di Asia Tenggara dan di Dunia Jika Mungkin (Chin Kee On: 148) Sejauh manakah usaha yang dilakukan oleh pihak Jepun ini mencapai kejayaan?" [Japan attempted to make the Japanese language as the lingua franca of Southeast

- Asia and the world if possible (Chin Kee Onn: 148). To what extent was Japan successful in achieving her objective?]. HST 422 Paper (1994).
16. Zaharah Md Nazir, "Pengalaman En Nazir Naim sebagai Pemborong Ikan, Pelajar dan Tenaga Pengajar pada Zaman Pendudukan Jepun di Tanah Melayu (1942-45) [The experience of Mr Nazir Naim as a fish wholesaler, student and teacher during the Japanese Occupation of Malaya (1942-45)]. HST 422 Paper (1994).
 17. Zaharah Hamzah, *op. cit.*
 18. *Ibid.*
 19. Siti Zubaidah Kassim, "Pengalaman Penduduk Sungai Aceh yang Bekerja sebagai *Jikeidan* Jepun pada Waktu Pendudukan Jepun di Tanah Melayu" [The experience of the inhabitants of Sungai Aceh village who worked as Japanese *jikeidan* during the Japanese Occupation of Malaya], HST 422 Paper (1991).
 20. Translated as, "Beware of Britain-America, enemy of the whole world, both want to make a fool of us, in their wanton ways. Destroy, destroy, our enemy, our enemy which are Britain and America".
 21. Shaballah Zainal Abidin, *op. cit.*
 22. Translated as, "What had the British done, plant rubber, that cannot be consumed, we must plant padi, something that can be consumed. The Japanese are clever, the British are stupid".
 23. See the review essay by Richard Hunt, "Remembering World War II: The Role of Oral History", *The Public Historian* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 83-85. One of the books reviewed was *Building the Death Railway: The Ordeal of American PoWs in Burma, 1941-45*, edited by Robert La Farce and Ronald E. Marcello (Willington, Del.: SR Books, 1993), which is based on the memory of 22 survivors, mainly from Texas. There are numerous books written by former PoWs and labourers on the Death Railway, made famous by the movie "Bridge on the River Kwai". For the Japanese themselves, there are available studies on the Death Railway, such as Yamagita Masaichi, *Taimen Tetsudo no Jissho to Senso Saiban* [The Reality and War Judgement of the Burma-Siam Railway] (Tokyo: privately published, 1954); and the more recent study by Koshikawa Toshiharu, *Taimen Tetsudo* [The Burma-Siam Railway] (Tokyo: Nakashima Shobo, 1994).
 24. Discussion on this section is based on the following short studies: Yasmin Hashim, "Tumpuan Khas Terhadap Haji Hassan bin Abdul Samad Melalui Pengalaman sebagai Buruh Paksa Keretapi Maut di Zaman Jepun" [A Focus on Haji Hassan bin Abdul Samad through his experience as a forced labourer of the Death Railway during the Japanese period], HST 422 Paper (1994); Mohd Norzan Yunus, "Semasa Pendudukan Jepun di Tanah Melayu (1941-45) telah Membawa Penderitaan kepada Buruh Paksa yang terlibat dalam Pembinaan Landasan Keretapi Maut" [The Japanese Occupation of Malaya (1941-45) had caused sufferings on those forced labourers who were involved in the construction of the Death Railway], HST 422 Paper (1994); Zulkefli Ismail, "Sejauh Manakah Penduduk di Tanah Melayu Dipaksa Menjadi Buruh Sewaktu Pentadbiran Jepun? [To what extent were the people of Malaya forced to become labourers during the Japanese administration?], HST 422 Paper (1994); Mohd Khir Ngah, "Buruh Paksa dan Pembinaan Jalan Keretapi Maut: Satu Tinjauan (Tumpuan kepada mangsa di Kelantan)" [Forced labourers and the construction of the Death Railway: A Survey

(Focus on victims in Kelantan)], HST 422 Paper (1994); Alias Senik, "Pentadbiran Jepun: Implikasi Buruh dari Sudut Sosio-ekonomi Terhadap Kg. Tok Kassim, Kota Bharu, Kelantan" [The Japanese administration: the implications on labour from the socio-economic aspect on Tok Kassim village in Kota Bharu, Kelantan], HST 422 Paper (1994); and Mat Zin Mat Kib, "Persatuan Bekas Buruh Paksa dan Keluarga Buruh Paksa Jalan Keretapi Maut Siam-Burma 1942-45, Persekutuan Tanah Melayu, 1958-73: Satu Tinjauan Sejarah Perkembangannya" [The association of forced labourers and families of forced labourers of the Burma-Siam Death Railway, the Federation of Malaya, 1958-73: A Survey of its Historical Development] (unpublished academic exercise, School of Humanities, USM, 1988; henceforth cited as "History Section AE"). Mat Zin's lengthy study shows that the first type of labourers came from all over the peninsula and were from all racial groups. In 1987, I met some of them in Raub, Pahang, where they had gathered to discuss the issue of back-pay claims from the Japanese government. So far, members of this association are fighting a losing battle and in the light of recent developments in Japan, I am convinced that such claims would fail. Perhaps this is one of the tragedies of the war when the plight of former labourers are not given due attention. The subsequent discussion of forced labourers is, however, confined to Kelantan and a few other states. See also the autobiographical account by Hashim Yop, *Korban Keretapi Maut* [Victim of the Death Railway] (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, 1985); and Yuszah Akmal Yusof, "Teh bin Said, 1942-45: Pengalaman sebagai Buruh dan Pengalaman melarikan diri dari Jepun di Burma" [The Said, 1942-45: Experience as a forced labourer and escaping from the Japanese in Burma], in *Pendudukan Jepun di Tanah Melayu*, pp. 129-135.

25. Arifin Osman, "Satu Tinjauan Teoritis Kehidupan Buruh (Paksa) Pembinaan Lapangan Terbang Zaman Jepun di Kuala Pilah, Negri Sembilan" [A survey of the life of (forced) labourers involved in the construction of an air field in Kuala Pilah, Negri Sembilan], HST 422 Paper (1994).
26. Mohd Yusof Mohamed, "Pasukan *Jikeidan* Kg. Repoh: Satu Pengalaman Kerjasama Penduduk Tempatan dengan Pihak Pentadbiran Tentera Jepun di Negeri Perlis" [The Repoh village *Jikeidan*: A case of co-operation between locals and the Japanese military administration in Perlis], HST 422 Paper (1994).
27. Translated as, "All the bad deeds that were carried out by the inhabitants of Sungai Acheh village such as theft and picking quarrels were no longer there because of the day and night surveillance. Everyone was scared of Japanese punishment". Siti Zubaidah Kassim, op. cit. The informant was Ibrahim Cheek, 73 years old in 1991, and a former KMM leader and chief of the Sungai Acheh *jikeidan*.
28. See, for instance, Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict During and After the Japanese Occupation, 1941-46* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1983), pp. 33-36.
29. Siti Zubaidah Kassim, op. cit.
30. Shahat Md Shah, "Pendudukan Jepun di Tanah Melayu: Penubuhan Tentera Sukarela dan Pasukan Pertahanan Awam (Tinjauan kepada *jikeidan* membangkitkan masalah perkauman di daerah Batu Pahat, Johor)" [The Japanese Occupation of Malaya: The formation of the volunteer army and local defence

force (Focus on *jikeidan* and the racial problems in the district of Batu Pahar in Johor)], HST 422 Paper (1994).

31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Mohd Yusof Mohamed, *op. cit.*
34. Siti Zubaidah Kassim, *op. cit.*
35. Chin Kee Onn, *Malaya Upside Down* (Kuala Lumpur: Federal Publications, 1976), pp. 46–49.
36. Ibid., p. 46.
37. Rohaini Kamsan, "Keadaan Kehidupan Masyarakat Luar Bandar Melayu Pulau Pinang di Masa Pendudukan Jepun Secara Am" [The life of the rural Malays of Penang during the Japanese Occupation], in *Pendudukan Jepun di Tanah Melayu*, p. 99.
38. Ahmed Baba Ahmed Meah, *Penaklukan Jepun: Suka Duka di Georgetown*, p. 71.
39. Ibid., p. 117.
40. Ibid., p. 111.
41. Gumbang Pura, "Masalah Inflasi di Pulau Pinang di Masa Pemerintahan Jepun 1941–45" [Inflation in Pulau Pinang under Japanese rule 1941–45], in *Pendudukan Jepun di Tanah Melayu*, pp. 76–78; see also Chin Kee Onn, *op. cit.*, pp. 49–50, on the attitudes of the townsfolk in these campaigns.
42. Yoichi Itagaki and Koichi Kishi, "Japanese Islamic Policy — Sumatra/Malaya", in *Intisari* II, no. 3 (nd): 11–23; Yoji Akashi, "Japanese Military Administration in Malaya: Its Formation and Evolution in Reference to the Sultans, the Islamic Religion and the Muslim-Malays — 1941–45", in *Asian Studies* 7, no. 1 (April 1969): 81–110.
43. Abu Talib Ahmad, "The Impact of the Japanese Occupation on the Malay-Muslim Population", in *Malaya and Singapore during the Japanese Occupation*, edited by Paul Kratoska (Singapore: Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, Special Publication Series no. 3, 1995), pp. 24–36.
44. Bahasan Abdul Rahman, "Pendudukan Jepun dan Kesannya di Pelangai, Pahang Darul Makmor" [The Japanese Occupation and its impact on the village of Pelangai in Pahang], HST 422 Paper (1988). See also the file in the Johor Archive, Letter from the Chief Kathi to the President of the Johor Religious Affairs and Education Department, dated 22 May 1943, in *Pejabat Kathi Besar Johor 67/03. Orang-orang Nippon Naik ke Dalam Masjid Mengachau* [The Chief Kathi Office Johor 67/03. The Japanese Had Entered Mosques, Creating Havoc].
45. See the request dated 13 December 1943, in *Pejabat Kathi Besar Johor 167/03. Memohon Satu Tanda Bertulisan Nippon* [Chief Kathi Office Johor 167/03. Application for a Sign Written in the Japanese Language].
46. Wan Ramli Wan Mohamad, *Pengakuan Tengku Ali* [The Confession of Tengku Ali] (Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti, 1993), pp. 42–43. Tengku Ali was never officially recognized as Sultan of Trengganu.
47. See, for instance, Nabir Abdullah, *Maahad Il Ihya Assyariff Gunung Semanggol 1934–1959* [The Maahad Il Ihya Assyariff Religious School of Gunung Semanggol 1934–1959] (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1976), pp. 82–91.

48. Zainah Arshad, "Keadaan Sosio-Ekonomi Pekerja-Pekerja Kerajaan (Guru) dalam Masa Pemerintahan Jepun", p. 151.
49. Nabir Abdullah, op. cit., p. 94.
50. Ahmad Baba Ahmed Meah, *Penaklukan Jepun: Suka Duka Di Georgetown*, pp. 70–71.
51. Shamsuddin Abdul Kadir, "Tinjauan Keadaan Ekonomi dan Sosial di Johor, 1942–45" [A Survey of the Economic and Social Conditions in Johor, 1942–45] (Mini thesis for HSM 411 Documents in Malaysian History, History Section, School of Humanities, USM, 1995; hereafter cited as HSM 411 Mini Thesis), pp. 37–54.
52. Self Defence Agency, Japan, *Tokugawa Shiryo no. 38* [Tokugawa Materials no. 38], which dealt at length on the 1943 conference in Singapore.
53. The subsequent discussion is based on minutes of the conference located in the Johor Archive, in a file entitled "Butir-Butir Mesyuarat Ugama Islam yang telah Bersidang pada 13–14 dan 15 Disember 2604 di Istana Iskandariah Kuala Kangsar Pejabat Kathi Besar Johor 257/04" [Details relating to the Islamic conference held on 13–14 and 15 December 1944 at the Iskandariah Palace, Kuala Kangsar, The Chief Kathi Office, Johor 257/04].
54. E'ajis Jaafar, "Md Nor Kassim dan Latif Mohd Yatim (1942–45): Pengalaman Bekas anggota Pertahanan Awam Jepun dan Tinjauan Semula tentang Kekejaman tentera Jepun di Kuala Selangor" [Md Nor Kassim and Latif Mohd Yatim (1942–45): The experience of former members of Japanese local defence force and a re-evaluation of Japanese army atrocities in Kuala Selangor], HST 422 Paper (1995).
55. Translated as, "The Japanese period taught us (Malays) to be more hard working, the bad ones fear the Japanese, and the love for this country was slowly being instilled as the Japanese kept reminding Malays of their rightful place here". Siti Zubaidah Kassim, op. cit.
56. Teh Koon Hoo, "Pendudukan Jepun di Yan, 1941–43 (Satu Tinjauan Sepintas Lalu)", HST 422 Paper (1994).
57. Teh Koon Hoo, "Pendudukan Jepun di Yan, 1941–43" [The Japanese Occupation in Yan, 1941–43], HSM 411 Mini Thesis (1995).
58. Harry Miller, *Prince and Premier: A Biography of Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, former Prime Minister of the Federation of Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: George C. Harrap, 1959), ch. 7.
59. Fujiwara Iwaichi, *F-Kikan: Japanese Army Intelligence Operations in Southeast Asia during World War II*, translated by Yoji Akashi (Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann, 1983), pp. 79–81.
60. Translated as, "Even though the period of the Occupation is less than 2 years, the Japanese had demonstrated their seriousness to bring benefits and good deeds to the people of Yan especially in the economic, social and spiritual (?) development. This means that the Japanese administration is far better than the British administration. The Japanese lived in a simple manner and by examples easy to be understood compared to the "sophistry" of British officials. The British with their soft approach only managed to deceive the Malays whereas the Japanese behind their forceful ways, wanted the locals to work hard, be disciplined and self-supporting to develop their own self, the society and the country". Teh Koon Hoo, "Pendudukan Jepun di Yan, 1941–43 (Satu Tinjauan Sepintas Lalu)", p. 20.

61. Azahar Raswan Dean Wan Din, "Penguasaan Ekonomi Kedah oleh Tentera Jepun Semasa Perang Dunia Kedua, 1941–45" [Control of the Kedah Economy by the Japanese Army during World War 2, 1941–45], History Section AE (1984).
62. *Ibid.*, pp. 61–79.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
64. Zainuddin Haji Ahmad, "Pendudukan Jepun di Kampung Permatang Tuan Samad, Permatang Sungai Dua, Seberang Perai" [The Japanese Occupation in the village of Permatang Tuan Samad in Permatang Sungai Dua of Seberang Perai], HST 422 Paper (1988).
65. Wan Hashim Wan Teh, *Peranan Gerila Melayu Force 136* [The Role of the Malay Guerillas in Force 136] (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, 1993). Among the prominent former members that he interviewed were the late Captain Mohd Salleh Sulaiman, Lt Mohd Nor Rani and Colonel Dato' Yeop Mahidin, important figures in the Malay guerilla movement.
66. Abdul Aziz Zakaria, *Leftenan Nor Pahlawan Gerila* [Lt Nor the Guerilla Fighter] (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, 1959).
67. Ismail Babu, *Kisah Seorang Perajurit*, pp. 88–127.
68. Mohd Yusof Ahmad, *Decades of Change*, pp. 202–90.
69. Zakaria Salleh, *Biografi Seorang Jeneral: Tan Sri Hamid Bidin* [The Biography of a General: Tan Sri Hamid Bidin] (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1995), pp. 47–50.
70. Cecilia Tan, *Tun Sardon Jubir: His Life and Times*, pp. 11–13.
71. Ahmed Baba Ahmed Meah, *Penaklukan Jepun: Suka Duka di Georgetown*, pp. 75–76.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
73. Ahmad Murad Nasaruddin, *Nyawa di Hujung Pedang* [Life at the Edge of the Sword] (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, 1986). The book was first published in 1946.
74. I am thankful to Dato' Profesor Wan Hashim Wan Teh for this information.
75. Mohamad Isa Othman, *Pendudukan Jepun di Tanah Melayu 1942–45 (Tumpuan di Negeri Kedah)* [The Japanese Occupation of Malaya 1942–45 (Focus on Kedah)] (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, 1992), pp. 49–56, 113–14.
76. Wan Ramli Wan Mohamad, *Pengakuan Tengku Ali*, pp. 33–38.
77. I am thankful to Dato' Profesor Wan Hashim Wan Teh for this information.
78. William Shaw, *Tun Razak: His Life and Times*, pp. 64–65.
79. Fujiwara Iwaichi, op. cit., pp. 79–80; and Harry Miller, *Prince and Premier*, chap. 7. In the 1980s, the late Tunku reiterated more or less the same story during an interview with USM academics, Profesor Sharom Ahmat and Dr Cheah Boon Kheng, for the university's oral history project, which was later published as *Reminiscences of Tunku Abdul Rahman and the Japanese Occupation, 1941–45*, by the Oral History Committee (Penang: Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1980). I am not sure if in that particular interview the Tunku did refer to this autobiography, or spoke from memory. The Tunku's story was first published in the *Star*, 25 August 1975.
80. Azahar Rawan Dean Wan Din, "Penguasaan Ekonomi Kedah oleh Tentera Jepun Semasa Perang Dunia Kedua, 1941–45", p. 11.

81. Michael Kammen, *The Mystic Chords of Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 10.

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Indian War Memory in Malaysia

P. Ramasamy

War and Memory

The world has come a long way since the end of World War II about fifty years ago. Far-reaching political, economic, and social changes around the globe have contributed to raising important questions about the future of mankind in the fast approaching twenty-first century and beyond. Although the future seems to be our utmost concern, perhaps it is equally significant to ponder about one of the most talked about subjects in the international arena — war. Not about future wars, not about strategies that nations should utilize in securing their interests, but how people experienced and remembered wars. A quick glance at the subject of war will indicate that the most glaring lacuna seems to be that little attention has been given to historical memories — as though these are not important but only as subject matter that would interest students of history.

In examining the subject of war and memory at the conceptual level, many questions arise, more questions than answers that anybody could provide. The fundamental problem seems to be the conceptualization of war itself. If there is universal agreement that wars are bad and immoral, then treating the question of memory is quite simple. In other words, people would only have sad or bitter memories of wars. Furthermore, if all wars are bad, then wars would have ceased a long time ago because they would not have benefited anyone. But a simple-minded conception of wars — that they are all bad, cruel, and ugly — cannot be accepted. As historian Freedman points out, if there is universal agreement that wars do not solve anything “it would provide a powerful argument against initiating hostilities. Yet war has shaped many states in the modern world to justify such a generalization, however true it undoubtedly is in many cases. Wars have toppled dictators and liberated oppressed peoples. They have also been fought and won to protect ways of life and cherished values” (Freedman 1994, pp. 4–5).

So wars mean different things to different people. The aggressor would resort to wars to subdue his enemies whereas the oppressed would resort to wars to escape from domination and enslavement. Given the fact that wars give rise to different perceptions, values, and meanings, the subject matter of memory — or how people remember wars — could pose a very challenging task to scholars and writers. In writing about war memory, the student should be well aware of the following concerns: the politics of memory, what is memory, methodological aspects of memory, character of memory, and finally who remembers. Such conceptualization of memory is essential to deal with its multifaceted aspects in any given historical setting. Social scientists, in recording memories, have their own biases and prejudices; they will want to record and articulate memories which they consider important and relevant. What is important and relevant, what constitutes historical memories, the target groups, and others are determined solely at the discretion of social scientists by utilizing criteria best known to them. In other words, there is no universal and acceptable criteria in writing about historical memories.

This chapter is about war memory among the Indian community in Malaysia. Malaya comprised three main ethnic groups during the war and the fact that the Japanese Occupation meant different things to these races makes it almost impossible to derive a common argument to state that the war, or the Occupation, had a similar impact on all the races. It is this differential impact that had a profound effect on the memories of the people. For that matter, even within the Indian community, one cannot speak of one memory; rather there are different kinds of memories that have sprung up as a result of sub-communal, class, and linguistic differences that have their roots in the history of this country.

This chapter seeks to discuss how the Indian community experienced World War II, or the Japanese Occupation in Malaya. Throughout the chapter, the reader will be aware that no pretensions to objectivity are made. The overwhelming thrust of the chapter has a class bias; in other words, having researched and organized plantation workers in Malaysia for the last fifteen years, I try to project a memory of war as experienced by the Indian working class. While I am sensitive to differences in the way the war was perceived by groups other than the working class, they are, however, not central to this chapter. I have always felt that the memory of the working class, who constitute the majority of the Indian population, are important both from a historical and a contemporary perspective. Gramsci (1971), Guha (1982) and others¹ have argued well that there is a pressing need in historical and political studies to combat élitism. The present reconstruction of war memory among the Indian working class during World War II represents a small effort in the direction of creating and sustaining a subaltern historiography. The discussion here revolves

around the three interrelated themes of hardship and struggle, heightened political consciousness, and disillusionment and re-orientation.

Hardship and Struggle

Historical documents, coupled with oral accounts of those who have experienced the Japanese Occupation, are sources that tell tales of how people in Malaya, irrespective of their backgrounds, suffered, perished, and endured the war. The suffering endured is perhaps the one common denominator among all the races in Malaya. While the degree of suffering varied from person to person and from community to community, suffering and hardship were nonetheless there. The sufferings experienced were, of course, mitigated to some extent by the Japanese attempts to cultivate ties with the Indians and the Malays during the later part of the Occupation.

The Indian community, having become domiciled in Malaya since the immigration ban in 1938, suffered by virtue of the fact that the majority of its members were located in the plantations. The Indian working class, with a history of exploitation under the British colonial planters, suffered when very basic items were put beyond their reach as a result of the collapse of the wage economy. Scarcity of food and other basic items during the Occupation was channelled to the working class by Indian middle-class intermediaries acting on behalf of the Japanese. These middle-class intermediaries more often than not either belonged to sub-communal groups like the Malayalees or Ceylonese, and being former members of the British colonial bureaucracy, resorted to the usual practices of exploitation and unfair distribution of food. Indian estate workers who experienced the Occupation have sad tales to tell about how these intermediaries, having gained the confidence of the Japanese, bullied, assaulted, and deprived the workers of their allocated share of food. The acute shortage of food gave rise to a situation where plantation workers would go around scavenging for food from rubbish dumps and near jungle fringes. In fact, given the acute shortage of rice, many had to subsist on tapoca and other root crops. As if this was not enough, the health and sanitation system completely broke down, causing untold suffering and even deaths.

While the working class suffered, the Indian middle and clerical classes were not seriously affected. Their economic strength and their administrative role during the Occupation spared them to some extent. Although the Occupation meant the end of British paternalism in the estates, labour was not spared the evils of regimentation and consequent hardship. In fact, under the Occupation, the Japanese, anxious to revive the plantation production system, elevated the former estate *kirani* (clerical staff) to positions formerly held by

the Europeans. The *kirani*, on their part, in order to please their new masters, imposed the worst forms of regimentation in the plantations. Jain is of the opinion that it was the redefinition of authority in the estates and the circumstances of war that shaped the *kirani*'s attitude towards the labourers. In this context, subtle role definitions and previously known paternalism gave way to cruder forms of coercion. According to Jain, "...the more tyrannical a *kirani* was the more successful he became with the Japanese. Conversely, in the eyes of the Japanese officers, a *kirani* who identified himself with the labourers was at best incompetent and at worst suspect (1970, pp. 301-2)". Because of the general shortage of basic necessities in the estates, such as clothing and food, many estate workers stayed away from work. Jain reports that in Pal Melayu Estate, the *kirani* and *kangani* (foremen), armed with sticks, would enter estate lines and force the labourers to report to work. During these raids, women used to run out covering themselves with only gunnysacks (1970, p. 301).

While the *kirani* were elevated to managerial positions and their duties increased, the old form of European paternalism was totally inoperative. Under the Japanese, the *kirani* had to face insults, indignities, and at times were assaulted in front of the labourers. The Japanese needed the services of the *kirani* but at the same time did not really trust them. Their activities were carefully watched. Although the *kirani* played a small part in the anti-Japanese resistance efforts, when the Europeans returned they were quick to spread the news of how they had helped the British in undertaking resistance efforts. According to some estate workers, the British in return praised the *kirani* and even rewarded them for maintaining the estate production system while they were away. In the immediate post-war years, the good treatment of the *kirani* by the British was condemned as being hypocritical by the labour organized within the fold of left-wing unions (Interview). As we know, a number of *kirani* were indeed punished by the MPAJA (Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army) in the immediate aftermath of the war for their mistreatment of labour during the Occupation².

To Indian labour, the most unforgettable and tragic episode of the Occupation was the forced recruitment of labour to work on the infamous Death Railway from Siam to Burma. In order to speed up war efforts, the Japanese gave top priority to the construction of the railway. Since labour was a problem, they naturally looked to the estates in Malaya for procurement. With the co-operation of the estate *kirani* and other Asian intermediaries, forced labour recruitment was the order of the day. Between 1942 and 1943, more than 80,000 labourers were recruited to work on the railway. It seems that out of this number, less than half returned to their families. Thousands died in the labour camps as a result of malaria, snake-bites, and lack of food and water. Stenson argues that the harshness of the impact of the Occupation

on the Indian labourers can be seen in the fact that the Indian population fell by up to 100,000, or nearly 7 per cent (Stenson 1980, p. 90).

Even after the war, the hardship suffered by the families of the labourers as a result of the forced recruitment to Thailand was constantly highlighted by the trade unions under the influence of the PMFTU (Pan Malayan Federation of Trade Unions), a labour affiliate of the MCP (Malayan Communist Party). Among the demands that were put forward by the unions was compensation to be paid to the families of the labourers who had died in Siam (Ramasamy 1994, p. 74). To those Indians who experienced the Occupation period, the forced recruitment of Indian labourers to Siam has been a sore point. Some of the persons who were interviewed felt that the Japanese Government should provide financial compensation for those families who had suffered. They were also unhappy that the Malaysian Government had been silent on this issue. Even the South Indian Labour Fund, established during the colonial period, has not been utilized for the benefit and welfare of those families who suffered as a result of the forced recruitment.²

A number of those who were recruited to work on the railway project are still living in the country. Interviews with several of them over the years reveal that the recruitment was not all voluntary. The Japanese imposed a quota that had to be fulfilled by the estate *kirani*. The estate *kirani*, out of fear and an "extreme sense of loyalty" to the Japanese, imposed their own method of recruitment. Blackmail, threat, and other methods were invariably employed to obtain the labourers' compliance to go to Thailand. In the course of such recruitment practices, some *kirani* pursued over-zealous methods on account of Japanese protection. According to those interviewed, instances of the *kirani* singling out newly married males for duty in Thailand was very common. Having separated the husbands, the *kirani* would then make an attempt to take the newly wedded women as their mistresses.³ For example, at Pal Melayu Estate, an estate staff named Sivan rounded up all the able-bodied men to work on the railway. Following this, Sivan told all the women whose husbands had been taken away to consider himself as their husband. Beyond this, according to Jain, "... Sivan and the Japanese once ordered some women workers on the estate to come to the dispensary. There, behind closed doors, they were stripped naked and beaten by the Japanese soldiers. Women were frequently beaten at the office" (Jain 1970, p. 302).

Even before the war, there was a deep distrust between Tamil labourers and the estate *kirani*, who, as mentioned earlier, consisted largely of Malayalees and Ceylonese. The relationship took a turn for the worse during the Occupation as a result of the practices of the *kirani* in trying to please the Japanese. It seems that the *kirani* were even more tyrannical during the Occupation than before. Jain argues that the more tyrannical the staff became, the more successful they were in the eyes of the Japanese. The forced recruitment of

labourers to Siam was one example of the *kirani*'s tyrannical measures. The opportunism of the estate *kirani* was particularly distasteful to estate labour following the return of the British after the war. In the words of one author:

When the Europeans returned to their estates after the war, they tended to praise the Asian staff for their positive contributions in saving the estates from total ruin. Within a short time, the staff adapted once again to serve their former masters. Estate labourers who had suffered much under the staff during the occupation were infuriated to see how hypocritical the European managers' attitude was towards them and the staff (Ramasamy 1994, p. 65).

Apart from the calls of nationalism, many Indian labourers joined the IIL (Indian Independence League) and the INA (Indian National Army) to escape the cruelty and harshness of the Occupation. However, Jain is of the opinion that Indian labour participation in the Indian independence movement was solely motivated by the desire to escape from being forcibly recruited to work on the railway project. To quote Jain:

There is no evidence that the labourers on Pal Melayu joined the Indian National Army for nationalistic reasons. If there was a trace of nationalism in a man's decision to join the army, it could be summed up in these words of one of its ex-officers (now headmaster of the school on Pal Melayu): For estate workers, the sole justification of joining the Indian National Army lay in the guarantee of a more honourable end in the cause of one's country, as against the ignominious death of a forced labourer in Siam (Jain 1970, p. 304).

Jain's reductionist understanding of the Indian labourers' support for the INA can be questioned. Interviews with former members of the INA suggest that the support and enthusiasm for the INA was overwhelming not only from labour but also from the clerical and middle classes.⁴ A former close aide to Subhas Chandra Bose, Jayamani Subramaniam (1979), now living in India, recounts in his two-volume book that Indians in Malaya readily gave their support to the INA. A similar picture emerges from the book published by Sudarman (1989), now living in Singapore, about Indian experiences during the war. In the latter part of the Occupation, when the INA failed to liberate India, Indian labourers turned their attention to the Malayan reality by switching their loyalty to the MPAJA. Apparently, in the plantations, news of guerilla activities were often a great joy to the labourers. The MPAJA, particularly some of its Indian members, were looked upon by the estate labourers as heroes because they punished the estate *kirani* for being cruel to the labourers. For instance, in the Sungei Siput and Sitiawan areas in Perak, guerilla leaders such as Perumal and Muniandy were considered heroes by the Indian estate

population. These two individuals, it seems, meted out severe punishments to the estate *kirani* for their harshness towards labour.⁵

The Indian clerical and middle classes too suffered during the Occupation. As we saw, the breakdown of pre-war paternalism exposed these classes, particularly the *kirani*, to the harshness of Japanese rule. The urgent need to survive in a hostile climate predisposed these classes to accommodate the wishes and desires of the Japanese. Even before the onset of the war, having had access to information, sections of these classes left for India before the actual invasion. For instance, members of the money-lending Chettyar community left for India, entrusting their establishments and properties with agents (Arasaratnam 1979, p. 103). Of the educated middle class, the estate staff, consisting largely of members from the Malayalee and Ceylonese sub-communal groups, had no alternative but to stay on in the country. As narrated by those interviewed, members of these two groups, being quite distinct from the majority of the labourers in economic and sub-communal terms, had little desire to participate in the Indian independence movement.⁶ They had no great nationalistic feelings and neither did they harbour antagonistic feelings towards the British; but the circumstances of the Occupation, the fear of antagonizing the Japanese, and above all, the need to survive, made them partake in the efforts of the Indian independence movement.

According to MacIntyre (1972, Ch 4), members of the Indian middle and upper classes were not happy in taking part in the activities of the IIL and INA that were sponsored by the Japanese. The Ceylonese community felt that since they were from Ceylon, the quest for India's independence was not their concern.

However, when it was announced that the Japanese would look upon those who did not join the independence movement as traitors, and that the Japanese would not tolerate the maintenance of distinctions such as Ceylonese, Malayalees, Muslims and others, many members of the sub-communal groups joined the movement. They did this even though they realized that the INA campaign for the liberation of India was a distant prospect. At first, Indian Muslims in Malaya refused to take part in the activities of the movement because of the use of the INA flag; however, when the Japanese imposed the condition that internal travel could only be possible with the use of passes obtained from the local IIL offices, the Muslims had no choice but to join the movement.

Stenson is also of the opinion that because of the disruption of the economy and administration, certain sections of the Indian administrative and clerical classes were brought closer to the labourers. Members of these classes who had left the towns for the safety of the countryside had to grow their own food crops and perform other menial jobs. Such an exposure humbled these members of the Indian middle class to a point where they began identifying

with the problems of Indian labour. These members of the middle class were the ones who emerged to provide the crucial leadership within the Indian Independence movement. To quote Stenson:

With the former barriers of status and function reduced, some Indian clerks emerged from the occupation with a strong commitment to leadership of movements for the uplift of Indian labourers. In their turn, Indian labourers gained increased political and social awareness from their contact with better educated groups (Stenson 1980, p. 91).

Stenson is not entirely wrong in his portrayal of the Indian middle class. At the same time, it needs to be pointed out that some of the more educated Indians who were involved in the INA were primarily responsible for the formation of "yellow" (pro-employer) unions after the war. For example, the formation of the NUPW in 1946 by P.P. Narayanan and his friends was basically to wean labour away from identifying with left-wing unions.

Despite the different impact of war on the various sections of the Indian community, the community as a whole suffered. The Indian middle class was caught in a situation that demanded total accommodation with the Japanese authorities. It was this accommodation that drove them to perpetrate some of the worst crimes on Indian labour. The Japanese strategic aim of allowing the formation of the Indian independence movement in Malaya to oust the British from India meant that Indians had to sink their sub-communal attachments to identify with a larger cause. Many sub-communal groups like the Ceylonese, Indian Muslims, and others were not keen to participate in the efforts of the movement. The members of these groups had come to Malaya to seek their fortunes and had little desire to be involved in a political campaign. Unfortunately, the Occupation period did not offer these groups a choice. Japanese policy made it clear that there would be no toleration of sub-communal identities and that everybody had to be identified as an Indian. So participation in the efforts of the IIL and INA became mandatory for members of the sub-communal Indian groups. Non-identification with the movement meant inviting the wrath of the Japanese.

Memory of the INA

As outlined earlier in this chapter, war evokes all kinds of memories. Insofar as the Indian community was concerned, the period of the Occupation was a contradiction of sorts. From one view, the Occupation meant great economic and social dislocation but, from another, it also meant a memory of nationalism and heroism that has been told and retold to younger generations. This fond

memory has to do with how Indians, especially the working class, encouraged by the Japanese, were inducted into the nationalist movement to liberate India from British rule.

According to Jayamani Subramaniam, Indian involvement in the INA was an act of revenge by Indian labour against the British for their exploitation and ill-treatment of labour. According to him, the defeat of the British in Malaya was something that Indian labour heartily welcomed. Just before the war, in the Klang district strikes which received international attention, many Indian estate workers were killed and those arrested were deported to India. Despite appeals made by the Indian authorities, the British Government delayed action on the grounds that they were preparing for war. With the advance of the Japanese in Malaya, orders were given for the evacuation of all European civilians. Jayamani Subramaniam, who witnessed the evacuation of European civilians, has this to say:

What I and my friends saw at the Kuala Lumpur railway station cannot be erased from our memories. Thousands of British — men, women, and children arrived at the station. They all looked sad. The women especially were crying and trying to wipe their tears. Babies were crying for milk. These men and women who had received high salaries were now finding it hard to even obtain a piece of bread. When we gave them some bread and cigarettes, they received them with much gratitude — as though they have never seen these things before. Even for a cup of coffee they would thank us many times. The sufferings and tears of Indian workers have now reduced the Europeans to mere beggars! (1979, pp. 37–38).

From the above testimony, and the testimonies of others, both written and oral, the Indian community's participation in the independence movement appears to have been genuine. The idea that the community had a role to play in the establishment of a free India captured the imagination of labour. Whether this idea was realistic or not was not the main issue; what mattered was the fact that an opportunity presented itself to Indians to get even with their colonial masters who had ill-treated and exploited them. Such an anti-British attitude had been slowly fostered in the 1930s by the activities of organizations such as the CIAM (Central Indian Association of Malaya) with its strong pro-Congress sympathy. In fact, the Klang district strikes in the early 1940s were organized and executed under the leadership of the CIAM. Following the crushing of the strikes, many of the leaders of the CIAM were arrested and deported to India by the colonial authorities (Wilson 1981).

Despite the hardship and suffering endured by the Indians during the Occupation, the Japanese sponsorship of the League and Army to liberate India from British rule psychologically enhanced their self-importance. The

commitment to take part in the struggle for the freedom of India ignited the imagination of the Indian community. As one author said, "Indians were elevated from being pariahs of British Malaya to a most favoured community status under the Japanese" (Stenson 1980, p. 92). Many writings on World War II have attested to the fact that the Indian involvement in the efforts of the League and Army spared them from the worst forms of Japanese brutality. For example, when MacIntyre, the Chairman of the Batu Pahat League, and his friends assaulted a Japanese official for his arrogance and for being rude, the matter became a serious issue — one of assaulting a Japanese officer during war-time. However, when MacIntyre made it known that he was merely discharging his duties as a member of Azad Hind (the Provisional Government of India established by Subhas Chandra Bose during the war) and that if the Japanese took action he would report the matter to the Provisional Government, the Japanese refrained from further action (MacIntyre 1972, p. 125).

It must also be remembered that the special relationship between the League and the Japanese did not operate under all circumstances. Although the League officials sought to provide relief measures for the Indian population, they began to be used by the Japanese between 1944 and 1945. The Japanese, in anticipation of an Allied invasion, began to utilize the League officials to procure labour for defensive works. Under threats and pressure from the Japanese, the League officials had to search for and supply labour to the Japanese. Those labourers who were reluctant to participate were forced by the League officials through threats, such as the denial of rice rations (Stenson 1980, p. 98). Furthermore, the League's financial demands became quite intolerant as the war progressed. In order to be less dependent on the Japanese, a donation drive was launched, but later replaced by a subscription move. Those who evaded subscription faced the grim prospect of having to explain to the Japanese secret police, the Kempeitai (Stenson 1980, p. 99).

The activities of the League and Army gave a sense of unprecedented communal solidarity. Never before had the Indian community been so united in a single movement like the Indian independence movement in Malaya. Even the 1941 estate workers strike, which received international coverage, was confined to the Indian labourers in the district of Klang. During the Occupation, Indians of all classes and sub-communal backgrounds joined the movement, even though some groups were forced. The strong and overpowering nature of Indian ideology brought the Indians together. As remarked by MacIntyre, the credit for this mass mobilization should go to the thousands of Indian labourers (1972, p. 127), who volunteered for the League and Army by forming volunteer corps called Thondar Padai in the estates (Arasaratnam 1979, p. 108). The same Thondar Padai was later revived by left-wing trade unions in the immediate post-war period to oppose the employers in the plantations (Nadarajah, p. 1981). Tamil school-teachers, estate *kangani*, literate

Tamil labourers, and others helped in the dissemination of information. Given the anti-Western nature of the Indian nationalist ideology, labourers long used to being subservient to the Europeans, began to change. In the immediate post-war period, Indian labour, having gone through the INA experience, was the most militant in challenging British rule in Malaya. In fact, the majority of the left-wing trade union leaders were former INA members. According to Ramasamy:

Whatever the limitations of the occupation, its sponsorship of the Indian independence movement was important in two respects. First, it gave rise to unprecedented nationalist feeling among Indians of different classes. Such broad, radical, nationalist sentiments were later effectively channelled by the MCP and its affiliates to challenge British rule. Second, Indian participation in the INA exposed them to military training and discipline, and gave them the opportunity to handle arms, to lead and organize, and in the process to gain self-respect. Such exposure proved particularly useful to Indians who later participated in radical trade union activities. It is no coincidence that many Indian leaders in the trade union movement were ex-INA members and officers (Ramasamy 1994, p. 60).

Indian memory of the INA is to remember the personality and character of Subhas Chandra Bose, the President of the Provisional Government of India, who literally transformed the Indian independence movement from a weak to a militant one. Three principal factors were responsible for this transformation. First, the revival of the independence movement coincided with Japanese strategic interests. In order to counter the Allied offensive, the Japanese were anxious to cement their relationship with the INA to prepare for the invasion of India. Secondly, Bose had been the past president of the Indian National Congress, a position that put him on par with leaders like Nehru and Gandhi. Apart from possessing the qualities of a genuine national leader, Bose had the ability to stand up to the Japanese and to get the recognition and respect of the Provisional Government of India. Thirdly, Bose's personal magnetism, his charisma, his oratorical skills, his nationalist fervour and other qualities led many Indians to revere him as a god-sent liberator of India. Thousands of Indians readily participated in the INA after hearing Bose's speeches. Those who personally knew Bose have the following to say about him:

His powerful oratory electrified all those who heard him. Netaji's clarion call for blood, sweat and sacrifice from the Indians of Southeast Asia moved thousands of men and women to join him. He was our leader and our banner. We had sold our lives to his dream and considered it a privilege (Captain Dasan of the INA).

I was most impressed by Subhas Chandra Bose. A man spurred by nationalist fervour from his early youth, he had opposed the British Raj with indomitable courage. Naturally, young men like me were drawn to his charismatic leadership (M. Gandhi Nathan, INA Tokyo Cadet).

I myself had never heard such a brilliant orator. During his speech, Netaji appealed to the audience for funds. When he had finished, there was a great rush towards the rostrum. Men were throwing their rings, women their jewellery and those who did not have gold ornaments, whatever money they had, on the rostrum (K.R. Dass, INA).

Memory of Disillusionment and Reorientation

Despite the hardship imposed by the war, and the Japanese regime in particular, the Indian community's involvement in the cause of India's independence was an experience that gave them dignity and self-respect. However, the failure of the INA to liberate India was a big blow to the thousands who had cast their lot with the independence movement and greatly disillusioned them. Having lost hope in the liberation of India, the INA returnees came back to face the social, political, and economic realities of Malaya. As Stenson puts it aptly, "as hopes of an Indian liberation faded, thoughts turned to Malayan realities, to the struggle for survival and to specifically Malayan politics" (1980, p. 100).

In the immediate post-war period, the biggest problem for the Indian educated and clerical classes was how to reorientate themselves to the realities of the Malayan situation. This was problematic because of two factors. One was their total identification with the Indian independence movement. This linkage was a source of anxiety because it provided an excuse, real or otherwise, for some Malay groups to question their loyalty. The other factor was related to their accommodation with the Japanese, particularly the members of the clerical and administrative classes. While the issue of non-Malay loyalty to the country was brought up sporadically, the British, having re-established their control over Malaya, apparently did not make an issue of the Indian clerical groups' co-operation with the Japanese. On the contrary, the British managers tended to praise the Asian staff for their positive contribution in saving the estates from total ruin. This attitude on the part of the British was of great annoyance to labour, according to Ramasamy:

Within a short time, the staff adapted once again to serving their former masters. Estate labourers who had suffered much under the staff during the occupation were infuriated to see how hypocritical the European managers' attitude was towards them and the staff. It was in this atmosphere of strained relations that labour shied away from the managers and staff (1994, p. 65).

The brief period after the Japanese surrender on 15 August 1945 and before the British return was marked by chaos and lawlessness. As Khong (1984) and others have argued, the MPAJA emerged as the most powerful organization. It was during this period that guerillas, among others, took action to eliminate a number of Asian staff for their ill-treatment of labourers during the Occupation. While Stenson is right in saying that the Indian independence movement brought the various classes of Indians together, this alliance was only temporary. With the surrender of the Japanese, and the emergence of the MPAJA, old memories were rekindled. As more and more rank and file Indians joined the communist-dominated organizations like the left-wing trade unions, the conflict between labour and capital became inevitable in the post-war period. For example, when an attempt was made to incorporate labour in the plantations into the All Malayan Estate Asiatic Staff Association (an association of the estate *kirani*), this initiative was criticized by the PMFTU (Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions) (Gamba 1962, p. 253).

Quite recently, a similar attempt was made by AMESU (All Malaysian Estate Staff Union) to bring about a merger between it and the NUPW (National Union of Plantation Workers), representing the estate workers. In response to this proposed merger, I wrote an article in one of the Tamil dailies that the proposed merger would not benefit the workers because they would inevitably come under the better educated and economically stronger estate staff. I also pointed out that whatever little progress that workers had made would be lost through the domination of the estate staff, who had different interests from the working class. Most importantly, I pointed out that the historical enmity and antagonism between the two classes would not be conducive to the establishment of a merger. In other words, the Indian working class in the plantations had not really forgotten all the misdeeds of the estate staff during the war. In reply to my article, one of the officials of the AMESU wrote a lengthy article in the union's publication criticizing me for not welcoming the merger, saying that my reasons were outmoded and could not be accepted during the present time. The proposed merger did not take place and I felt vindicated because AMESU and its officials had underestimated the extent of enmity and misgivings that the plantation workers had towards the estate *kirani*.

Unlike the Indian middle class, the Indian rank and file experienced no great problems during the political transition. The MPAJA, having made some contact with Indian labour during the Occupation, intensified Indian recruitment in the post-war period. Many of the returnees from Burma were simply welcomed into the various front organizations of the MCP. Indians who had leadership roles in the INA became leaders of labour organizations. It was these Indians in the various left-wing organizations who provided the

crucial leadership to the Indian masses in the eventual conflict that took place between the MCP and the British authorities.

To those Indians who had INA experience, their involvement in the activities of the MCP did not constitute a contradiction. For the majority, the struggle against British imperialism was a continuation of the struggle that was first spearheaded by the INA. In the Malayan context, given their history of subservience and servility to British capitalists, the struggle forged by the MCP in the immediate post-war period was a just and democratic one. The Indians, of course, did not join the MCP blindly: the MCP had carefully cultivated Indian alliance during the war and later appointed a number of Indians to leadership positions within the party hierarchy and in left-wing trade unions.

The involvement of Indian labour in the activities of the MCP through labour organizations such as the PMFTU led to inevitable conflict with the colonial authorities. While labour won substantial concessions from capital, the combined employer-government opposition became a factor to be reckoned with. In the end, through a series of measures, the left-wing organizations were gradually weakened, forcing the MCP to go underground to begin long protracted guerilla warfare. During this period, government measures, such as hangings, deportations, and the process of deregistration of unions left large numbers of Indian labourers unrepresented. However, with the formation of government-sponsored unions like the NUPW and others, Indian labour, without any alternative, had to participate, albeit rather grudgingly. Later, the rise of the Malayan Indian Congress and cultural organizations such as the Dravida Kalagam sought to provide some representation to Indian labour under the watchful eyes of the colonial authorities. Discussions with former members of left-wing organizations reveal that the crackdown on the left in general created a vacuum in the Indian community that could not be filled by organizations that eschewed politics⁸. Much later in the 1960s, when an opportunity presented itself, these former members sought to align themselves with left-wing parties like the Labour Party and Party Raakyat. For instance, the formation of unions like the MEWU (Malayan Estate Workers Union), UMEWU (United Malayan Estate Workers Union) and others were instances of radicalization among labour in the plantations in the 1960s.

As was the case with the colonial authorities, the Malaysian Government did not view positively the radicalization of labour, especially Indian labour in the 1960s. The government argued that the underground Malayan Communist Party was infiltrating into legally established organizations and, as such, the government had to take a firm stand to stop this. The Labour Party was especially singled out for criticism because it was believed that communists had infiltrated into its ranks. The Party, which was involved in some labour disputes, came under increasing scrutiny and was finally banned in 1967. It

was during the same year that a number of unions affiliated to the party were deregistered. The UMEWU, which emerged as a rival to the NUPW, was also deregistered, leaving thousands of workers in a quandary in states like Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Malacca, and Johor. When some members of the deregistered unions took the initiative to highlight their problems by undertaking a long march from Asahan in Malacca to Kuala Lumpur, many of them and their leaders were arrested and detained under the Internal Security Act (Ramasamy 1994, chp. 6).

Conclusion

It can be concluded therefore that World War II, and specifically the occupation of Malaya by Japan, imposed great hardship and misery on the people. But then, the actual experience and the memory retained vary significantly not only between different ethnic groups but also within each ethnic group. In the case of the Indian community, while the rank and file was exposed to much hardship and cruelty, their experience with the INA was a very memorable event because it provided a chance of a life-time to settle old scores with their colonial masters. It was their participation in the INA that gave ordinary Indians a great sense of dignity, self-respect, and self-worth. While the failure to liberate India was a big blow to their dignity and pride, their quick reorientation to the political, economic, and social realities of Malaya naturally disposed them to sustain the efforts of left-wing organizations that were bent on upgrading the status of labour in post-war Malaya.

Notes

1. One conscious attempt at a subaltern historiography of Malaysia was the publication of an edited work by Peter J. Rimmer and Lisa M. Allen, eds., *The Under-side of Malaysian History* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990).
2. Interviews held with many estate workers in states like Perak, Selangor, Johor, Negeri Sembilan, and Malacca between 1987–88.
3. Interviews.
4. Interviews in Perak, 1987.
5. Interviews with former INA members in Perak and Selangor.
6. Interviews in Perak.
7. Memories of soldiers in Netaji Centre, *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: A Malaysian Perspective* (Kuala Lumpur: Netaji Centre, 1992).
8. Interviews with former members of left-wing unions in Seremban during 1987–88.

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The Japanese Occupation as Reflected in Singapore-Malayan Chinese Literary Works after the Japanese Occupation (1945-49)

Yeo Song Nian and Ng Siew Ai

Introduction

The Chinese literary scene in Singapore and Malaya during the period from 1926 to 1937, prior to the Sino-Japanese war, saw the existence of two major but diametrically opposite movements. One advocated and promoted literary works and identity with Singapore and Malaya, while the other continued to advocate literary works and identity with China.

The former, known as the Nanyanization movement, called for an open mind on the part of the Chinese writers to reflect the life of other ethnic groups, apart from solely reflecting the life of early Chinese immigrants in Singapore-Malayan Chinese literary writings,¹ with the ultimate aim of establishing a tradition in itself, and not to be just a continuous imitation of mainland Chinese literature.

This Nanyanization movement received support and enthusiastic responses from Chinese writers and editors of major literary supplements. For example, in 1927, editors from "Huangdao" of *Xin Guomin Ribao* expressed their determination "to introduce only Nanyang colour into the (Chinese) literary world".² Other newspapers such as "Yelin" of the *Lat Pao*, "Kudao" of the *Yichun Ribao*, "Nanyang Di Wenyi" of the *Nanyang Shibao*, "Wenyi Zoukan" of the *Nanyang Siang Pao*, and "Nanguo Di Yusheng" of the *Guanghua Ribao*, also strongly supported the call for Nanyanization of Malayan Chinese literature.

Despite the Nanyanization movement becoming the dominating trend in Singapore-Malayan Chinese literature then, the pro-China movement was also

an important force. The latter movement subscribed to the idea of regarding homeland literature as the orthodox. This was reinforced by leftist writers who had fled China after the Kuomintang-Communist split in 1927.

The arrival of leftist Chinese writers from China had a strong influence on some Singapore and Malayan Chinese writers. They wrote about events in China, their feelings towards China, and class struggles which occurred there. In 1932, some leaders of the League of Leftist Writers in China, whose aim was to create "literature for the masses", also had a strong influence on local Chinese writings, and the campaign for the use of *dazhong yu* (the language of the masses) in Malayan Chinese literature was a result of this.

After the Marco Polo bridge incident in July 1937, the Japanese launched a full-scale invasion of China. The Chinese in Singapore and Malaya responded with massive donations and materials for the war against the Japanese. Local Chinese writers then turned away from the pursuit of Nanyang colour in their writings, and identified themselves once again with China, expressing their patriotic feeling towards China after the Japanese invasion.

Between 1937 and 1941, many Malayan Chinese supported China by organizing anti-Japanese boycotts and strikes, fund raising,³ and recruiting volunteers. Others were actively involved in the establishment of civil defence, in guerilla warfare, in intelligence work, and other patriotic activities. Some local Chinese even returned to China to fight the Japanese.⁴

The cultural scene then was also very active in its support of the war effort. Singapore-Malayan Chinese writers joined the massive patriotic movement, known as the National Salvation Movement, and authors and playwrights through their works and plays,⁵ helped to promote patriotic feeling. They were united under the political call to create a "national defence literature". Their anti-Japanese thinking was well known and was reflected also in the short stories, poems, and prose that they wrote. Collectively, these were known as "Resistance Literature". Yu Dafu, who came to Singapore during this period, wrote about his mission in a magazine he was then editing:

It has been two years and six months since the struggle to defend our motherland started. We have reached a stage that we should utilise all chances to lead us to our final victory. We should develop the capability to fight in the literary scene. More propaganda, both internally and externally should be produced. We should attack the defeatists and collaborators. We, as writers should, as the war progresses, in the face of harsh reality, build an anti-war force. No doubt, the regional reality, personal opinion, as well as group unity are important, but the most important of all is the total unity of the nation. By this, there should be no dividing line between politicians, the military and the intellectuals. Thus, our future effort, be it in writing critiques or non-fiction, we should always remember and bear this focus in mind.⁶

Because of the Japanese invasion of China and the outbreak of the Pacific War, literary movements in Malaya proliferated. There was a greater number of outstanding young writers and the appearance of more creative works filled with slogans on defending homeland China and protecting Malaya against the Japanese military aggression. Tie Kang, Lin Ji, and Liu Bing, among others, wrote about the cruelty of the Japanese and the despicable behaviour of the Chinese traitors. In general, the feeling of solidarity against the Japanese was the theme of many Malayan Chinese literary works.

Following the invasion of Malaya, anti-Japanese sentiments among the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya intensified. On 30 December 1941, the Singapore-Malayan Overseas Chinese Anti-Japanese Mobilisation Headquarters was formed, led by a committee which comprised Lin Moushen, Lin Jiangshi, Hu Yuzhi, and others. The Chinese community contributed to the anti-Japanese war effort by serving as a pool of ready labour for the British colonial government. A Chinese volunteer force was also set up to fight side by side with the British army.⁷ The Chinese literary circle led by Yu Dafu, Hu Yuzhi, Zhang Chukun, Wang Renshu and others played a role in the anti-Japanese campaign through its anti-Japanese propaganda and cultivation of younger generation leaders.⁸

After landing in Kota Bahru, the Japanese avalanched southward via two routes, the west and the east.⁹ The western troops faced stiff resistance from the Chinese volunteer troops who fought together with the British, Indian and Australian troops, causing great loss to the Japanese army. This was a major reason cited for the massacre of the Chinese population after the fall of Singapore.

As the local Chinese were involved in the Sino-Japanese War, many Japanese soldiers in the 25th Army, who had fought the local population, had a strong dislike for the Malayan Chinese. The Japanese military therefore ordered severe punishment for the Chinese through a campaign known as *sook ching* (purification through purge), which resulted in the massacre of thousands of Chinese.¹⁰ This was reflected in Chinese literary works in Singapore and Malaya, which will be discussed later.

On 15 February 1942, the British surrendered unconditionally, and Singapore fell into the hands of the Japanese, who renamed it Syonan or Light of the South. Thus began the three years and eight months of the Japanese Occupation. After the fall of Singapore, some local writers either returned to China or joined the underground forces elsewhere to fight the Japanese, and the "Resistance Literature" came to a halt.

The purpose of this chapter is to reconstruct a picture of Singapore and Malaya during the Japanese Occupation, as reflected in Chinese literary works, and in particular, the life and sufferings of the people through the eyes of Chinese writers during this period.

Life during the Japanese Occupation in Singapore and Malaya

The war caused massive destruction to the population of Singapore and Malaya. This was reflected in the works written after the war. In Miaoxiu's *Huolang* [Waves of Fire], there was a scene which described the aftermath of an air raid by the Japanese bombers:

The fifty pound bomb of all the luck struck the bomb shelter of the 'tea-li' tree right in front of the Temple. The family of seven which included young and old hiding inside the shelter were immediately buried together as a whole family. None of them survived. The next day, the people in the village found that the shelter had become a big hole filled with blood and flesh.¹¹

In the story entitled *Fuchou* [Revenge], Qiu Tian also depicted the cruelty of the Japanese and the destruction of the invasion:

The road was engulfed by flames. Corpses were everywhere. There were burnt corpses, the private parts of a woman, corpses without heads, and there was also a leg dangling on a wire pole... blood streaming under a fallen pole, and also on the cement ground....

The accursed Japanese devils were so cruel! The planes fired at the refugees, rows and rows of men and women collapsed on to the ground. Sorrowful and pathetic cries shocked heaven and earth. But the [Japanese] devils in the planes were laughing with evil smiles!....¹²

The description of the result of the bombing in *Fuchou* is similar to Miaoxiu's *Huolang*, where the writer's hatred towards the Japanese can be felt by readers from the enunciation in his writings.

During the Occupation, the Japanese made their presence felt with slaps, kicks, detention, rape, torture and massacre, and terrorizing the multiracial population in Singapore, aggravated by the additional millions seeking refuge from Peninsular Malaya.

The various kinds of torture were described by Fang Nianzu in his work, *Bincheng Da Jianju Ji Rekou Duxing* [The Penang Cross-Examinations and Torture].¹³ According to him, the Japanese Army used numerous kinds of torture, including *laohu bei zhu* (the tiger carrying the pig), *zuo feiji* (riding a plane), *guan shui* (forcing in water), and *zhen cha zhijia* (piercing the finger nails with nails). *Laohu bei zhu* was a torture method that made use of Judo, in which a Japanese soldier would throw the prisoner until he lost consciousness. Cold water would then be used to wake the prisoner in order to continue the torture. *Zuo feiji* was a form of torture where the prisoner was stripped of his clothes. His hands and legs were tied together, and he would then be hung upside down about three or four feet above the ground. The

prisoner would remain in this posture until he lost consciousness. If the prisoner refused to admit to his "crime", or refused to collaborate, he would be hung again and struck with a thick stick or a hot rod pressed onto his face or body. *Guan shui* was the act of forcing water into the prisoner's belly with a water hose shoved into the prisoner's mouth. The belly would expand accordingly. If the prisoner lost consciousness, his belly would be stepped on, forcing water to come out from his nose, mouth and eyes. Another way of forcing water into the prisoner was to tie a weight on him and he would then be dropped into a water tank. When no air bubbles could be seen, the prisoner was dragged out of the tank, the water forced from his belly and he would be left under the sun.

In Lin Cantian's *Yu Ai* [The Remaining Sadness],¹⁴ he described the life of two Australian captives in the concentration camp. They experienced hard labour and ill-treatment, which resulted in the death of one of them. In addition, in the story entitled *Xishengzhe De Zhiliao* [The Treatment of a Martyr],¹⁵ a heroic figure, Detainee No. 548, was portrayed by Yin Zhiyang. He was tortured by the Japanese in jail and sentenced to death. In his final days, he declined treatment by a doctor and requested that the medication be saved for other detainees as he knew that there was a shortage of medicine in the jail. Apart from this, Yin Zhiyang also depicted the torture of the detainees by the Japanese in the jail in the same story:

His punishment was especially severe; no food was given to him for a stretch of four to five days. Not even a drop of water was given to him so that he could not even stand steadily. He had to hold on to the wall in order to walk. And for three to four times a day, he was filled with large amounts of water which caused such pain in his stomach and intestines that though hungry, he could not eat his piece of tapioca.¹⁶

One of the main aims of the massacre and cross-examination was to remove the anti-Japanese intellectuals. As such, the intellectuals suffered greatly under the Japanese. Moreover, when the Japanese were systematically removing the anti-Japanese elements in Singapore, their policy was to make sure that all suspects were dealt with, even if it meant killing the innocent. Puzhi's, Dike's, Hanzhi's and Fang Nianzu's works are most reminiscent of the cruelty of the Japanese and the great misery they brought to the people in Singapore and Malaya. As depicted in Fang Nianzu's *Bincheng Da Jianju Ji Rekou Duxing* [The Penang Cross-Examination and Torture]:

On the morning of the 6th of April, Japanese sea force and police permeated all the main roads in Penang. Everyone, regardless of sex, age or state of health, was forced at bayonet point to go out to the main street for cross-examination. As this was their first experience, everyone was worried and lost. Groups of people, including the aged and the kids, were standing or

squatting at the edge of the road under the scorching sun without food or water. It was not until noon that the police, under the orders of their Japanese superiors, ordered everyone to form two lines — one for males and one for females. The males were ordered to remove their shirts, and to walk past the Japanese officer who would inspect their hands for signs of tattoos. Those with tattoos would be removed from the main line to form another line. The police were holding whips and they were threatening the people, ordering them to proceed. At the second gate, even more people were removed from the main line. Those who managed to stay on in the line were not allowed to return home as the officer in charge wanted to lecture them. Within the two or three hours, many people were trucked away.....

Less than a quarter of those who were trucked off managed to return. The rest were either killed or imprisoned....¹⁷

Other books such as *Shuangxi Danian Yu Julin Zhi Datusha* [The Massacre in Shuangxi Danian and Julin] and Chunsheng's "Bazhubahai Mengnan jingguo" [Captured and Killed (by Japanese) in Batu Pahat], Liao Liangyi's *Pure Zai Pili Zhi Cansha* [The Massacre by the Brutal Japanese in Perak] described the massacres that took place in other areas of Singapore and Malaya. A good example was Liao Liangyi's *Pure Zai Pili Zhi Cansha*, which describes the massacre that took place at Meiluo and Songxi:

Although Meiluo was only a small town about 40 miles from Ipoh, in terms of population and resources, it was the richest in the region. During the war, it suffered greatly. Take Sanbaoling, which was about one mile from the city, where about 100 families and a few hundred Chinese were staying. The Japanese came and massacred them. They forced the Chinese to squat down and machine-gunned them. Others were forced to go indoors and the houses were burnt down. Using such inhumane methods, more than 90 percent of the houses were vacant at the end of the massacre.¹⁸

As for those who were detained and survived, they were subjected to all kinds of torture in jail. Literary works such as Dike's *Cong Pei Jubu Dao Ruyu* [From Capture to Imprisonment], Lan Kong Ying's *Wo Bei Jubu* [I Was Captured], and Huang Weijiang's *Xinglou Yuzhong* [In the Jail of Xinglou] also described the various scenes inside the concentration camp. The 17 March 1947 issue of *Sin Chew Jit Poh* had a special column to commemorate the Chinese killed in Johor during the war. The special column contained works such as Chunsheng's "Bazhubahai Mengnan Jingguo" [Captured and Killed (by Japanese) in Batu Pahat], and "Gedatingyi Dusha Jishi" [A Record of the Massacre in Kota Tinggi]. The famous Singapore author, Miao Xiu, included many scenes of the atrocities committed by the Japanese and the sufferings of the people in his novel.

Liu Leng's *Yige Jiandie De Zishu* [An Autobiography of a Spy] described how he was tricked to become a spy for the Japanese. The Japanese officer in the story was heartless. He tortured and even killed soldiers and spies that betrayed him.

On the eve of the Japanese landing, many intellectuals chose to leave Singapore. They included Hu Yuzhi, Shen Zijiu, Yu Dafu, Wang Renshu, Li Tiemin, Shao Zhonghan, Wang Jiyuan, Wang Jinding, Zhang Chukun, Li Gaogang, Gao Yunlan, Chen Zhongda, Zhen Chuyun, Li Zhendian and Liu Daonan. Of those who exiled themselves, Liu Daonan died during his escape. In Zhang Chukun's book,¹⁹ he mentioned that he together with Hu Yuzhi and twenty-eight others fled Singapore by squeezing themselves into a four-metre motor sampan. All of them disguised themselves as small proprietors who engaged in trades like wine-brewing, soap, and paper-making businesses. They also changed their names in order not to arouse the suspicion of the Japanese. Yu Dafu changed his name to Zhao Lian, and Hu Yuzhi changed his to Jin Zhixian, and worked as an auditor for Yu Dafu, who owned a wine-brewing factory. Zhang Chukun himself was the wine-brewer cum manager of the same factory in which Hu Yuzhi was working as an accountant. They were all put under tight Japanese surveillance on an island in Riau.

When the situation worsened during the war, following Yu Dafu's advice, Hu Yuzhi and his wife fled to East Sumatra and started a soap factory. During their stay in Sumatra, Hu wrote two books.

Yu Dafu's identity was exposed towards the end of the war, and he was warned by a Taiwanese interpreter that the Japanese intended to kill him and his company on 1 September 1945.²⁰ A few days after the surrender of the Japanese, Yu Dafu was kidnapped and murdered at the age of fifty.

Yu Dafu's death, in particular, has remained a mystery and has become a favourite theme in the works of many authors, among which are Hu Yuzhi's *Yu Dafu De Liuwang He Shizong* [The Exile and Disappearance of Yu Dafu],²¹ Luo Fang's *Yu Dafu Xiansheng Yishi* [The Anecdote of Yu Dafu],²² Others are Lin Feixin's *Jinian Yu Dafu Xiansheng* [A Remembrance of Mr Yu Dafu],²³ Dingying's *Yu Dafu De Beihai* [The Murder of Yu Dafu], Yinpu's *Yi Yu Dafu Xiansheng* [Remembering Yu Dafu], Dabai's *Jinian Yu Dafu* [In Memory of Yu Dafu], Zheng Yaping's *Yi Yu Dafu Xiansheng* [Remembering Yu Dafu], Xu Yunqiao's *Jinian Yu Dafu Xiansheng* [In memory of Yu Dafu],²⁴ *Yu Dafu, Zhi Jizhan Qian?* [How Much is Yu Dafu Worth?],²⁵ Yang Ming's *Lishi De Huiyi* [A Historical Recollection],²⁶ Fang Mu's "Yu Dafu Bing Bu Langman" [Yu Dafu Is Not Romantic] and "Yu Dafu Liangmi" [Two Mysteries about Yu Dafu],²⁷ Dan Lin's *Yu Dafu De Shici* [The Poems and Lyrics of Yu Dafu],²⁸ and Tan De's *Guo Moluo De Huiguo Yu Yu Dafu De Yuhai Zhi Mi* [The Mysteries behind Guo Moluo's Return to China].²⁹ In 1948, there were also

articles in memory of Yu Dafu, in Singapore's newspaper supplements.³⁰ Even after a lapse of ten years following Yu Dafu's death, Li Shisheng wrote an article entitled "Daonian Yu Dafu" [Commemorating Yu Dafu]³¹, while Li Bingren wrote "Yu Dafu De Yizuo He Yishi" [Yu Dafu's Unfinished Writings and Lost Poems].³² The memory of Yu Dafu lived on, and in 1958, books on him were published in Singapore.³³ Shiwu's mini-essays about Yu Dafu became renowned works. These works were not mere narrations of Yu Dafu's daily life and activities but portrayed strong emotions, sympathy and praise for him.

After Malaya was occupied by the Japanese, many intellectuals took up arms to fight openly while others conducted their anti-Japanese activities underground. Their heroic acts were recounted in many works — for example, Xia En and Yao Hongxue in *Huolang* [Waves of Fire], Lin Qiu and Wu Yong in *Niandai He Qingchun* [Time and Youth], and Di Luan and Lin Tieshan in *Xiaocheng Youyu* [Melancholy of a Small Town]. As for those who lost their lives fighting the Japanese, they were highly-honoured in the works of many authors. Yun Xian's poem "Dao Lin Mousheng Lieshi" [Commemorating Martyr Lim Bo Seng], and Wu Yi's "Xinghua Yiyongjun Zhuidao Zhenwang Lieshi Dahui Ji" [A Record of the Meeting of the Singapore Chinese Voluntary Force: Commemorating of Martyrs Killed in Action] are some of the representative works.

Some intellectuals even gave their lives for the resistance. Works remembering fellow authors exiled or killed during the war, written after the war, are in abundance. The 31 August 1946 edition of *Sin Chew Jit Poh* had a special supplement entitled "In remembrance of fellow authors". It included articles by Hu Yuzhi, Hutuo, Yunzhen, Mandi, Feidi and Zedi. In the same edition, the will of a talented author, Wang Junshi, was published, together with a foreword by the editor. In the foreword, he eulogized that Wang was a very active reporter for the *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, who loved literature and had published several promising articles. When the war broke out, he was involved in leading the local Teochew youths in their anti-Japanese resistance. His patriotic spirit inspired many people. When the Japanese landed in Singapore, he committed suicide by jumping from a building.

Apart from this, Hu Yuzhi's article³⁴ also mentioned the death of his former colleagues in *Nanyang Siang Pao* during the war. They were Zhuang Chaosong, Cheng Chongqing, Ye Shihou and Xu Yiyao. Zhuang Chaosong, Cheng Chongqing and Ye Shihou joined the underground resistance force and helped in the printing of anti-Japanese materials. All three were captured and tortured to death. Xu Yiyao disappeared during the cross-examination.

In the works published after the war, a distinguishing feature observed was the revelation of the extent of cruelty of the Japanese army, as well

as their collaborators. In Liu Leng's "Yige Jiandie De Zishu", he was able to portray the inhumanity of the Japanese army through the eyes of a collaborator:

The Japanese Army has to be a kind of animal. The number of rape cases that happened after the Japanese landed in Malaya was frightening. Even old women were unable to escape from them. When the Japanese soldier has to satisfy his sexual needs, he would go to extremes to do it. It was especially so for the lower rank soldiers. They were sadists. The female prisoners, apart from the usual torture that all prisoners were subjected to, were humiliated and have suffered in ways beyond words. The Japanese would strip the female prisoners, fondle their bodies and burn their nipples with cigarette butts, before gang-raping them."⁵⁵

Hong Jintang lamented in his book *Rekou Yu Ge Minzu* [The Japanese and All Races]:

Everyone has sisters, or sons or daughters that suffered during the war. Even if we were to eat their flesh, our hatred for them would remain.⁵⁶

The atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945 ended the war. The Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore officially ended on 3 and 5 September 1945 respectively when the British landed.

With the defeat of the Japanese, all aspects of life, including cultural activities, returned to its former vitality. The five years preceding the war had witnessed unparalleled development in pre-war Chinese literature, both in terms of the number of authors and the quality of their work. Drastic changes in the political climate, as well as culture and educational policies during the war, had brought the development of Chinese literature to a halt, to the extent that this has been called the darkest era in the history of Singapore-Malayan Chinese literature. For example, the number of Chinese schools, which peaked at 370 in 1941, dropped drastically to 21 in the Syonan era, with student enrolment plunging from a pre-war high of 38,000 to 2,543. This trend was reversed in 1946, when the number of Chinese schools and student enrolment totalled 125 and 46,699 respectively. The publication of journals experienced a similar trend. In the period 1937–42, there were 29 Chinese magazines and newspapers. However, under the Japanese Occupation period, there were only two newspapers. The defeat of the Japanese was followed by a post-war renaissance of journals, with the resurgence of familiar pre-war established journals and an upsurge in newly established papers and magazines.

Conclusion

The three years and eight months of Japanese Occupation had brought about great suffering to the population of Singapore and Malaya. The war, loss of assets, relatives, and homes made them realize their dependence on the land they were living on. Before the Japanese Occupation, the Chinese population in Singapore and Malaya had regarded Nanyang as a second hometown. However, such sense of belonging was superficial as their hearts belonged more to their ancestral homeland — China. The war fostered the bond between them and the land in which they settled as never before.

In addition, in the period immediately after the war, the independence movement prevailed in Southeast Asia. Intellectuals in Singapore and Malaya were influenced by this movement. They believed strongly in the uniqueness of Singapore and Malayan Chinese literature, and that literature should reflect the reality of the land that they were living in. The idea of the uniqueness of the Singapore and Malayan Chinese literature was further developed in the mid-1950s into "patriotic literature" and "popular patriotic literature". To the intellectuals of Singapore and Malaya, the word "patriotic" expressed their love for Singapore and Malaya, and with it, the hope that colonialism would end as soon as possible.

The search for identity in Singapore and Malayan literature can be traced back to 1919 when the vernacular language was adopted in the literary works of Singapore and Malayan writers with the launching of *Xin Guomin Zazhi* or *Xin Guomin Ribao*. This development was an extension of the movement to adopt the vernacular language in China then. Vernacular Chinese was then widely adopted by local newspapers within two years, reflecting the underlying desire to identify themselves with mainland China and for Singapore-Malayan literature to be identified as part of Chinese literature.

This movement, however, did not last long as Chinese writers in 1925 began to search and re-evaluate "all value in the thoughts of Nanyang"³⁷, hoping to repaint the literary world of Nanyang. This resulted in a call for local elements to be reflected in Singapore-Malayan literature in 1927. In response, "Huangdao" editors were determined to introduce Nanyang colour into the literary world. This was also supported by editors of other literary supplements who embraced Nanyanization enthusiastically "to build an unshakable iron tower of Nanyang (literature)".³⁸

In the course of its development, Singapore and Malayan writers encountered problems, such as the strong influence from mainland Chinese literature, which resulted in a debate over Chinese literature versus Singapore-Malayan local literature. This led to a collective psychological search by Singapore-Malayan Chinese writers for their "local" identity.

The problem was compounded, after the split between the Kuomintang and the communists in 1927, by the great influx of leftist writers from China, who reinforced the China-oriented feeling among some local Chinese writers towards homeland China. This was evidenced during the period 1927 to 1937 when local writers vacillated between identifying with Nanyang and homeland China.

In general, local Chinese writers as well as writers who came to Malaya and settled there, for example, Dike, Tie Kang, Lin Ji, Liu Bing Miaoixiu, Lin Cantian and Qiu Tien, tended to have strong feelings towards Nanyang, their place of residence, and were more ready to adopt the local identity. On the other hand, those writers who came after 1937, for example, Yu Dafu, Hu Yuzhi, Zhang Chukun, and Wang Renshu, tended to have a profound attachment to their homeland, China.

However, the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 unified these two diametrical groups with strong patriotic feelings towards China, suppressing the search for a Nanyang identity. Their patriotic feeling was evidenced in the large-scale promotion of "Resistance Literature" in various newspapers and periodicals. With the end of the Japanese Occupation of the Malay Peninsula and Singapore, the severance of political relationships between Communist China and Singapore and Malaya after 1949, and reduced interaction between these countries, issues concerning their identity resurfaced. Many local writers began to realize their differences in identity and the urgency of adopting the local identity.

Both Singapore and Malaya continued to have a close literary relationship and identity even after Malaya achieved independence in 1957 and Singapore, self-government in 1959. However, with the independence and separation of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965, Chinese literature developed along totally different paths with its different characteristics, because of the different political climate and cultural backgrounds, into what it is today.

Notes

1. Da Nan, "Nanyang Di Wenyi" [The Literature of Nanyang], *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 1 January 1929.
2. Jin Yan, "Langman Yinian De Huangdao" [Huangdao's Wandering Year in Nanyang], *Guomin Ribao*, 2 February 1928.
3. Li Tiemin, "Nanqiao Chouzheng Gongzuo Gaikuang: (Fulu Yi) Nanyang Huaqiao Chouzheng Chengji Gaikuang Biao" [A General Survey of Fund Raising Work done by Chinese from the South: (Appendix 1) Table of Nanyang Chinese Fund Raising Result], in *Dazhan Yu Nanqiao* [The War and the Chinese of the South], edited by Nanyang Huaqiao Chouzheng Juguo Nanmin Zonghui — Dazhan Yu

- Nanqiao Weihui (Singapore: Xinnanyang Chubanshe, 1947). The average monthly fund raised from Malaya (Malaysia and Singapore) was the highest among the Philippines, Myanmar, Indonesia (Dutch colony), and Vietnam.
4. Lin Fangsheng, "1937 Nian De Malaiya Huaqiao" [Chinese in Malaya in 1937], *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 1 January 1938; Zi Xin, "1938 Nian De Xinjiapo" [Singapore in 1938], *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 1 January 1939; Lin Kai, "1939 Nian De Mahua Jiawang Yundong" [The Salvation Movement of Malayan Chinese in 1939], *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 1 January 1949; Huang Kemei, "1940 Nian De Malaya Huaqiao" [Malayan Chinese in 1941], *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 1 January 1941. The above articles can also be found in Xu Yunqiao and Cai Shijun, eds., *Xinma Huaren Kang Re Shilue 1937-1945* [Malayan Chinese Resistance to Japan 1937-1945: Selected Source Materials] (Singapore: Xinjiapo Wenshi Chuban Youxian Gongsi, 1984).
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 6. Yu Dafu, "Wenyi Ji Fukan De Yinian [One Year of Literary Supplements], *Sin Chew Jit Poh's Wenyi Zhuokan* [Weekly Literary Supplement], 31 December 1939.
 7. Zi Gang, "Xinzhou Huaqiao Kangdi Dongyuan Zonghui Jilue" [A Brief Record of the Headquarters of Malayan Chinese' Anti-Japanese Mobilization], in Xu Yunqiao and Cai Shijun, eds., op. cit., pp. 221-22.
 8. Chen Zhongda, "Xinma Zhanshi Wenhua Jie Zhi Yijiao" [A Corner of the Literary Circle of Malayan Chinese during the War], in Xu Yunqiao and Cai Shijun, eds., op. cit., p. 223.
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 10. Thio, Eunice, "The Syonan Years", in *A History of Singapore*, edited by Ernest Chew and Edwin Lee (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 95-114.
 11. Miao Xiu, *Huolang* [Waves of Fire] (Singapore: Qingnian Shuju, 1960), p. 171.
 12. Fang Xiu, *Mahua Xinwenxue Daxi: Zhanhuo* (2), *Xiaoshuo Yiji* [An Anthology of Malayan Chinese Literature: Post-War (2), Short Stories No. 1], (Singapore: Singapore World Bookshop Pte. Ltd, 1982), p. 23.
 13. Nanyang Huaqiao Chouzheng Juguo Nanmin Zonghui - Dazhan Yu Nanqiao Weihui, eds., op. cit., pp. 97-100. See also Xu Yunqiao and Cai Shijun, eds., op. cit., pp. 509-12.
 14. In *Mahua Wenxue Zuopinxuan* [Selected Works of Malayan Chinese Literature], edited by Fang Xiu (Kuala Lumpur: Malaixiya Huaxiao Dongshi Lianhehui Zonghui, 1991), pp. 7-15.
 15. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-21.
 16. Fang Xiu, op. cit.
 17. Nanyang Huaqiao Chouzheng Juguo Nanmin Zonghui - Dazhan Yu Nanqiao Weihui, eds., op. cit., pp. 97-100. See also Xu Yunqiao and Cai Shijun, eds., op. cit., pp. 509-12.
 18. Xu Yunqiao and Cai Shijun, eds., op. cit., pp. 199-200. See also pp. 533-34.

19. Zhang Chukun, *Zhang Chukun Shiwenxuan* [A Selection of Zhang Chukun's Poems and Articles], (Beijing: Zhongguo Huaqiao Chubanshe, 1994), pp. 117–18.
20. Huyuzhi, "Yu Dafu De Liuwang He Shizong" [The Exile and Disappearance of Yu Dafu], in Xu Yunqiao and Cai Shijun, eds., op. cit., pp. 254–60. This was originally published in *Minzhu*, 14, 21, and 28 September 1946, pp. 48–50.
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22. *Huaqiao Ribao: Xinhai*, 2 March 1946.
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25. *Sin Chew Jit Poh: Xing Yun*, 28 May 1947.
26. Ibid., 11 July 1947.
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38. The Editor, "Our Hope", *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 11 January 1929.

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Part III
LOCALITY AND MEMORY

Memory and Its Historical Context

The Japanese Occupation in Sarawak and Its Impact on a Kuching Malay Community

Naimah S. Talib

The fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Japanese Occupation in the Asia Pacific was a fitting occasion to examine the Japanese interlude in Sarawak and define its historical significance. In any assessment of the war, it may be necessary to emphasize that the actors in the war were those who fought on the side of the Allies or the Japanese, while the majority of the people in Southeast Asia participated as victims or were mere spectators. For most Southeast Asians, the issues of atrocities, suffering, deprivation and self-sufficiency loom large in their recollections of the war, and thus form part of their collective consciousness. The local level personal experiences of the war participants should not be dismissed as it is interesting to note how their experiences of the Japanese Occupation have been reconstructed, recollected, reinterpreted, reinvoked, or reinvented. This complex of narratives will reveal the memories that people individually or collectively carry of the war. One may legitimately ask whether the bonds that tie one generation together as a result of their common experiences of war will be passed on and their experiences communicated to the next generation, consequently becoming a component of the historical consciousness of a particular community or nation.

It is also important to make the connection between personal experience and memory and the historical context of the war. Memories of war cannot be fully appreciated without an understanding of the actual events that took place; memory has to be referred to the originating experience. Memory, or orally communicated history, gives a sense of personalized immediacy, of being there, and of participation. However, oral history has its obvious limitations as our memory is selective and limited to the subjectivity of individual or collective recall. The historical context corrects distortions, exaggerations and omissions often seen in reconstructions based totally on memory. This, however, should not detract us from the importance of orally communicated

history. The importance of memory lies in the underlying truths, contained in values, attitudes and feelings as expressed orally in "exaggerations, distortions and seeming contradictions of historical fact" (Allen and Montell 1982, pp. 89-90). These "submerged truths" are revealed through oral history narratives. Memory returns history to the situation in context; in other words, it lends a situational perspective to an event.

This chapter will attempt firstly to give a historical context to the discussion by giving a descriptive outline of the events leading to the Japanese landing, and the subsequent occupation of Sarawak. The second half of the discussion addresses the various recollections of a Kuching Malay community fifty years after the end of the war, who are caught between past experiences and the present context of remembering.

The Japanese Occupation period in Sarawak from December 1941 to September 1945 and the commencement thereafter of the British Military Administration until April 1946 was a transitional period in its history. This period of nearly four and a half years could be seen as an interregnum between the end of Brooke rule and the transfer of Sarawak's administration to the British Crown in July 1946. The Japanese interlude provided an alternative to European government, and local residents were entrusted briefly with greater roles of responsibility in government than had previously existed. While in many respects signalling a break from the past, the Japanese Occupation also saw the perpetuation of certain Brooke administrative traditions.

Background

Sarawak was founded in 1841 by James Brooke, who then proceeded to establish his own regime. The borders of Sarawak gradually expanded and the country grew in size and later included many of the former territories of the Brunei Sultanate. The system of government devised by the so-called "White Rajahs" evolved against a background of headhunting Ibans in the interior, established Malay officials on the coast, and immigrant Chinese entrepreneurs, miners and agriculturalists. The Brooke family ruled Sarawak for one hundred years without any intervention from a Western colonial power. Britain only accorded recognition to Sarawak in 1863 and it became a British Protectorate from 1888 until the Japanese Occupation in December 1941.

The treaty of 1888,¹ signed between the second ruler of Sarawak, Rajah Charles Brooke, and Britain stipulated that the British would hold responsibility for the defence of Sarawak and the conduct of its foreign relations. The British were concerned about the oilfields in Miri, but Sarawak's only defence force, the Sarawak Constabulary, was ill-equipped for the task. As early as March 1941, the third ruler of Sarawak, Rajah Vyner, had recognized the

possibility of war with Japan and he attempted to remind the British of its responsibility for the defence of Sarawak under the 1888 Treaty. The Rajah felt that Britain should now focus attention on the airfields which were constructed by the British in the 1930s and were undefended, and consequently constituted a source of danger to Sarawak. In a letter to the British Agent, the Rajah stated that while Sarawak would continue to contribute to the British war fund, Britain was expected to fulfil its obligation in meeting Sarawak's defence. The Rajah added that the Sarawak government would be responsible for raising and maintaining the local forces in Sarawak (*Sarawak Gazette*, 6 August 1949).

Britain sent Lieutenant-Colonel Bruce Steer to Kuching to determine the defence measures necessary for Sarawak. According to his report, Kuching was strategically important in the defence of Southwest Borneo, where major Dutch airfields were located. The Bukit Stabar landing ground could easily be used by an enemy force for attacks on shipping passing through Singapore.

The 2/15th Punjab Regiment was then despatched to Kuching in April 1941. They were given instructions to deny prospective attackers access to the Lutong refinery and Miri landing sites until a scheme for sealing off the oilwells could be put into effect. The Regiment was also responsible for defending Kuching against attack and safeguarding the Bukit Stabar airfield from being destroyed. The existence of the Miri and Seria oilfields and the refinery at Lutong required the stationing of troops in these areas, and their presence was also prompted by the oil denial schemes. These schemes were intended to destroy the installations in the oilfields and were designed to prevent the Japanese from gaining access to the oil resources of British Borneo.²

During a visit to Kuching in July 1941, the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, stressed the urgent need for local forces to complement Imperial forces in the defence of Sarawak. The Sarawak Rangers, comprising mainly Ibans, was constituted as a military force in September 1941, and it grew to about 400 men at the outbreak of the war. Initially, it was decided that the role of the Rangers would be that of a harassing forward force, trained in jungle warfare. However, owing to frequent changes of command, much valuable time was lost and by 8 December 1941, the Sarawak Rangers were not in any way fit to carry out the role ascribed to them (Noakes 1950, pp. 3, 4). The Sarawak Volunteers were given roles far beyond their limited capabilities, while the existing Sarawak Constabulary Force was not a well-disciplined military unit and was not prepared for war-time situations (*Sarawak Gazette*, 7 September 1949).

Defence was to be concentrated mainly at Kuching and Miri, and the latter would only be defended until the completion of the oil denial schemes. The military garrison in Kuching was found to be totally inadequate. Moreover,

the British had not organized any air defence measures, and this left the Japanese free to inflict maximum damage with their bombing raids. There was also no attempt to co-ordinate defence plans with the Dutch. However, it would be inaccurate to assert that the British had no defensive strategy for Sarawak against Japanese attack, but as a result of limited resources, the British could only provide token resistance.

News was received of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and Manila Bay on the morning of 8 December 1941, resulting in a state of war between Japan and Britain and, therefore, Sarawak. One of the first few measures taken by the Sarawak Government was to intern all male Japanese nationals. The final phase of the denial scheme of the Miri oilfields was also implemented with immediate effect and the destruction of the oilfields and the Lutong refinery was completed by 13 December. Most of the major towns were already evacuated by then.

The Japanese Landing

A strong Japanese force, the Kawaguchi Detachment, operating from Canton, left by ship for Camranh Bay in early December 1941, from where it departed again on 13 December heading for Miri.³ On the morning of 16 December, the Japanese arrived off the coast of Miri. The landing in Sarawak was made difficult by rough seas caused by one of the worst gales ever recorded in the area. According to one account, the Japanese landed an estimated 10,000 troops on the oilfields within a few hours (*Sarawak Gazette*, 7 October 1949). They found them almost completely wrecked, and much work was required before the oilfields could be put to use again. Despite the odds, the Japanese managed to drill sixteen new wells and, by 1945, had brought production at both the Miri and Seria oilfields to pre-war levels.

Dutch bombers raided Japanese troops at Miri between 17 and 28 December, but only minor damage was done. The main body of the Japanese invasion force, consisting of two battalions, left Miri on 22 December heading for Kuching and only one battalion was left to secure all of British Borneo outside Sarawak.⁴ Kuching was captured on 24 December and, three days later, the Japanese took control of the Kuching airfield. The airfield was, however, found to be inadequate to protect the left flank of the 25th Army during its operation to seize Singapore (Ogawa and Ito, AL 5256, p. 12).

By the time the Japanese began their onslaught on Sarawak, the Rajah had already left for Australia, where he later established a government-in-exile. Most of the Sarawak government officers, including the Chief Secretary, C.D. Le Gros Clark, and the Defence Secretary, J.L. Noakes, and several administrative officers were interned at Kuching and were moved to the Bukit

Lintang Camp in July 1942 (Howes 1976).⁵ A large number of those who were interned survived the war, except for the few who died from natural causes, and several who were killed by the Japanese, including Le Gros Clark, who met his fate at Keningau in June 1945.⁶ In the Third Division, a group of Sarawak government officers and other Europeans led by the Resident, Andrew MacPherson, attempted to escape to Dutch Borneo. Their route took them to the Rejang river and they eventually arrived at Long Nawang, a Dutch military outpost near the Sarawak border. Unfortunately, at Long Nawang, the original party, as well as those who joined later, were massacred by the Japanese between late August and September 1942.⁷

The Japanese Occupation of Sarawak

Under the Japanese, the designated area of "North Borneo" referred to the four former British Borneo states of Sarawak, Brunei, Labuan and the territory previously occupied by the Chartered Company of North Borneo, and was under the control of the 37th Army with its headquarters at Kuching.⁸ Sarawak was divided into three provinces, Kuching-shu, Sibushu and Miri-shu, each headed by a Provincial Governor.

The Japanese tried to maintain the structure of the pre-war administrative system, and staffed it with Japanese and a number of the pre-war native officials. The Governor was at the apex of the administration in each province, while the Prefectures were under the charge of the Divisions. The Prefectures were, in turn, subdivided into smaller districts under the control and surveillance of the chief Japanese officer or native officers; in pre-war days, this post was equivalent to that of a District Officer.

The Army Commander issued a directive⁹ in 1942 which indicated the administrative chain of command. Orders issued by Provincial Governors to Prefectural Residents could be modified as warranted by local circumstances. The Resident's primary duties were firstly, to keep law and order; secondly, to maintain the production of food and raw materials; and thirdly, to aim for self-sufficiency within their own Prefectures. This was the original order of importance of the Resident's duties, but as the war situation deteriorated, self-sufficiency became the most important goal. Under the Brooke Rajahs, the Chief of Police in each Division was subordinate to the District Officer, but the Japanese system placed the Chief of Police and the District Officer on an equal footing and both were under the direct supervision of the Prefectural Resident.

The Japanese appointed natives to positions of responsibility in the government, perhaps owing to a shortage of personnel. Early in 1942, Abang Openg, who had worked as a native officer in the pre-war Brooke government,

was appointed District Officer of the Kuching Division (Chin 1976, p. 17). The Dato Bandar, Abang Hj. Mustapha, held the post of district court magistrate until the Japanese surrender. Ibans were also given access to the administrative service, as illustrated in the case of Empenit Adam, who served as a District Officer during the greater part of the Japanese Occupation. It may be assumed that the Japanese were aware that non-Malay natives, particularly the Ibans, although large in numbers, were not proportionately represented in the Brooke government service. In an effort to redress this imbalance, Eliab Bay, an Iban, was appointed in January 1942 as Liaison Officer in Iban affairs (Reece 1982, p. 147). That his position held some importance was confirmed by the fact that other Ibans were appointed as District Officers on his recommendation. Bay was also responsible for the supervision of Iban and Chinese padi planting teams and played an important role in the transportation of padi and other essential foodstuffs in Sarawak.

The *Ken Sanji-kai*, or Prefectural Advisory Council, established in October 1943, provided another channel for native participation.¹⁰ This body was set up by Setno Yamada,¹¹ an Oxford graduate and an influential Japanese army official, with the aim of allowing native members the opportunity to give advice and assistance on administrative matters and economic projects. Meetings of the *Ken Sanji* were also used to disseminate Japanese propaganda and discredit the former Brooke government.¹² Members were drawn from the old Malay élite and Iban local leaders such as Tuanku Bujang, Abang Openg, Philip Jitam and Charles Mason. Apart from the natives, local Chinese also participated in the Councils as extraordinary members, and among the more prominent were Ong Kuan Hin and Lee Wing Thoong.

In an attempt to identify anti-Japanese elements in the population, the Japanese instituted a vigilante system, the *jikeidan*. This system divided centres of population into manageable units of approximately thirty households, each under the supervision of a local leader. These leaders were responsible to the police and were answerable for all activities in their designated areas. They resembled the Brooke-appointed officials such as the *tua kampung*, who was in charge of the Malay and Melanau villages, and the *penghulu*, who acted as the headman of the native longhouse. It was not clear whether the *jikeidan* leaders held the same status as the pre-war native officials or whether the former displaced the latter altogether. According to Reece, the *jikeidan* provided a "structure of social organisation and responsibility previously unknown in Sarawak" (p. 146). It may be worthwhile to note a major difference in the nature of responsibilities of the two systems; the *jikeidan* placed more emphasis on its police duties and its organizational set-up was similar to an "informal spy network", while the Brooke native official's task was more diverse and largely administrative.

The Japanese allowed natives greater participation in government during their brief occupation of Sarawak. Of importance was the opportunity given to the non-Malay natives, such as the Ibans, in exercising important administrative functions. However, it must be noted that the Japanese were more interested in the propaganda value of appointing local officers than giving them proper administrative guidance. Although the Japanese tried to enlist the support of the local residents of Sarawak, the deprivations brought on by the Occupation eventually alienated most of the local residents. Towards the latter half of the Occupation especially, food became scarce in the towns and the Japanese practice of using forced labour to build airfields and roads caused further resentment.

By 1944, the Japanese position in Borneo had weakened and the war was beginning to take a toll on the population. As a result, the Japanese intensified their propaganda campaign and urged the people to work harder. Civil servants were required to do manual work projects and grow food crops. The general feeling then was that the war would end in late 1945 or early 1946. Since it was expected that the Allies, in order to defeat Japan, would have to take island by island, the Japanese were determined to make each Allied territorial gain as costly as possible. It was hoped that this strategy of attrition would pressure the Allies to come to terms. To this end, all Japanese garrisons were ordered to fight to the last man. When the Imperial Order to surrender was disseminated in Borneo, the Japanese were taken by surprise. On 6 September, a despatch arrived from Singapore ordering the Commander of the 37th Army to begin negotiations for surrender with the commanding officer of the 9th Australian Division. On 10 September 1945, Lt-General Baba, accompanied by his staff, surrendered to Major-General Wootten at Labuan. However, several detachments refused to lay down their arms immediately and the surrender did not become complete until 8 November when the Fujino force submitted to the Allies in Ulu Trusan.

Reminiscences of War: The Kuching Malay Community during the Japanese Occupation¹³

Kuching, the capital of Sarawak, is located in the southwestern corner of Borneo on the banks of the Sarawak river. The settlement first appeared as a small and relatively unimportant Malay village in the early nineteenth century and did not achieve its status as an urban and administrative centre until after James Brooke became Rajah of Sarawak in 1841. Under the Brookes, the Kuching Malays gradually developed as a cohesive community and they were able to absorb migrants from Java, Sumatra, Brunei and elsewhere in Borneo

(Lockard 1987, pp. 57–64). By the late 1930s, there were about 14,000 Malays in Kuching compared with 19,000 Chinese.

In 1941, most of the local residents in Kuching were aware of the imminence of war but they did not view the impending Japanese Occupation with great concern. They had never experienced modern warfare and had no desire to be embroiled in a conflict which they neither understood nor wanted. Although they sympathized with the Allied war aims, they were not prepared for either passive or hostile resistance. The Chinese had stronger sentiments and were more actively anti-Japanese, but they, too, feared war. They understood the consequences of the Japanese invasion far better than the natives because China was then at war, but even so, they had no intention of joining in mass, armed opposition.

Prior to the outbreak of war, many of the residents of Kuching with homes or relatives or friends in the rural areas, had left the town. Others had arranged to do so upon the outbreak of war. On 8 December 1941 and for days afterwards, the local residents left by vehicle and boat for the rural areas or adjacent coastal districts like Santubong, Bako, Buntal and Sambir. There was no evidence of panic and many of the Malays in the various *kampung* of Kuching evacuated quickly.

On 13 December 1941, the Japanese planes visited Kuching at noon but did not attack. They reappeared for two days in a row, but again they did no damage. Each time they appeared, the air raid warning signal was sounded and passive defence personnel were mobilized. Two warnings were sounded on 18 December, and on 19 December at noon, Kuching and the Bukit Stabar landing ground were bombed. One oil dump belonging to the Borneo Company was destroyed and total casualties amounted to 33 dead and 78 wounded. The Chief Secretary sent a message to the British Agent giving particulars and pointing out that the morale of the local population was very low, particularly because of the complete absence of aerial defence measures. He also stated that the medical staff was very inadequate to cope with further attacks, as there was only one European surgeon in Kuching. On 20 December 1941, the Chief Secretary and the Secretary of Defence moved their offices to the Maderasah Melayu to facilitate collaboration between their two departments (*Sarawak Gazette*, 7 November 1949).

The Japanese landed at Kuching on Christmas Eve and caught the local population by surprise. They ordered the local Malay residents employed by the Brooke government to resume their duties. As mentioned earlier, the Datu Bandar, Abang Hj. Mustapha, became a court magistrate, while Abang Openg, a Brooke native officer worked as a District Officer. Hj. Daud Azahari recalled that he had to supervise a Japanese agricultural farm near the 27th mile during the Occupation, cultivating padi, sweet potato, and tapioca. Hj. Hossen

Hj. Usop, who was 14 years old at the time of the Japanese landing, later became a wireless operator and worked in the Natunas for about one year. Hj. Suhaili Wahed taught at a local Malay school for a while and also conducted surveys for the research department of the Japanese army. Datin Hj. Fatimah Weit reminisced that *zaman Jepun* (the Japanese Occupation) was a time of hardship for her family. In order to supplement the family income, she had to work in a Japanese factory manufacturing manila hemp near the Malay *kampung*, which employed mostly women factory workers.

One recurrent theme observed in the oral history interviews I conducted is the perception of war as being compartmentalized into phases congruent with periods of incremental hardship. There was a realization that at the initial stage, there was hardly any hardship. Hj. Daud stated "...*pada mulanya, kesusahan itu tidak ada*" (...in the beginning, there was hardly any hardship) and mentioned later in his recollection that "*kesusahan semakin hari semakin susah*" (the difficulties worsened as the days passed by).¹⁴ A prominent member of the Kuching Malay community, Tan Sri Datuk Hj. Hamdan Sirat, also remembered the war in terms of phases. According to him, during the first two years of the war, he did not experience difficult times but during the third year, he maintained that there was a shortage of essential foodstuffs.¹⁵ Hj. Suhaili Wahed surmised,

*Mula-mula, makan belum susah, tahun pertama 'stock' masih ada; tahun kedua, makan susah dikit, 'old stock' udah kurang; tahun ketiga, makan nasi campur jagung.*¹⁶ (Initially, food was not a problem as stocks were still available; in the second year, however, foodstuffs were not so readily available and during the third year, we had to complement our meagre rice rations with corn.)

As there was a shortage of essential commodities in Kuching, particularly during the latter part of the war, the Japanese were determined that the local population should improvise and look for alternatives. For example, the Japanese taught Hj. Daud how to process benzene. As a result, he managed to barter benzene for rice. The alternative for cane sugar was *gula apung* (nipah palm). People also learned to be innovative; coconut oil was used for lamps. As rice was short, people relied more on sago (*lemanta*), sweet potato (*kribang*) and tapioca (*bandung*) to supplement their diet. Hj. Suhaili pointed out that despite the food shortage, there was no starvation in Kuching. The Japanese gave food rations to the local people and encouraged them to be self-sufficient. Datin Fatimah maintained that those who worked for the Japanese did not experience much hardship. The local Malays who did not have regular jobs found life relatively more difficult — *kalau ada makan pagi, makan petang tidak* (if we had breakfast, we would not eat lunch).¹⁷

It was also important to determine the attitudes of the local people towards the Japanese before the Occupation. Apparently, prior to the war, the Kuching Malays were already acquainted with Japanese products. Tan Sri Hamdan pointed out that Kuching residents had a high regard for Japanese goods – “Japanese rice was cheap and Japanese bicycles were good. People actually wanted the Japanese to come.”¹⁸ It was thought that when the Japanese arrived, “things would be cheap”.¹⁹

During the war, some of the local inhabitants were able to form close friendships with the Japanese soldiers. Hj. Chem Ali recounted how he befriended several Japanese soldiers during the war, who gave him cigarettes from time to time. He maintained that the Japanese “...*tidak kacau orang Melayu, asal jangan curi... Jepun tidak ganas dalam kampung. Sama saya, dia memang baik*” (...did not bother the Malays, as long they did not commit any thefts; the Japanese were not ‘aggressive’ in the *kampung*, they were good to me.)²⁰ This contrasts with their feelings towards Taiwanese soldiers in the Japanese army — “*askar Taiwan memang jahat, Jepun tidak*” (the Taiwanese soldiers were cruel but not the Japanese).²¹ Tan Sri Datuk Hamdan recalled that during the third year, there were many Taiwanese soldiers in the Japanese force who were certainly more aggressive than the Japanese.

The interviewees also mentioned the existence of a small Japanese community prior to the war.²² Some of the Japanese migrants operated retail shops and laundries while others were rubber and vegetable growers. There were also a few Japanese dentists and physicians in the bazaar area. A large Japanese firm, the Nissa Shokai, established just after the turn of the century, was affiliated with a rubber estate on the Samarahan river, east of Kuching. Most of the Kuching Japanese were sojourners and kept in close contact with events in their homeland (Lockard 1987, p. 143). When news was received of the attack on Pearl Harbour and Manila Bay, male Japanese nationals in Miri and Kuching were immediately interned by the Brooke government.

The issue of collaboration also forms the focus of the reminiscences. Most of the interviewees recalled the exploits of a Japanese “physician”, Mohd. Taufek Kuno, who came to Kuching in the 1920s and married a local Malay woman. Feelings about Mohd. Kuno were mixed. There were some who did not look upon him as a collaborator but as someone who, like many of the local residents, worked for the Japanese to earn a living. According to Hj. Daud Hj. Azahari, Mohd. Kuno was interned by the Brooke government prior to the outbreak of war. He was then released by the Japanese and worked as a court interpreter during the war. Some local Malays appeared to have taken a dislike to Mohd. Kuno, a natural response among those who were envious of his privileged position. According to one interviewee, Mohd. Kuno “...*tunjuk belang dia. Anaknya pakai pedang Jepun. Dia cakap — pergi sana, ini Jepun, mesti tunduk pada dia*” (...later showed his true colours. His son used a

samurai sword and would frequently ask people to move away, saying '...I am Japanese, you must bow and show respect to me').²³ At the end of the war, Mohd. Kuno and most of the local Japanese were repatriated back to Japan. His family, however, chose to remain in Sarawak.

Reece maintains that although the Japanese propaganda machine in Sarawak was not as extensive as Indonesia or Malaya, attempts were made to arouse anti-European feelings among the local population (p. 148). Photographs of Europeans and English books were destroyed. A weekly romanized Malay newspaper, *Khabar Harian Kuching*, was published and functioned as a propaganda instrument of the Japanese. Apart from this, "slogans were posted around Kuching and other major towns lauding the Japanese armed forces, the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and Asian brotherhood; rallies were organized to swear allegiance to the Japanese as the 'light of Asia'."²⁴ A huge welcome was also arranged for Japanese Prime Minister Tojo's visit to Kuching.

As in Malaya, the Japanese fostered the growth of communally-based associations, such as the Indian Independence League for the small Indian community, the Overseas Chinese Association and the Perimpun Dayak (Dayak Association). Leaders of these associations were given responsibility for the actions of their respective communities and they also had to organize periodic demonstrations of loyalty and cultural events to commemorate the Emperor's birthday and War Heroes Day.

The Japanese, however, banned the Malay association, the Persatuan Melayu Sarawak, as they were not certain of the political leanings of its members. Instead, they chose to follow the Brooke precept of using the traditional Malay elite to further their interests. They worked with Malay officials in the *jikeidan*, such as Tuanku Bujang or the Kuching District Officer, Abang Openg. An attempt by Ibrahim Yaakub's Kesatuan Melayu Muda to establish a branch in Kuching in 1942 was nipped in the bud by the Kempeitai (Reece 1982, p. 145).

A women's association, the Kaum Ibu, was started in Kuching and flourished under the sponsorship of the Japanese. The four major races were represented in this association; Lily Eberwein, a Eurasian Muslim and headmistress of the Permaisuri Melayu school, was secretary of the Malay section, while Mary Ong, Barbara Bay and Mrs Gopal headed the Chinese, Iban, and Indian sections respectively. The Kaum Ibu was encouraged to raise money, organize singing and dancing sessions for concerts held on special occasions, and to plant and tend vegetable plots. Reece cautions against overstating the importance of the Kaum Ibu and its connection with post-war political developments (p. 146).²⁵ The Japanese slogan of "Asia for the Asians" left a deep imprint on the members of the Kaum Ibu. Barbara Bay, for example, felt that the self-confidence she gained in the movement through contact with the Japanese paved the way for her subsequent involvement in politics.

When asked about civilian atrocities committed by the Japanese, Hj. Hossen Hj. Usop pointed out that there were not many instances of cruelty against the local population and there were certainly no mass executions.²⁶ He only remembered the public execution of five Chinese accused of stealing petrol. According to Hj. Daud Hj. Azahari, the Japanese were very harsh in their treatment of those accused of theft. Datuk Wan Yusuf Tuanku Bujang, who was living near the Kempeitai headquarters at Kampong Jawa, recalled that he often "heard shrieks, shouts and sounds of the beating".²⁷

The issue of forced or conscript labour was also addressed by some of the interviewees. Hj. Daud Hj. Azahari mentioned that towards the end of 1944 he was tricked by the Japanese into becoming a labourer. Apparently, the Japanese had given word to the local population to assemble at Pangkalan Batu by the Sarawak river. He elaborated,

We were told to bring gunny sacks to collect rice. We were overjoyed! About 3,000 people came. We waited for a long time and then saw a ship arrive. A Japanese soldier counted 100 persons and told them to board the ship. The ship left. I became quite worried when nobody returned. My turn came and I went on board as well. Aduh! I was trapped. The ship continued its journey, past Batu Kawa and it finally docked at Siniawan. We were all told to spend the night and on the following day we were asked to unload the ship's cargo. Fortunately, I managed to escape.

The Japanese also conscripted labour for public works projects such as the construction of the landing strip. There was a system of *gotong royong*, or *kinrohushi*, through which *kampung* men were mobilized for projects like the levelling of land. But this was not compulsory and those who participated were given food rations.²⁸ The Japanese also imported labourers from Indonesia.

Several interviewees recalled that towards the end of the war, the Japanese had planned to execute prominent Malays. The intention was to cripple the administration when the British reoccupied Kuching. They had a list of people whom they wanted to round up, and dug up a big trench near the old mosque to be used as a mass grave. Fortunately, the Japanese surrendered before they could carry out their plans. Tan Sri Datuk Hamdan, whose name was apparently on the list, related his experience as follows when forewarned of the planned execution.

...our close friend, Mohd. Kuno warned us not to respond if the Japanese were to knock on our doors in the early morning... our house was on stilts and so we cut a hole on the floor and kept a ladder nearby. If we were to hear the Japanese on our doorstep, we could easily escape to the river bank.²⁹

After the Japanese surrendered, Sarawak was officially handed over to the Australian military on 10 September 1945. The Australians found that Kuching had suffered little damage during the war. There were tensions, however, among the local population when the Australians tried to identify collaborators. Gatherings in the street were common during the few days following the reoccupation by the Australians. The vendetta was also driven by communal feelings, with the Chinese accusing the Malays of collaborating with the Japanese. It is difficult to gauge how serious the recriminations were; there were street beatings of Malays and Indians by groups of Chinese and many so-called "collaborators" sought protection from the Australians.

The Chinese regarded the Malays as traitors and felt that the Kuching Malay community did not experience much suffering during the war. Many of the Malays, who were former Brooke civil servants, were retained by the Japanese, and the native community leaders also provided support to the war-time administration. Anti-Malay feelings among the Chinese culminated in the Kuching riots of 11 October 1945. Fighting broke out between the Malays and Chinese in the bazaar area and by late morning more than 1,000 Chinese had assembled opposite the old mosque, preparing to attack the mosque and the various Malay *kampung* behind it. The Australians were able to disarm the would-be rioters and prevented a bloodbath. A few deaths occurred and it was commonly believed that the casualties amounted to 100 persons.

Concluding Remarks

It is apparent that the Japanese interlude in Sarawak did not have far-reaching consequences on the Kuching Malay community. They did not prosper under the Japanese nor did they experience extreme deprivation or hardship. Their attitudes towards the Japanese were mostly ambivalent. It may be useful to emphasize here that Japan's priorities in Sarawak were military and the focus of its economic interest were the oilfields at Miri.

On 15 April 1946, the military administration formally handed over the government to Rajah Vyner. By then, negotiations were already under way for the cession of Sarawak to the British Crown. The Rajah's return to Sarawak in April was to explain to the people his decision and secure token approval on the cession issue. Even before the Japanese Occupation, there were suggestions that the Colonial Office would eventually assume responsibility for the government of Sarawak. As a result of the Japanese Occupation, pressure was brought to bear on the Rajah to yield to the prospect of cession. The British attempted to impress on the Rajah that the Sarawak government did not have adequate resources for post-war reconstruction. The extension of

British colonial rule to Sarawak, instead of being a strong possibility, now became a necessity in order to uplift the state from the ravages of war.

The cession issue evoked strong sentiments among the Malays in Kuching and divided the community. Some of the Malay élite were against the cession of Sarawak to the British Crown, and strongly felt that the pre-war status quo should be restored. Although the Japanese Occupation gave little opportunity to the Malays for political activity, it did give them self-confidence which later inspired them to form political parties. The Malay National Union sought the return of Brooke rule, as some of its members were inclined to look upon the restoration of the pre-war government as a prelude to a form of national independence.

Notes

1. See "Agreement between Her Majesty's Government and Charles Brooke, Second Rajah of Sarawak. The Treaty of 1888", in R.H.W. Reece, *The Name of Brooke: The End of White Rajah Rule in Sarawak* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 288-89.
2. "Report by Colonel C.M. Lane, Officer Commanding the Sarawak and Brunei Forces", 9 January 1942, CO 203/2689.
3. See Special Staff US Army Division, "The Borneo Operations, 1941-1942", *Japanese Studies in World War II*, no. 27, AL 1099 (Imperial War Museum).
4. This detached battalion occupied Labuan on 1 January 1942, and Jesselton a week later. On 17 January, two infantry companies landed at Sandakan.
5. The *Sarawak Gazette* published a series of articles under the title "Past History, 1941-1942", giving a commentary on the events that happened several days before the Japanese capture of Kuching up to the surrender of and internment of Sarawak officers. See the following issues: 7 September 1949, pp. 218-20; 7 October 1949, pp. 256-57; 7 November 1949, pp. 289-91; 7 December 1949, pp. 317-19; 9 January 1950, pp. 13-15, and 7 February 1950, pp. 38-39.
6. Le Gros Clark was shot at Keningau, along with other British civilians and a Chinese diplomat, a few months before the Japanese surrender.
7. For a more detailed account of the events at Long Nawang, see "Report by W. McKerracher, Manager of the Rejang Timber Concession", in A.F.R. Griffin Papers, Mss Pac s 109; and "Report concerning the massacre of Europeans, Longnawan, 1942" by VX31299, Lieutenant F.R. Oldham, 20 May 1946, in Sarawak War Crimes and Miscellaneous Reports, WO 203/5591.
8. See "Status of the Military Administration in North Borneo", Nishijima Collection, Waseda University, p. 29; and Item no. 2178 (Interrogation of Kuji Manabu), Bulletin no. 237, WO 203/6317. Kuji Manabu was the Governor of the West Coast Province from December 1942 to July 1945, after which he was replaced by Major-General Kuroda.

9. "The Fundamental Principles for the North Borneo Civil Administration", Item no. 2178, Bulletin no. 237, CO 203/6317.
10. See "Extracts from a broadcast interview by Christopher Chan and Tan Sri Ong Kee Hui, 14 February 1975", in the *Journal of the Malaysian Historical Society, Sarawak Branch*, no. 3 (December 1976): 9.
11. Yamada was seconded from the Department of Interior in Japan and was posted to Sarawak in 1943 as Head of the 37th Army's research section. In 1944, he was made head of the General Affairs Division in Kuching.
12. See minutes of meeting of the Simanggang *Ken Sanji*, held on 10 Ichi-gatsu, 2604, JAP/2, Kuching District Office File (Sarawak Museum).
13. The discussion in this section is based on oral history interviews conducted with the residents of several Malay *kampung* along the Sarawak River within the vicinity of the old mosque. In August 1995 I interviewed 18 persons between the ages of 65 and 91, who had lived in these *kampung* during the Japanese Occupation.
14. Interview dated 16 August 1995.
15. Interview dated 24 August 1995.
16. Interview with Hj. Suhaili Wahed, 19 August 1995.
17. Interview with Datin Hj. Fatimah Weit, 22 August 1995.
18. Interview with Tan Sri Datuk Hj. Hamdan, 24 August 1995.
19. Interview with Hj. Hossen Hj. Usop, 22 August 1995.
20. Interview with Hj. Chem bin Ali, 17 August 1995.
21. Ibid.
22. In 1939, there were 133 Japanese living in Kuching.
23. Interview with Source 1 (anonymous), 16 August 1995.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Interview dated 22 August 1995.
27. Interview dated 22 August 1995.
28. Interview with Hj. Suhaili Wahed, 22 August 1995.
29. Interview dated 24 August 1995.

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War and Ambivalence

Monuments and Memorials in Johor

P. Lim Pui Huen

Introduction

Malaysians shared a common experience of war and occupation in World War II but emerged with different memories. The memories of war differed partly because Japanese policies towards the various communities differed and partly because the perceptions of war among these communities also differed.¹ One can even argue that there was not one war but several wars that took place simultaneously.

To begin with, World War II in Malaya was a war between Japan and Britain within the context of the larger conflict between the Allied powers led by the United States and Britain against the coalition of Japan, Germany and Italy. Malaysia was merely "a party to other people's war".² British and Commonwealth forces fought the Japanese because British interests were at stake. Prime Minister Muruyama confirmed this when he addressed a letter of apology to the Prime Minister of Britain. But for the Chinese, the war in Malaya was an extension of the war in China. This was the way the Japanese perceived it too, hence the harsh treatment meted out to the Chinese. Whether China-born or local-born, China-oriented or Malaya-oriented, all Chinese were subjected to the same severe measures. To the Indians, the war provided a means of striking a blow for India and many Indians joined the Indian National Army (INA) to fight for Indian independence. Malayan Indians donated generously to the INA and a number of them fought in Burma in the Imphal campaign. In the Malay community, perceptions varied from the pro-Japanese *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* to those who joined Force 136. Moreover, many Malays feel that three and a half years of hardship was a small price to pay. One of them said to me, "the Japanese fought our war for us. If they had not done so, we would have to fight the British ourselves".

Would some of these sentiments and perceptions be captured in monuments? As concrete and visible objects constructed in the past, what kind of messages would they convey to the present? Monuments are "materialized memories" which are invested with interpretations of the past (Locher-Scholten 1995, p. 2). They are constructed to promote certain notions of the past and to define society's view of history.³ Monuments are static objects but the context in which they are viewed is not constant. The conditions surrounding the construction of the monument can change so that the purpose for which it was erected may no longer be relevant, or new generations may not find the original purpose sufficiently meaningful. Indeed, a monument may convey a completely different message to what was originally intended.

In this chapter, I shall look at the monuments that have been erected in Johor to see what they tell us about the history of the war and what they reveal about war and memory, as well as war and locality. In terms of geography, Johor had a unique role in the Japanese campaign in Malaya. By virtue of its location as the southernmost state on the Malay Peninsula, all units of the Japanese army converged in Johor Bahru to launch the final assault on Singapore.

To briefly recapitulate, the Japanese 25th Army landed on three locations on the east coast of the peninsula on 8 December 1941, at Kota Bahru, Singora and Patani. On the eastern front, the Japanese overcame the British resistance at Kota Bahru and advanced towards Kuala Trengganu and Kuantan. At the time, there was no road south of Kuantan and so the invaders took to the sea and landed at Endau, in northeast Johor, on 26 January 1942. They went on to take Mersing, Jemaluang, Kota Tinggi and then pressed on towards Johor Bahru. (I mention the places that the Japanese army passed through for reasons that will become obvious later.)

On the western front, nothing was able to stop the Japanese advance and Kuala Lumpur fell on 11 January. By 15 January, the Japanese had reached northwest Johor, having bombed and then taken Muar and seaborne units had infiltrated points further south. When Japanese forces pushed forward to take Batu Pahat, Yong Peng, Kluang, and Ayer Hitam, British and Commonwealth forces began retreating towards Johor Bahru. On 30 January, the withdrawal across the Causeway began and was completed the following day to the sound of bagpipes after which a seventy-foot gap was blasted in the Causeway. As they withdrew, General Yamashita and his forces moved in and began planning their battle for Singapore.

In the initial stages of the war, Johor Bahru was left comparatively untouched. Bombing of the town began around 29 January as the battle moved inexorably southwards. After the Japanese forces occupied the town, the inhabitants were ordered to evacuate. From vantage points in Tampoi, Kempas

and the surrounding areas, the evacuees saw the fires of Singapore light up the night sky.

Johor on the Eve of War

Johor is the second largest state on the Malay Peninsula, having a territory of 7,321 square miles. In the 1930s, it was mainly an agricultural state with rubber as the main crop but extensive areas of the state were still jungle and large tracts of land had been set aside as forest reserves.

The last pre-war census taken in 1931 gave the population of Johor state as follows:

	Population	Percentage
Malays	234,422	46.39
Chinese	215,076	42.56
Indians	51,025	10.10
Others	4,788	0.95
Total	505,311 ⁴	100.00

Outside Johor Bahru, the most populous towns were Muar (population 133,056) and Batu Pahat (population 120,160) on the west coast, while Kluang, Segamat, Kota Tinggi and Pontian had populations of 35,000 to 45,000 people.

Johor Bahru, the state capital, had only a population of 21,463 in 1931 so that the population at the outbreak of war can be estimated to be about 30,000.⁵ It was and remains the administrative centre of the state and government service can be said to be the chief occupation at the time. The town itself consisted of the area bounded by three main streets, Jalan Ibrahim, Jalan Trus and Jalan Wong Ah Fook. The main buildings were the Istana Besar, the Abu Bakar Mosque, and the newly completed state government secretariat and government hospital. The secretariat with its high square tower (about twelve storeys high) was the tallest building dominating the town. The open verandah on top of the tower provided the Japanese with a bird's eye view of the surrounding area and a commanding view of Singapore across the Causeway, down Bukit Timah Road and the northern sector of the battlefield.⁶

The Japanese Monuments

An esplanade by the Straits of Johor is the most scenic feature of Johor Bahru. About one-and-a-half miles out of the city centre, westwards along the coast

road, a two-step concrete platform stands by the side of the road next to the sea. It is about 14 feet square with a round hole measuring 2 feet in diameter in the centre. There is no lettering or marking to show that it is the base of what used to be a memorial dedicated to the Japanese troops who died in the attack on Singapore. Aris Mohamed, in a letter to the *New Straits Times* (*NST*), describes the memorial as "a wooden cylindrical piece about 20 feet high placed on a square pedestal" (*NST*, 27 February 1992). It stands some distance from busier spots along the road and only occasionally can people be seen using it as a seat to enjoy the sea breeze.

One mile further along the coast at the popular Lido Beach, there once stood another Japanese monument. Aris Mohamed again describes it as follows:

It was a small garden planted with flowers with a chain link marking the boundary. In the centre was a 10-foot high granite obelisk inscribed with several Japanese characters. On one side of it was a board with a map of the Straits of Johor and Singapore island signifying the invasion of Singapore by the Japanese army which took place from there towards the west side of the island (*Ibid.*).

Lido Beach was the embarkation point for the final amphibious assault in the Malaya campaign. The Japanese troops had assembled in Johor Bahru and Tampoi at points not visible from Singapore. At dusk on 8 February, collapsible landing crafts were launched at the estuaries of the Sungai Melayu, Sungai Skudai and Sungai Danga, all of which flowed into the Straits of Johor not far from Johor Bahru. A young Malay was forced into carrying heavy loads and pushing carts for the Japanese. He saw them build wooden ramps at the beach and on the night of the attack, he saw the landing crafts and men rendezvous at Lido Beach when the tide was up.⁷ Hidden among the mangrove swamps on the Singapore side were the men of the 2/4th Australian Machine Gun Battalion. The Australians put up a stubborn resistance and their deadly gunfire inflicted heavy casualties. Because of this, so it is believed, the men of the unit were given the "honour" of constructing the monument which marked the starting point of their defeat. (I shall refer to this as the "invasion monument" to distinguish it from the other monument, which I shall refer to as the "invasion memorial".) The Australian prisoners-of-war were billeted in a house above the beach, which is now the official residence of the State Secretary, and soon became friends with Ismail Nych Osman, the young son of the Malay family next door. For Ismail, the monument has a special meaning, as I shall discuss later.

Although the Japanese constructed the two monuments, Johor Bahru residents do not recall any ceremonies being held at these locations. Possibly,

Johor Bahru was too small and too insignificant for the kind of ceremonies held before the Japanese memorial at Bukit Batok in Singapore (*Syonan*, p. 61). However, school-children were taken on outings to see the invasion monument and given talks on the attack launched from Lido Beach. They were also taught to sing a song commemorating the fall of Singapore.

Much greater importance was given to celebrating the Emperor's birthday on 29 April, in a ceremony held in the field below the state government secretariat. Government servants and school-children were lined up, the Japanese Governor made a speech, the Japanese national anthem was sung, and everyone bowed east in the direction of the Emperor's palace. Similar ceremonies were held to commemorate the birthday of Emperor Meiji and the enthronement of Emperor Jimmu, the legendary first emperor of the Japanese people. These celebrations were held as part of the "Nipponization" policy to inculcate Japanese culture and values into the local population (Akashi 1991, p. 117). The ceremony to commemorate Japan's victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 was also celebrated.⁸ Japan's triumph over the Russians had given it enormous prestige as the first Asian country to defeat a European power and the occasion served as a reminder to Johoreans of its military prowess in defeating not one but several Western powers in this war.

The Istana Bukit Serene is situated on the hill above Lido Beach, with a panoramic view over the Straits of Johor and Singapore. The palace has a tower from which every key target in the northwestern sector of the battlefield could be seen and it was from this tower that Yamashita directed the battle for Singapore (Corner 1981, p. 112).

When Yamashita chose Istana Bukit Serene as his headquarters, some of his officers felt that the position of the palace was too exposed. But he was confident that the British would not bombard the palace of their old friend, the Sultan of Johor, and he was proved correct.⁹ What is not certain is whether Yamashita was aware that the royal family of Johor had connections with Japan dating back to 1883 when Sultan Ibrahim's father, Sultan Abu Bakar, visited Japan and was received by the Emperor (Mohd. Salleh 1980, p. 117). Sultan Ibrahim himself had visited Japan and had been bestowed the Grand Order of the Rising Sun by Emperor Hirohito for his services in protecting Japanese nationals in Malaya. In fact, he wore this order with his uniform as Colonel of the Johor Military Force when he received the Japanese Commander (Kuok 1991, p. 116).

Sultan Ibrahim was also a close friend of Marquis Tokugawa Yoshichika who had visited Malaya in 1921. The visit led to a lifelong friendship with the Malay rulers and an absorbing interest in Malay history and the Malay language which he spoke fluently (Corner 1981, p. 10). With the Sultan of Johor, he shared a common love of tiger hunting and, following a successful

tiger hunt, the Sultan was invited to visit Japan where he was honoured by the Emperor, as already mentioned. In return, the Sultan presented the Marquis with Johor's highest order, the Darjah Kerabat (D.K.) (*Perayaan*, 1986, unpaged). Because of his friendship with the rulers and his knowledge of Malay, the Marquis was appointed Supreme Adviser to the 25th Army, responsible for all the sultans' affairs (Akashi 1969, p. 102). Nevertheless, he had to fall in with the Malayan Military Administration's policy of appointing Governors as heads of the various states, and Sultan Ibrahim lived in retirement throughout the Occupation years.

As already mentioned, there was a small but significant Japanese community in Johor before the war. Japan had considerable investments in plantations, mining and commerce in pre-war Malaya (Ghazali 1978, p. 13). These activities have been described as part of the Japanese southward advance into Southeast Asia that had begun in the early twentieth century.¹⁰ Johoreans remember the Japanese rubber plantations in Kota Tinggi and Kluang, and the small Japanese businesses, many of them photographers, who had penetrated even into remote areas like Batu Enam as long ago as the 1920s — evidence, they feel, of Japan's expansionist intentions. In fact, one of the photographers, named Tanaka, returned with the Occupation forces to head the Propaganda Department in Johor Bahru.¹¹

To Johoreans, the monuments are not only reminders of the war but also of Japanese activities before the war. As to their fate, there are two versions of what happened. In the first version, the monuments were destroyed by the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) during the post-surrender interregnum. In the second version, the wooden invasion memorial was cut down by the Public Works Department and fell into the sea. The granite invasion monument, on the other hand, simply keeled over by its own weight because of the soft muddy ground. There it remained buried until it was rediscovered in 1982 in the course of public works on the site (*NST*, 25 October 1982, *BH*, 15 October 1982). It now rests in the Japanese cemetery on Jalan Kebun Teh in Johor Bahru.

The Chinese Monuments

Not far from the Japanese cemetery stands a memorial that the Chinese built in Kebun Teh for the Chinese victims of Japanese atrocities. It is a mass grave of more than 2,000 people killed in Johor Bahru and its vicinity. The monument is about 50 feet long with steps leading up to a number of inscriptions. In front of it, there is a memorial arch decorated with appropriate proverbs and couplets. The inscription in English on the monument tells us:

This monument is erected by the Chinese community of Johor Bahru district in undying memory of those thousands of our beloved countrymen who were

massacred by the Japanese between 25th February and 31st March 1942 in the towns and villages of the district and of those who were apprehended and tortured to death, many for having been members of the China relief fund organization. Here lie the remains recovered and reverently re-interred of some two thousand of the victims (Franke and Chen 1982, p. 149).

The sites of the massacres are generally known. Johor Bahru had its own version of *sook ching* when all the people of the town were made to march past a post gate.¹² One out of every five were ordered to step out, loaded onto trucks and brought to the Civil Service Club where they were made to dig their own graves and then killed (Kuok 1991, p. 125). Others were lined-up along the sea-front and machine-gunned so that their bodies fell into the water. Residents remember that the stench from the sea lasted for weeks, human remains continued to be washed up along the swamps and beaches, and no one went fishing for a very long time.

Not all those massacred were Chinese. In one infamous episode, two Indian doctors were killed in the Tampoi Mental Hospital in front of their horrified staff.¹³ Almost the entire Eurasian community was massacred in an estate bungalow in Ulu Tiram (Kuok 1991, p. 120). Eye-witnesses remember seeing bodies of all races tied together in the sea but acknowledge that most of them were Chinese.

Twice a year during the two festivals of remembrance, which are Qingming and Chongyang, when the Chinese visit the graves of their ancestors, a ritual is held at the Kebun Teh monument, organized by the Chinese Association of Johor Bahru (Xinshan Zhonghua Gonghui) (Trocki 1990, p. 7). The rituals are performed by the representatives of the Association, five *bang* organizations, and the Foon Yew School. The Chinese Association is a body which functions as the representative of the Chinese community in matters that concern the whole community, and has eleven sister associations which join together to form the Federation of Chinese Associations, Johor State. The five *bang* organizations are traditional social organizations in Johor Bahru which cater to the specific needs of the five main dialect groups, the Teochew, Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka and Hainanese.¹⁴ Foon Yew School is the only Chinese school in Johor Bahru and one of the largest Chinese schools in Malaysia. These organizations provide the traditional leadership of the Chinese community, and their leaders were among the targets of the Japanese Kempeitei.

The Chinese Association of Johor Bahru has its origins in an older organization that was part of the history of nineteenth century Johor, the Ngee Heng Kongsi, which was one of the triads or brotherhoods that used to dominate the underworld of the Chinese in Malaysia and Singapore.¹⁵ These secret societies were organized along dialect lines and the Ngee Heng in Johor was

a society for the Teochew. Since most of the pepper and gambier cultivators in Johor were Teochew, the Sultan of Johor permitted the Ngee Heng to operate as a legitimate body and to maintain law and order among the Chinese. To all intents and purposes, it functioned like a traditional Chinese social organization and was well accepted by all the Chinese in Johor. It did not have the image of a clandestine organization but was nevertheless ordered by British officials to dissolve itself in 1916 (*Johor Annual Report* 1917, p. 7). Its leaders then built a tomb into which they deposited, after due ceremony, its ancestral tablets, sacred objects and records. The gravestone of the tomb carries only two characters, "Ming Mu" or Ming Tomb, characters which betray their triad roots.¹⁶ The Ngee Heng then donated their assets, amounting to a sum of \$30,000, to the Foon Yew School as an endowment on the condition that the School Committee perform the annual rituals of remembrance at the Ming Tomb (Wong 1963, p. 9).

After the Ngee Heng was dissolved, the Chinese Association of Johor Bahru was set up in 1922 to take its place (Wu 1977, p. 5). Since that time, the rituals have been faithfully observed up to the present day, and since the end of World War II, have been extended to include the Kebun Teh monument.

Ancestor worship is a deeply entrenched tradition that is an integral part of the Chinese belief system. Rites held at the organizational level, such as those described, are acts of group solidarity. At a personal level, ancestor worship is an extension of the Chinese concept of filial piety which calls for the care of aged parents when they are living and ritual remembrance when they are dead,¹⁷ and one of the most important obligations of ancestor worship is the observation of rituals held annually at the grave. Should the deceased die in such a way that the body cannot be recovered for burial, a symbolic grave is sometimes constructed so that these rituals can be held.¹⁸ There is also the popular belief that those who die a violent death and who do not receive ritual offerings are doomed to an after-life as hungry ghosts (Eastman 1988, p. 52). Such uncared for ghosts only receive offerings once a year when they are released from hell during the month-long Feast of the Hungry Ghosts. To those Chinese who lost a family member during the war, the Kebun Teh monument is therefore more than a memorial. It is both a mass grave and a symbolic grave for all those whose remains were never recovered, and where appropriate rituals can be performed for the repose of the soul.

Since the monument was erected by the Chinese community and the annual ceremonies are carried out by its representatives, it has become part of the local cultural life and entered the community awareness. Furthermore, since the ceremonies are carried out on the same day and by the same persons and organizations conducting the ceremonies at the Ming Tomb, it has been integrated into the history and the culture memory of the Johor Chinese that reach back to the beginnings of the Chinese community in Johor.

As far as I know, there are thirteen other monuments in Johor state. They are in:¹⁹

1. Mersing
2. Jemaluang
3. Kota Tinggi
4. Ayer Hitam
5. Sengarang
6. Gelang Patah cemetery
7. Gelang Patah, 3rd mile towards Tanjung Kupang
8. Kampung Pok, Tanjung Kupang, near Gelang Patah
9. Ulu Choh, 27th mile cemetery
10. Ulu Choh, 23rd mile Hokkien cemetery
11. Ulu Choh, 23rd mile Cantonese cemetery
12. Ulu Tiram
13. Yong Peng

These are places through which the Japanese army passed on their advance towards Singapore, as mentioned earlier. Monuments are therefore found not only in the small towns but also in the rural districts of central and southern Johor. All of them are mass graves, each of which tells its own tragic story. They can be divided into two categories: graves of people killed immediately after the fighting ceased, and graves of people killed in the course of the Occupation.

The mass grave in Mersing, for example, contains the remains of an estimated 300 people who were killed on the beach after the fall of Singapore. The three mass graves in Gelang Patah contain the remains of about five hundred people killed in March 1942. The victims included evacuees who came by boat from Singapore hoping to find safety in this remote corner of southwestern Johor. Similarly, the mass grave in the Hokkien cemetery at the 23rd mile in Ulu Choh, which is not far from Gelang Patah, contains the remains of about 300 people from Batu Jeram, Pulaui district, who were killed a few days later.

On the other hand, the other mass grave in Ulu Choh, in the cemetery at the 27th mile, contains the remains of about 200 people from Kampong Sawa, Bukit Nanas district, who were killed in October 1943 as a reprisal against the activities of anti-Japanese guerillas. Another massacre of a whole community is marked by the third Ulu Choh grave in the Cantonese cemetery at the 23rd mile which contains the remains of an unknown number of Chinese from Kampong Ulu Pulaui who were killed on an unspecified date. There are other instances of entire villages put to the sword, and many stories of random killings and whole families slaughtered. The remains of candles and incense

found at these graves show that they are still visited and that the dead are still remembered.

The largest Chinese monument is the mass grave at Ayer Hitam which contains the remains of not only those killed in the surrounding area, but also those killed in Muar and Batu Pahat. No one seems to know what the numbers are but since these two towns have much larger populations than Johor Bahru, it can be estimated that the number of victims would not be less than those buried in the Kebun Teh mass grave. It is a large and impressive monument decorated with the Kuomintang sun emblem, and the calligraphy of the inscription came from the brush of Chiang Ching Kuo.²⁰

On 15 August 1995, the Chinese community of Johor gathered in a solemn ceremony at the Ayer Hitam monument to commemorate the victims of a war that had ended fifty years ago (*Nanyang*, 16 August 1995). The occasion was organized by the Federation of Chinese Associations, Johor State. Wreaths were laid by the representatives of more than thirty Chinese associations representing local communities in Johor so that the event was a broadly based community function. The speakers condemned the evils of war and appealed for "peace in the heart". At the same time, the dead should not be forgotten and Japan should apologize for the atrocities perpetuated. The ceremony was also a religious one; prayers were chanted, incense burnt and libations of wine were offered.

The Chinese Association of Johor Bahru had organized an exhibition on the war in Johor Bahru in 1994. The ceremony on 15 August 1995 was, however, organized by the Federation of Chinese Associations at which all Chinese associations in Johor State were represented. The commemoration of the sufferings of war has become a community activity.

The Emergency Monument

On the seafront near the Sultanah Tun Aminah Hospital stands a cenotaph dedicated in 1962:

In memory of those who lost their lives in the two World Wars and the Emergency,

It was erected by the Ex-Services Association of Malaya, Johor Branch, with donations from the Johor government, Ex-Services Association of Malaya, and members of the public.

The dedication draws attention to the little known fact that Johor men were, in a small way, involved in action during World War I. The Johor Military Force (JMF), formed in 1885, was then the only Malayan military unit.²¹

A company of the JMF was despatched to Singapore to assist Indian troops guarding German prisoners-of-war. When the Indian troops mutinied, three members of the JMF were killed, including two officers. The Indian Sepoy Mutiny was eventually put down but detachments of the JMF were deployed in Singapore until the war ended.

The number of Malaysians involved in the defence of Malaya in World War II is much harder to determine. When the war began, the Malayan Armed Forces was still in its infancy. The Malay Regiment, set up as an Experimental Squad in 1933, had by 1941 grown only to the strength of two battalions (Nordin and Abdul Razak 1994, p. 5). The combined strength of the Malay Regiment and the JMF has been estimated to be about 1,500 men.²² The men of the 1st and 2nd Battalions, Malay Regiment, fought with outstanding valour in the battle for Singapore. The site of their heroic stand at Kent Ridge in Pasir Panjang, where so many gave their lives, has been marked by a memorial as part of Singapore's activities to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II.

In terms of manpower, the total strength of the Malaya Command, including local men, on the eve of invasion was as follows:

Regular Forces:	British	19,391	
	Australian	15,279	
	Indians	37,191	
	Asiatics	<u>4,482</u>	76,343
Volunteer Forces:	British	2,430	
	Indians	727	
	Asiatics	<u>7,395</u>	10,552
			<u>86,895</u> ²³

If we add the reinforcements of 36,350 which arrived in the course of the war, making a total of 123,245 men, the proportion of local men involved was very small indeed.

As for the volunteers, the British official "History of the Second World War" lists the volunteer units that were mobilized as follows:

- 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Battalions, Straits Settlements Volunteer Force
- 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Battalions, Federated Malay States Volunteer Force
- Armoured Car Company, Singapore Volunteer Force
- Singapore Royal Artillery Volunteers
- Armoured Car Company, Federated Malay States Volunteer Force
- Light Artillery Battery, Federated Malay States Volunteer Force
- Kelantan Volunteer Force

Kedah Volunteer Force
Perak River Platoon
Sultan Idris Company
Johore Infantry
Johore Volunteer Engineers²⁴

There is not much information available about the composition of these volunteer units but the Johor situation was probably reflected in most of the other Malay states. The JMF is presumably the Johore Infantry listed above. The Johor Volunteer Force, which was made up of Malay members of the Johor Civil Service, has been omitted from the list, while the Johor Volunteer Engineers were recruited from European civilians, mainly managers and staff of rubber estates (Ibrahim 1984, p. 159). In the Straits Settlements of Singapore, Malacca and Penang, the volunteers included men of all races.

However, local men, other than the Malay Regiment, were in fact not given the opportunity to play a meaningful role in the defence of their country. Mohamad Yusoff Haji Ahmad, for example, was a member of the Malayan Volunteer Infantry (MVI) but did not seem to have been called up for service (Mohd Yusoff 1993, p. 181). In any case, the MVI did not attract many Malays because, in his view, they had no conception of what a modern war was like whereas the European volunteers had memories of World War I. Most of those who signed up were low-ranking government servants and rubber tappers who were attracted by the allowance. Moreover, he did not have a very high opinion of the training he received, much of which he regarded as "pointless". He recalls in his autobiography, "I did not like the training though I wanted to be a soldier to defend my country".

That the British military authorities had no role for the local volunteers is also shown in the recollections of Yap Pheng Geck, who was Officer Commanding of "E" Chinese Company, Straits Settlements Volunteer Force (SSVF). The SSVF had put in a lot of their own time in training but were not issued with proper weapons or ammunition even after war had broken out. Yap Pheng Geck recalls:

In retrospect I cannot help thinking that the authorities never intended to make the Volunteer Force an effective military unit. Our spirits were high but our training and preparation was grossly inadequate. Our colonial rulers were never quite certain of the loyalty of the local people. Until the war broke out, we were not allowed to carry our firearms home. ... when the war broke out and we were sent to our respective stations, we were without ammunition until about the middle of January 1942 (Yap 1982, p. 47).

His sentiments are echoed by my informants in Johor. "Percival did not trust us", they said. Abdul Aziz bin Haji Shukor, a member of the Johor

Volunteer Force, was told to "go home".²⁵ At the outset of the hostilities, Sultan Ibrahim had offered the services of the JMF and the Johor volunteers to the General Officer Commanding, Malaya, and the Governor in Singapore (Pameran, 29). He received a polite acknowledgement but there is no record to indicate whether the JMF was actually deployed with the British or Australian forces. Certainly, its official history makes no mention of it and as far as can be ascertained, the JMF was stationed on guard duty at essential installations while a small signals detachment was posted on one of the islands off Mersing (Shaharom 1995, p. 140; Ibrahim 1984, p. 161). On 28 January 1942, when the Japanese had advanced beyond Ayer Hitam deep into Johor territory, the JMF was demobilized and ordered to surrender their weapons to the retreating British troops so as to prevent them from falling into the hands of the enemy. Nevertheless, a number of JMF personnel and Johor volunteers lost their lives, as can be seen by the names inscribed on the Kranji War Memorial.

British histories of the war give a different view of the non-involvement of local men. According to Louis Allen, the Chinese were not armed because of fears that they would fall into the hands of the communists, and the British failed to use the Malays because many officers believed that "they were not a martial race" (Allen 1977, p. 247). Even after the heroic stand put up by the Malay Regiment, Colonel Ashmore was still to write of the Malay as "a nice fellow" who "does not possess any martial qualities" (Ibid., p. 255), and Kirby, in his official history, wrote of the Malays as an "easy going race, content to live a simple life and accept the edicts of their rulers with good grace" (Kirby 1957, p. 155).

These comments reveal the prejudices against both Malays and Chinese on the part of the civil and military authorities, although for very different reasons. But by the time of the Emergency, which lasted from 1948 to 1960, attitudes had changed. It was recognized that the services of local men were badly needed to augment British and Commonwealth forces, and attention was given to building up local defences. The Federation of Malaya assumed responsibility for internal security when it became independent in 1957, by which time Malayan security forces had been substantially enlarged (Jeshurun 1985, p. 135). With the involvement of Malaysians in counter-insurgency operations, there was a concomitant level of casualties. But there were also many casualties among the local population so that we have the following figures:²⁶

	Killed	Wounded	Total
Security forces	1,253	1,473	2,726
Civilians	2,473	1,385	4,668

During the Emergency, Johor and Perak were the two states which had the most terrorists. The murders of four Chinese in Johor were among the acts of violence that started the Emergency. Johor was one of the strongholds of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) and the terrorists in Johor were regarded as being a greater threat than those of other states (Short 1975, p. 351). As a high level of operations was carried out to maintain the pressure on the CPM, it can be assumed that a fair number of Johoreans were included in the casualties.

One of my informants, Ismail Nyeh Osman, was assigned as medical auxiliary to the security forces on some of these operations. He told me, "After the Emergency, there was nothing to remember our boys who died. So we collected some money and built this monument." World War II ended in 1945 but the cenotaph was completed in 1962, two years after the official end of the Emergency. When he spoke of "our boys", Ismail was clearly referring not to those who died in the war but to those who died in the Emergency.

Memory Encapsulated, Memory Lost

The three types of monuments described capture three sets of memories.

The Japanese monuments marked the victorious Japanese army in its moment of triumph. But a brilliant military campaign was marred by the brutalities and atrocities that followed, actions for which half a century later, a Japanese Prime Minister was forced by world opinion to make an apology. The monuments, erected in victory, have become a reminder of aggression and defeat. One has become an anonymous piece of street furniture and the other lies neglected in the Japanese cemetery. The local Japanese community which maintains the cemetery has not seen fit to place it under protective cover so that it is exposed to the elements and is so badly eroded that the characters are no longer legible.

The residents of Johor Bahru are generally unaware of their existence, with the exception of some local history enthusiasts. To them, these are historical monuments which ought to be preserved and the invasion monument marking the attack on Singapore should be re-erected as a local landmark and tourist attraction. And for Ismail Nyeh Osman, this particular monument has a special meaning. His cousin was a participant in the events commemorated, it was erected in front of his house, he saw the Japanese stonemasons engraving the words and he was a friend of the prisoners-of-war who constructed it. He would like to see it re-erected at its original site.

As the Chinese monuments are mass graves, they have an emotive and symbolic significance over and above that of other monuments. The Chinese suffered more than other ethnic groups in the war and thousands of Chinese

were massacred by the Japanese. The actual number of those killed will probably never be confirmed; estimates vary from 6,000 (Japanese figures) to 40,000 (Chinese figures).²⁷ A more accurate figure of 100,000 has been recently established by Takashima Nobuyoshi, a Japanese school-teacher who has visited fifty-one burial sites in the country (*NST*, 14 August 1995). The fact that fourteen out of the fifty-one known burial sites in Peninsular Malaysia are located in Johor shows that Japanese atrocities were particularly ferocious there for reasons that are not clear. Japanese brutality has completely coloured the Chinese memory of war, but at the same time the collective memory of suffering has contributed to the Chinese sense of community.

The monuments also hint at memories not articulated. Why, for example, were the victims of massacres from Batu Pahat and Muar not re-buried in these towns which have sizeable Chinese populations? Was this due to the clashes that occurred between the Malays and the Chinese towards the last months of the war and during the post-surrender interregnum? Could some of the dead have been victims of these clashes and not victims of the Japanese? My Chinese informants have only a vague knowledge of these events and were surprised by stories of MPAJA activities which, it is generally believed, aroused Malay resentment that triggered off the racial violence.²⁸ They offered two explanations: firstly, that the clashes were due to the Japanese inciting the Malays against the Chinese, and secondly, that they were the work of the communists. Most of my Malay informants also have little knowledge of the clashes in Batu Pahat. Except for one who lived through a period of tension in Kluang, none of them had very much to say about these events. My informants, whether Chinese or Malays, were generally disinclined to talk about communal conflicts, which are regarded as sensitive subjects. Even though there are varying versions of the events, the different versions still show that both sides were in the ambiguous position of having been transgressors as well as victims.

Memories of war run over into the Emergency period which lasted from 1948 to 1960. When elements of the MPAJA returned to the jungle, the memorials to their comrades who died in the war fell into the uneasy space between heroic resistance fighters and anti-government terrorists. In the Hokkien cemetery in Ulu Choh, there is a shrine which, I am told, is dedicated to deceased resistance fighters. This information has been suppressed by the local residents and has only resurfaced recently. Similarly, a memorial dedicated to deceased members of the MPAJA, the only such memorial in Johor, was buried and only recovered in the course of land clearing in Yong Peng in 1994 (*Nanyang*, 1 December 1995). The stone is decorated with three stars and is inscribed with fifty-six names, three of them non-Chinese. The passage of time and the fact that the Communist Party of Malaya has signed a peace accord with the governments of Malaysia and

Thailand in 1989 (Sebastian 1991, p. 271), have made it possible for the people of Yong Peng, a CPM stronghold during the Emergency, to re-erect the memorial.

This memorial with its CPM insignia is a contrast to the other two graves, one in Ayer Hitam and the other in Ulu Choh, which carry the Kuomintang emblem. Taken together, they are a manifestation of the division in the political affiliations of the Malayan Chinese at the time. Even in death, the two groups claim their respective constituencies.

So far as I know, the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war passed without much fanfare in Malaysia. No official statement was issued regarding Prime Minister Murayama's apology, which was buried on page 22 of the *New Straits Times* of 16 August 1995. This is not surprising as Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad is on record as the only Asian leader who said that Japan need not apologize for the war (*Star*, 28 August 1994). However, at a later date on 2 November 1995, Malaysia did hold a low-key official ceremony for its veterans to pay tribute to their services during the war (*NST*, 3 November 1995).

Conclusion

The various monuments that are scattered about the Johor landscape illustrate the truism about the changing fortunes of war, that they rise and they fall. Everyone builds monuments of one kind or another, but it is the monuments of the victors that survive. The Japanese monuments, triumphant in victory, are an embarrassment in defeat.

The Chinese monuments on the other hand, are not monuments to warfare but to victimhood in war. Memories of war gradually fade but memories of victimhood not only persist but are constantly renewed. Memories of defencelessness and helplessness violated seem to take a firmer hold on the imagination than heroic battles. We can see this very clearly in the way Hiroshima recalls the war for the Japanese and the Holocaust recalls the war for the Jews. The massacres of Chinese civilians in Malaya take on some of this symbolic quality of representing a great depth of suffering.

Certainly, the Chinese monuments convey a powerful message of man's inhumanity. In the *sook ching* operations in Singapore, only men were screened and selected for massacre. Death in warfare can be understood, but in Johor whole communities were slaughtered both in the period immediately after the fighting ended, and in the course of the Occupation. The mass graves connect locality with the wider war arena. Larger concepts, such as war between nations and the struggle for economic competition and political

dominance, narrow down to the deaths of particular persons. Fifty years after the end of the war, the memories of war have passed but for the survivors and the families of the victims, the grieving still remains. Because of the Chinese custom of visiting graves annually, and because the commemoration of war has become a community activity, the memory of the suffering of war is kept alive.

In this process of localizing the memory of war, the geography of memory has changed. When Malaysian Chinese recall the war, China is no longer the point of reference but Malaya. During the pre-war period, stories of distant battles and images of Japanese atrocities, such as the Nanking Massacre, stirred Chinese anger in Malaya. But after the war, these were replaced by more immediate, more real experiences that they had actually suffered and lived through. War brought about a Chinese realization of their place in Malaysian society and an identification with events that occurred in Malaysia, which started them towards the transition from being sojourners to settlers.

The monuments mark both the memory and non-memory of war. The Chinese mass graves reflect what may be called the Chinese memory of war but they also reveal two problematical areas of memory. In the case of the communal clashes which occurred towards the end of the war, there is a reluctance to remember which, with the passage of time, has resulted in a collective amnesia regarding those events. Thus, the memory of the anti-Japanese guerrillas, regarded as heroic during the war, has been confused by their subsequent activities as terrorists and consequently suppressed.

The monuments reveal two very different perceptions and two very different memories of war on the part of the Chinese and the Malays. They bring us to a realization of the ambivalence with which war is remembered. At one level, war highlighted the contradictions in Malaysian society, some of which have still not been resolved. Yet, at another more personal level, war had been a common experience. People of all races and all ages shared a period of hardship and misery compounded by fear. Suffering, deprivation and terror is the common theme that runs through all accounts of World War II in Malaya, a theme that dominates and overrides other themes. In a multi-racial country like Malaysia where each community carries so much of its own cultural baggage, the memory of the common suffering of war provides an important shared historical experience.

Notes

1. I have discussed these different memories in greater detail in Lim (1995), p. 121.
2. Datuk Syed Hamid Albar, Malaysian Law Minister, in the TV3 talkshow "Global", on 3 March 1996.

3. The construction of public monuments is by no means a straightforward task but one subject to continuous debate of what to memorialize and how to memorialize. See, for example, Young (1993); and Bodnar (1992).
4. The figures are taken from the 1947 Census of Malaya.
5. Its population in the 1947 census was 38,826.
6. For an account of Johor during the Japanese Occupation, see Ghazali (1978).
7. Interview with Ismail Nye Osman.
8. Interview with Kael Singh Hans.
9. Noted in *The Japanese Conquest* (n.d.).
10. See Robertson (1979).
11. Interview with Aris Mohamed.
12. *Sook ching*, meaning "purification by elimination", was the operation mounted to screen the male Chinese population for anti-Japanese elements. These men were then killed. The operation started in Singapore but was extended to the peninsula. See Cheah (1983), pp. 20–24.
13. *New Straits Times*, 4 October 1994; and interview with Kael Singh Hans.
14. A *bang* is a sub-ethnic identity within the Chinese community based on dialect and geographical affinities.
15. See Trocki (1979) for an account of the Ngee Heng Kongsi in Johor; and Trocki (1990) for an account of the Ngee Heng Kongsi in Singapore.
16. Secret societies in Malaya trace their origins to the Tiandihui Heaven and Earth Society, also known as the Triad Society, which was founded ostensibly as an anti-Manchu organization with the slogan, "Overthrow Qing, Restore Ming". See Blythe (1969), pp. 19–22.
17. There are many studies on the subject, such as Freedman (1970), Chap. 7: "Death and its Cult"; and Ahern (1973).
18. The most recent example of symbolic burial is the mass burial of the victims of the SilkAir crash at the Musi River in Sumatra in December 1997. The mass grave contained 93 coffins, only two of which had the unidentifiable remains of the victims. The rest of the coffins, each labelled with the name of a victim, was either empty or contained some belongings of the victim (*New Straits Times*, 20 January 1998).
19. Lee Kau Chai's article, in *Nanyang Siang Pau*, Nanyang Johor ed. (1 December 1995).
20. The eldest son of Chiang Kai Shek, who succeeded him as President of the Republic of China.
21. A brief history of the JMF is appended to Ibrahim (1984). In this memoir, the retired Chief of Armed Forces Staff, Malaysia, recalls his secret operation in occupied Malaya. An official history of the JMF is provided in *Pameran* (1986).
22. From Allen (1977), p. 217. Governor Sir Shenton Thomas' figure of 30,147 local participants in the war, which he cited, is clearly not supportable.
23. From Elphick (1995), pp. 185–86.
24. From Kirby (1957), p. 517.
25. Interview with Abdul Aziz bin Haji Shukor.
26. See Nordin and Abdul Razak (1994), p. 12.

27. Figures cited by Cheah (1983), p. 23. Hsu (1955): 1–112, lists the names of 7,500 massacre victims.
28. See Cheah (1983), chapter 8; and Halinah's M.A. thesis (1975), for detailed discussions on these interracial clashes.

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Remembering Darkness

Spectacle, Surveillance and the Spaces of Everyday Life in Syonan-to

Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Kamalini Ramdas

Introduction

In popular imaginations of the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, force and violence are hallmarks of this short but traumatic era; and the rhetoric of fear, terror and common suffering looms large. This is not unexpected given that "occupation" is, in the first instance, "an act of geographical violence", a seizure and appropriation of space or territory by force (Said 1990). The use of violence was integral to the Japanese annexation of Singapore during World War II, both in the initial takeover bid as well as in the subsequent attempts to manage and control the daily compass of social life and work. Unlike the British colonizers who preceded them, the Japanese had to resort to the use of overt force because they faced physical resistance from both the colonial power and the local populace in their attempts at conquest and rule. The Occupation was effected in the context of war, unlike the rule of the preceding colonial power which was aimed, initially at least, at establishing trading and mercantile links rather than territorial conquest.

Drawing mainly on a repository of personal memories constructed through 35 oral history accounts,¹ this chapter examines the construction of a clearly identifiable landscape of fear made up of strategically located places of checks, inspection, detention and public display of power, and the people's response to such a landscape. It first focuses on the exercise of power by the Japanese administration based on spatial strategies of control which inspired fear. These are *spectacle*, or the mapping, staking out and signposting of space; and *surveillance*, or the installation of spatial grids to facilitate the systematic scrutiny and regulation of social life (Gregory 1994). The aim is to reconstruct what people remember of these strategies of control and the effects they engendered

in the lifeworlds of those who lived during the Occupation. In so far as these strategies did not achieve total domination over the lives of the people, the chapter also attempts to reconstruct the coping strategies of the people in the creative spaces of everyday life, or what Foucault (1980) calls the "little tactics of the habitat".

Power and Space

The ways in which the Japanese rulers exercised power, during extreme flashpoints as well as through the course of everyday life, constitute a major feature of popular memory of the Occupation. Just as the exercise of power during the initial annexation connotes "*geographical violence*" (emphasis added), the workings of power during the grind of everyday life (what Foucault calls "micro-powers") in Japanese-occupied Singapore is inextricably woven into the signification and control of space. In Foucault's words, "a whole history remains to be written of spaces — which would at the same time be the history of powers — from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat ..." (Foucault 1980, p. 69). Space is, therefore, not just a backdrop, "... fixed, undialectical, immobile ..." but rather, a "strategy, a tool important in compounding the effects of power" (Ibid., p. 70). In other words, the inner workings of power relations often depended on "the use of spatial, strategic metaphors" (Ibid., p. 70).

Writing in a similar vein, Lefebvre (1977, p. 341) argues that "space is political and strategic"; it is a social product which accrues to groups who appropriate it in order to manage and exploit it. Lefebvre goes on to explain that space is drawn upon in strategies of *both* dominant and subordinated groups interacting within particular configurations of power relations. In order to understand the act of appropriating and controlling space as well as the resistance this gives rise to, Lefebvre refers to three concepts: *spatial practices*, which refer to "the time-space routines and the spatial structures — the sites and circuits — through which social life is produced and reproduced"; *representations of space*, which refer to "conceptions of space — or, more accurately, to constellations of power, knowledge and spatiality — in which the dominant social order is inscribed, implicated and legitimated"; and *spaces of representations*, or "counterspaces that arise from the clandestine or underside of social life to challenge the dominant spatial practices" (Lefebvre, quoted in Gregory 1994, p. 403). In short, space has the nature of a power resource drawn upon in concrete strategies by different groups; at the same time, the workings of power are often manifested in and through space. In the next section, we examine specifically how spatial strategies are played out in Singapore under Japanese rule.

Spatial Strategies of Control and Resistance in Singapore under Japanese Rule

The unconditional surrender of Lieutenant-General A.E. Percival, General Officer Commanding Malaya, to Lieutenant-General Yamashita Tomoyuki, Commander of the 25th Army, on 15 February 1942 marked a significant change in Singapore's space-time co-ordinates. Within two days, the island was no longer Singapore but Syonan (meaning "Light of the South"); all traffic signs were reinscribed in the Japanese script; public buildings such as hospitals and cinema halls were renamed; the year was no longer 1942 but 2602 according to the victor's calendar; the clocks were moved one and a half hours to follow Tokyo time; and the daily newspaper, the *Straits Times*, reappeared on 20 February as the *Syonan Times*, proclaiming that the "germ of the New Order" had arisen and commanding the people to "take all steps to cultivate an understanding of this New Order" (*Syonan Times*, 20 February 1942; Thio 1991, p. 95; Wong 1995, p. 3).

Not only had the rhythm of everyday life on the island been remapped by a re-calibrated space-time framework, but the generally *laissez faire* ethos of British colonialism had been replaced by the rule of military might. The Japanese administration in Southeast Asia as a largely military affair led by the Supreme Command of Southern Army Headquarters was guided by three principles: the need to restore public order; the acquisition of resources vital to national defence; and the establishment of economic self-sufficiency for area armies (Shinozaki 1975, p. 56). Syonan became the base for the 25th Army, which also controlled Peninsular Malaya and Sumatra, and in this power structure, civilian officials were relegated to minor roles *vis-à-vis* their military counterparts. The municipal government (*Tokubetsu-shi*) was subordinate to the military government (*Gunseikan-bu*) which insisted on giving top priority to security and the needs of the war (Turnbull 1977, p. 198; Akashi 1981, p. 50). In an essentially military regime, methods employed to establish law and order and to control the local population were centred on the use of force and violence. As Yamashita proclaimed in a declaration of 20 February 1942, the people of Syonan must co-operate to establish the "East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere" and "New Order of justice", or the "Nippon Army will drastically expel and punish those who still pursue bended delusions, ... those who indulge themselves in private interests and wants, those who act against humanity or disturb the public order and peace and those who are against the orders and disturb the military action of Nippon army" (*Syonan Times*, 20 February 1942).

To restore order immediately after the Japanese takeover, edicts listing a number of prohibitions were issued, all ending with ominous warnings that those who disobeyed "shall be severely punished without any exception" or,

more succinctly, "will be shot" (Lee 1992, p. 68). Most of those in charge were military men who were strong champions of discipline, often interpreting any failure to comply with the rules as an affront to the Emperor himself (Low 1983, p. 152). They were advocates of the principle of *Dokudan-senko* which allowed them to have complete freedom in the area of operational planning and execution without any civilian control over their activities (Akashi 1981, p. 49). This gave them a reputation of being all-powerful in civil society, coming across to the locals as fierce, hard and uncompromising. The locals generally cowered in fear in their presence and few would outrightly challenge their authority. In the words of one writer, they "naturally feared the all-powerful military and police authorities which issued regulations and decrees in the name of the Imperial Japanese Army and severely punished transgressors" (Akashi 1981, p. 59).

The pre-eminence of the rule of force did not simply hover over Syonan like a heavy pall; its effects were worked out through inscribing specific representations of space. These included the strategy of *spectacle* which operated mainly through the "bureaucratization of [public] space"; and that of *surveillance*, which focused on a more covert means of "bureaucratization through space" (Gregory 1994, p. 401).

Spectacle: The Bureaucratization of Space

"Spectacle" connotes a high degree of display and theatricality (Daniels and Cosgrove 1993, p. 58), that which impresses not so much by its actual substance but through fanfare and show. In *Discipline and Punish* (1991), Foucault writes about how punishment in the Middle Ages did not simply depend on the existence of gaols and dungeons but was for the most part based on spectacular rituals. More specifically, he examines how torture, in being part of a ritual, met two demands.

First, the spectacle of public torture involves the marking of the body and its direct involvement in the political field. Power relations have an immediate hold on the body: as the site of spectacle, it is marked, trained, tortured, and forced to carry out tasks; it performs ceremonies and emits signs (Tuan 1979, p. 182; Foucault 1991, pp. 25–26).

Secondly, public torture is highly visible and spectacularly triumphant (Tuan 1979, p. 182; Foucault, 1991, p. 34). It is intended to be seen by all and to appear as a victory or conquest of sorts. Thus, the triumph of justice is proclaimed in the spectacle of law through public execution (Foucault 1991, p. 34). Above the call for justice, the spectacle surrounding a condemned man also represents "the symmetrical, inverted figure of the king" (Foucault 1977, p. 29). As such, the spectacle of a public execution acts as a political ritual

that manifests power and compounds the omnipotence of the ruler/conqueror. Punishment carried out in this way invests spectacle not with measure, but with imbalance and excess. By seizing the body of the condemned and displaying it, marked, beaten and broken, the sovereign uses his/her position to accentuate his/her power. The ceremony of punishment, then, is an exercise of terror: "public execution and torture did not only re-establish justice; it reactivated power" (Foucault 1991, p. 49).

While the concept of spectacle connotes a concentrated occasion of pomp and display, its effects are not simply immediate and momentary but pervades the whole of social life. For instance, the effectiveness of punishment is seen as resulting from its inevitability and not just from its visible intensity. As such, it is the certainty of being punished and not just the horrifying spectacle of public punishment that discourages potential criminals and rebels. Seen in this light, the threat of punishment through spectacle becomes a hidden part of the penal process, which leaves the domain of everyday perception and enters that of abstract consciousness (Debord 1973; Foucault 1991, p. 9). The fear that people experience from spectacular displays of public execution and torture thus has the capacity to intrude into the very private realm of their lives and linger on beyond the immediate experience of witnessing the spectacle. In more recent scholarship, Tuan (1979), Stoler (1992), Scarpaci and Frazier (1993) and Jarosz (1994) all discuss the use of spectacular images and landscapes of fear both as a method of control and a means of accessing power to challenge dominant impositions. For example, Jarosz (1994) discusses how mythic figures such as vampires and heart thieves were manipulated in Madagascar under colonial rule by various groups to fulfil specific local political agendas and invoke differences in race and class. Rumours and sightings created a landscape of fear which enabled and constrained complicity with, or rebellion against, agents of the state and the church (Jarosz 1994, p. 421). In a different setting, Scarpaci and Frazier (1993) examined the specific ways in which regimes of state terror were mapped onto urban spaces in the Southern Cone countries, and the gendering of landscapes as women protestors drew upon gendered notions of public and private spheres as a strategic tool.

In a parallel vein to the use of spectacle as a punitive strategy and to invoke fear, spectacle may also be employed as a celebratory strategy to inspire more positive feelings of awe and wonder. Various writers, for example, have interpreted the spectacle of world fairs, heritage sites, commemorative rituals and ostentatious parades as a "landscape metaphor" which promotes consensual values and exerts some form of ideological hegemony. Such landscape spectacles act as an instrument of social control, which allows the élite in society to exert control not only in the area of commodity relations in the economic sphere but also beyond, in the realm of social life and popular consciousness (Ley and Olds 1988; Goheen 1993a; 1993b; Kearns 1993; Yeoh

and Lau 1995; Kong and Yeoh, 1997). Whether as a punitive or celebratory strategy, it should be noted that fear and awe are often inextricably conflated and that a specific spectacle may have a whole gamut of effects.

During the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, spectacle as a socially powerful landscape metaphor — made manifest in the form of victory parades, public torture and executions — was frequently exploited as a tool to instill both fear and awe among the local populace. In popular memory, two different types of landscape spectacle appear to have featured prominently. The first were nodal points in public space which were specifically selected for extravagant displays of torture or decapitation to instill fear and inculcate discipline. By marking out specific spaces for the creation of spectacles, the omnipotent power of the Japanese rulers was manifested and compounded. The second were the grand parades intended to proclaim the superiority of the Japanese rulers, such as the victory parade held by the Japanese on 16 February 1942 and the *Tentyo-Setu* (Japanese Emperor's birthday celebration) held on 29 April during the Occupation years. These were carefully orchestrated landscapes particularly remembered for their scale, pomp and pageantry.

Spectacles of Terror: Decapitated Heads and Tortured Bodies

In the creation of a landscape of terror, selected public spaces are often used as important landmarks for detention, punishment and torture (Scarpaci and Frazier 1993). During the Japanese Occupation, the display of decapitated heads of looters and other transgressors at various prominent areas provided stark evidence not only of the imbalance and excess which typified Japanese use of force in general but also the extent of the victor's command of the subjects' bodies. That the mastering of the body was the object of power was already clear in everyday settings, as seen in the victor's demands for bodily postures of submission, such as bowing and cowering; decapitated heads and tortured bodies on public display signalled the ultimate triumph of the Japanese over the captive body. As one interviewee recalled, guards who caught looters were ordered not to shoot, and instead the perpetrators were beheaded and set up as examples to "instill terror, [so that people] would not revolt".² The Japanese not only held the power of life and death over their subjects, but could well dictate the manner of death and the fate of the body.

As with all spectacles, the intended impact is magnified by public visibility. Sites chosen for the display of decapitated heads included public places and transit nodes (Lim 1995, p. 129). One interviewee spoke of the horror of seeing five decapitated heads arrayed outside Dai Towa (Cathay) Cinema and "some twelve, thirteen" heads strung out along a bridge in Geylang,³ while another recalled how the Japanese "severed eight heads for stealing something

from the Harbour Board... They beheaded [the offenders] and put each head in those big bridges like Kallang Bridge".⁴ Others reported seeing heads displayed at Tanjong Pagar Railway Station⁵ and at Jardine Steps, the latter in full view of people travelling back and forth between the main island and outlying islands.⁶ Spectacles of fear sometimes need not be seen to be felt: rumours of sightings were often enough to mark out certain sites as "no-go" areas. On hearing of the display of severed heads in *xiao bo* (north side of the Singapore River), one interviewee, for example, avoided the place for fear of being killed.⁷ The enactment of spectacles of fear was also replicated at other levels, such as at the workplace where workers who transgressed factory rules were paraded and publicly punished. One interviewee recalled how those who were caught stealing at the military factory at which he worked were strapped to posts outside the front entrance of the factory.⁸ Another described how labourers who were caught stealing from the godowns where he worked were manhandled and tied naked to coconut trees in front of the offices for the whole day, and sometimes even through the night.⁹ Their Japanese supervisors would occasionally beat them with sticks in an exhibition of brutality.

Spectacles of fear not only "demonstrated to the people that it would be more than very risky to challenge [the Japanese]"¹⁰ but also broadcast the capricious nature of Japanese justice. "For a small act you can have your head chopped off"¹¹ was the verdict that many people who witnessed the spectacles came to. The Japanese were "gods within themselves"¹² was another commonly held view. The omnipotence of the Japanese, made clear in punitive strategies, was further bolstered by spectacles which capitalized on ceremony as a celebratory strategy, as seen in the *Tentyo-Setu*.

A Spectacle of Celebration and Compliance: *Tentyo-Setu*

Emperor worship, along with the promotion of the Japanese language, music, religion, history and *bushido* ("the way of the warrior") through the mass media and the education system, formed an integral part of the concerted attempt to Nipponize the population and to impress upon the people the superiority of Japanese culture (Cheah 1983, p. 39). The celebration of the Japanese Emperor's birthday on 29 April 1942 was a momentous occasion, which exemplified the different elements which goes into the making of a landscape of spectacularity. As has been observed in the case of other civic rituals, the celebration parade involves a suspension of the everyday and a setting apart of place and time (Goheen 1993b, p. 131). Typically, all normal business is interrupted for the parade; streets are decorated in exceptional ways; costumes of parade participants are specially designed; music is publicly

played. Together with the mammoth crowds that gather in the parade grounds, along the streets or at vantage points, the atmosphere is transformed into an emotive one, and place and time are set apart (Kong and Yeoh, 1997). Everyday routines are deliberately interrupted and bracketed out to make way for a carnival-like mood and an atmosphere of fanfare and theatricality.

During the Occupation, prior to the "auspicious" day itself, households and shops in different streets were exhorted through the news media to display the Japanese flag in honour of the Emperor, and to create a "festive spirit".¹³ The programme for *Tentyo-Setu* began from ten o'clock in the morning and threaded together a number of different activities distributed over time and space until ten o'clock at night. School and work were disrupted, and apart from the massive parade involving thousands of school-children singing Japanese patriotic songs¹⁴ and carrying the *Himomaru* (Rising Sun flag) winding through the streets, and a march by the Nippon Navy band, the host of activities included the screening of various propaganda and non-propaganda films at cinemas throughout the island; an exhibition of photographs introducing the might of Nippon at various theatres; trolley buses and omnibuses decorated with flowers and flags travelling around the island; vehicles going around distributing propaganda pamphlets; and the presentation of Birthday Honours to "those who co-operated with the Nippon forces" at the Syonan Ockijo (Victoria Memorial Hall), followed by a mayoral luncheon at the Adelphi Hotel attended by representatives from the various communities (*Syonan Times*, 28 April 1942; 30 April 1942). At Japanese banks, government offices and schools, celebrations were also held but on a smaller scale. One interviewee who worked at the Yokohama Specie Bank recalled,

During the emperor's birthday, [the employees of the bank] went up to the hall to bow to the sun three times... After that we had a small party... [The Japanese employers] were happy and gave us some drinks and cakes... then we went home because the day was a holiday, so we didn't work.¹⁵

People of different ages and ethnic groups were thus drawn into the transformation of ordinary spaces into a ceremonial landscape capturing the extension of Nippon rule over the whole country in a symbolic fashion for the first time. In the words of Wataru Watanabe, President of the Military Administration:

Tentyo-Setu is the first national festival to be observed here since the rule of Nippon was extended over the country. My joy is enhanced in that I have celebrating with me to-day and wishing everlasting blessing to *Tenno-Heiko* [the Emperor], the people who have been newly privileged to enjoy the benevolent rule of Dai Nippon (quoted in the *Syonan Times*, 29 April 1942).

In the same vein, the *Syonan Times* (29 April 1942) devoted a whole issue to rapturous pronouncements on the significance of the *Tentyo-Setu*, during which "the national foundation and the tie that binds the whole nation together have ever been thus strengthened and the glory of the Imperial Throne ever waxes brighter".

The festivity and pageantry were intended to create a liminal space, "a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action" (Turner 1974, p. 156), when and where an illusion of "community" between victor and vanquished could be created. By incorporating the local people as both participants and spectators in the creation of spectacle, the aim was not only to demonstrate community solidarity but to signify the compliance of the people to Japanese rule. This is patent in the enactment of the "ritualised drama" (Harrison 1988) wherein at precisely ten o'clock all the people at the parade, locals and Japanese alike, observed one minute of silence facing a north-easterly direction towards the Imperial Palace in Tokyo as an act of homage to Heika (His Imperial Majesty), followed by an "enthusiastic" rendition of the *Kimigayo* (Japanese national anthem). Similarly, prayers in silence were offered to the spirits of the officers and men of the Japanese Imperial Army and Navy (*Syonan Times*, 29 April 1942). In commenting on the significance of the *Tentyo-Setu* celebrations, the *Syonan Times* (29 April 1942) observed:

for the first time in the history of Malaya, we can say, with confidence ... [that] we are *subjects of an Emperor and citizens of an empire*, second to none in glory and power in the whole world, and we are truly proud of our new status (emphasis added).

Local involvement in the festivities and the rituals of compliance were thus intended to prove that the once loyal subjects of the British were now willing supporters of the "glorious reign" of the Japanese ruler. The gathering of "many thousands of loyal people" to participate in the parade and celebrations was seen as proof that "Malayans [were] proud of their new status", while mass singing of the *Kimigayo* was "the most important medium through which the people of a nation can express their loyal sentiments to their beloved sovereign and country" (*Syonan Times*, 29 April 1942). The hoisting of the Japanese flag all over the city was perceived as equally symbolic; in the words of a student's essay, reproduced in the *Syonan Times* (30 April 1942):

Oh, when we see the Rising Sun flag flying over all Syonan, it seems like the dawn of a new era, a heaven-sent blessing, in strange contrast to the British flag. What can we say? We have a feeling like that of receiving a

gift of sweets and beautiful flowers. We are lucky to be under the protection of the Government of Nippon.

The effects of spectacle also partly derives from the terrain on which it is staged. The materiality of the landscape does not simply provide a passive backcloth for the enactment of spectacle but its architecture and aesthetics are designed to invade the private realm and invite visual consumption of inscribed meanings. Indeed, the choice of which landscape to stage a spectacle is not a matter of indifference, for "[s]ome sites have more significance than others" (Kuper, quoted in Goheen 1993a, p. 331). The *Tentyo-Setu* parade was staged, with the Padang Besar, the expanse of green characteristically situated at the administrative and symbolic heart of the colonial city, as the point of convergence. Fronting a premier recreation club and surrounded by municipal offices, the courthouse, and other religious and educational institutions, the Padang had served both as a cricket and ceremonial ground (a quintessentially British combination) in the colonial days. Once housing at its centre a statue of Stamford Raffles, the Padang and its surrounding buildings and monuments represented the pinnacle of British colonial and civic pride, providing the stage for British displays of imperial might, such as the celebration of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee at the Town Hall and the Centenary Celebrations in 1919 (Song 1984, p. 227 and 560). By using the Padang as the culmination point for the *Tentyo-Setu* parade, the spectacle capitalized on and re-invested the Padang with new meanings: once the political seat of white colonial rule, it was publicly reappropriated to serve a new ruler in view of all the people. The re-inscription of symbolism was affirmed when at 11 a.m. Mayor Odate appeared on the balcony of the Municipal Building before the gathering of people and offered three *banzai* (salutations of victory) (*Syonan Times*, 28 April 1942; 29 April 1942).

Parades often do not simply occupy central space but also move through space as a means of diffusing the effects of spectacle (Kong and Yeoh, 1997). Different contingents of parade participants starting at different sites streamed in towards the Padang: contingents of school-boys marched from the field at Bras Basah Boy's School through Queen Street, Stamford Road, Hill Street, and High Street to Clifford Pier; other school-children took different routes, one group starting from the Cenotaph and another from the Syonan Chinese Recreation Club. At Clifford Pier, the children, wielding the *Hinomaru*, combined to form one column before marching to the Padang, passing along Collyer Quay and Anderson Bridge. By traversing different parts of the city and bringing the parade physically closer to the habitations of the people, these long marches, comprising parts of the main pageantry, multiplied the effects of spectacle.

The Limits of Spectacle

As with the display of decapitated heads, the occasion of the *Tentyo-Setu* was obviously meant to be "an impressive sight never to be forgotten again" (*Syonan Times*, 30 April 1942). The impression of the vanquished's fear or the victor's triumph was intended to enter the realm of abstract consciousness beyond the immediate experience of witnessing the spectacle. The intended effect is to invade the private realm of everyday life through the use of hegemonic means rather than force (Ley and Olds 1988). Yet hegemony is never fully achieved (Gramsci 1973). There will always be what de Certeau (1984, p. xix) calls the means by which the "weak" create their own sphere of autonomous action and self-determination within the constraints placed on them by the "strong". Among many interviewees, while the fear and awe evoked by spectacles of power created lasting impressions in their minds, few accepted the ideological intents behind these excessive acts of display. Some, for example, insulated themselves against the effects of spectacles of fear by simply avoiding potentially "dangerous" places, using different routes across town or moving away from the town to the relatively safer refuge of rural areas.¹⁶ As one interviewee succinctly put it, the strategy used by most people was a simple one: "If we can avoid [a particularly risky or menacing place], we try to avoid".¹⁷ Put differently, another interviewee summed up the situation: "I never went out roaming. What for? You are simply asking for trouble".¹⁸ Of interest too was the fact that spectacle as a strategy could also be overturned and used by those who actively contested Japanese rule, such as the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), a group of resistance workers comprising mainly Chinese communists trained by the British (Lee 1992, p. 80). For example, an interviewee related an incident where a local informer working for the Japanese was murdered by the MPAJA.¹⁹ His dead body, with a piece of paper with the word "traitor" stuck to it, was prominently displayed, tied to a tree at the top of a hill in Kreta Ayer near one of the Kempetai (Japanese military police) offices. In this fashion, spectacle as a strategy could be inverted to become an outright affront to Japanese authority and as a means to forewarn the local population of collaborating with the new rulers.

Spectacle as a celebratory strategy had even more diluted hegemonic effects. Despite the pomp and rhetoric invested in the *Tentyo-Setu* celebrations, many so-called "citizens of Syonan" simply "went through the motions" as a means of avoiding trouble rather than out of any sense of identification with Nippon. In the words of an interviewee who taught in a school during the Occupation and had to participate in the parade,

At that time, if [the Japanese] gave a command to go [join the parade], who would dare not to go? Even if you do not wish to cooperate, you have to

go. If you refuse, the principal [of the school] will order you to go. You cannot refuse to go for even the principal has to be there in person.²⁰

Similarly, the "zealous" display of Japanese flags all over the city was at least in part motivated by the desire to demonstrate outward compliance and safeguard one's household and property from unwanted attention. As one interviewee described it, with the Emperor's Birthday approaching, everyone rushed to buy the small paper "Rising Sun" flag as it was almost as good as a "peace talisman" to ward off trouble.²¹ In fact, for many inhabitants, the celebrations amounted to nothing more than "singing a few songs" and "having a holiday".²² In sum, while the spectacles mounted during the Occupation were meant as vital tools to invade popular consciousness and continued to feature as a memorable part of the period, their ideological intent was far less effective, simply because ordinary people were capable of their own "tactical" ways to create counterspaces of their own.

Surveillance: Bureaucratization through Space

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1991) explained how the strategy of "surveillance" depended on making power palpable yet unverifiable. In this way, it is markedly different from "spectacle", which places emphasis on the importance of visibility and theatricality. Through what Foucault (1991, p. 214) calls the "panoptic [all-seeing eye] gaze", surveillance ensures power to anyone who can remain "invisible" whilst making all else "visible". Panopticism thus refers to a segmented space-time, "supervised continuously at every point, in which power is exercised without division and in which each individual is constantly distributed, located, and examined" (Driver 1985, p. 428). Through surveillance, power is exercised not just through might or force but through exact observation. Surveillance thus offers a strategy of control, as has been explored by Thomas (1990, p. 152) in his work on colonial Fiji where he discussed how compulsory registration of births and deaths and other sanitary measures created "a net of fine meshes" from which "nothing can escape"; and Yeoh (1991, p. 26) who examined the strategies of spatial reorganization and environmental reform employed by the colonial administration in Singapore to bring "concealed decay into the ambit of official surveillance and the public gaze".

As a strategy to control the local populace during the Occupation, surveillance was present at many different levels of social life, permeating both the public and private realms. The technique involved the Japanese placing themselves (and their minions) in advantageous positions, which allowed them maximum freedom to observe others while they themselves

remained relatively hidden and unobserved. More specifically, surveillance as a spatial strategy of control included at least two main aspects. First, the system involved people through whom "power [was] mobilised and extended everywhere" (Foucault 1991, p. 214). These included those working from within the military administration, such as sentry guards and Kempeitai agents, as well as locals who were conscripted to become "eyes" of the Japanese military regime and who acted mainly as spies or informers for the Kempeitai. Secondly, to facilitate surveillance, a system of passes was instituted that increased the visibility of private lives and their vulnerability to control. These two modes of surveillance tended to reinforce each other, as Giddens (1987, p. 303) has observed:

surveillance tends to become concentrated in respect of a multiplication of modes of the documenting of the subject population by the state. This is the basis of an expanded supervision of those activities, carried out by the police and their agents.

Surveillance: Sentries, Spies and Secret Police

The system of surveillance involved the use of people placed in strategic places to infiltrate different levels of social life, either overtly or covertly. Sentry guards stationed in strategic locations all over the island and tasked with keeping an eye on the local population and ensuring some semblance of public order were the most "overt" feature of the system. Equipped with bayonet-tipped rifles, sentries stood by their posts, usually made of barbed wire and poles, located at major road junctions such as the Scotts Road–Orchard Road junction and the Tanglin Road–Orchard Road junction;²³ along major thoroughfares such as Serangoon Road and Yio Chu Kang Road;²⁴ and in front of important military areas such as the army camps along Bukit Timah Road and Dunearn Road.²⁵ By situating sentries at important nodal points, the Japanese made them part of the landscape which people were likely to encounter in their daily movements across public space.

Upon meeting a sentry guard, the locals were expected to perform certain ritualized acts that sometimes amounted to a localized form of landscape spectacle. One interviewee described the "rite of passage":

in the beginning there were Japanese sentries everywhere.... Every sentry you have to stop and we had to show our pass and other documents and tell from where you are coming, where you are going ... all the details. They will question. As soon as the sentry comes you have to get down [from] the transport and bow down to them. If [you make a] slight mistake, they will slap you.²⁶

The act of bowing as a sign of obeisance was vividly remembered. In the words of the interviewees,

You had to bow to him [the sentry guard] or else they would bayonet you. Then they would check to see if you had the permit.²⁷

... you had to bow to a Japanese sentry otherwise you'll get slapped, a couple of slaps on your face and then told to bow again. The worst thing of course that could happen to you, you would be tied to a lamp-post or something like that.²⁸

When you passed the sentry you had to bow, otherwise, you would get a slap. This showed that they would not tolerate any rebellion, that they were the masters and we the servants".²⁹

The system of sentries thus provided more than a means of controlling and accounting for the movements of locals over space; it was also arranged "to provide hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make possible to know them and to alter them" (Foucault 1991, p. 172).

Apart from sentries at fixed locations, the Japanese administration also used various primary and auxiliary organizations which operated at a more dispersed level among the people to keep them under scrutiny. Primary organizations were those which came directly under the purview of the military administration. The most feared of these was undoubtedly the Kempeitai who had powers to arrest and extract information from civilians and military alike (Turnbull 1977, p. 193). Trained in interrogation methods, their main task was to crush all resistance to military rule and root out anti-Japanese elements. The Kempeitai, who had powers of life and death over others, employed secret agents and informers from among the local population to detect and denounce those suspected of disloyalty (Turnbull 1977, p. 208). These informers were usually pre-war Japanese agents, captured communists, or Chinese secret society members who had agreed to give information to save their own lives (Cheah 1983, p. 22). One word from an informer could mean arrest. Those arrested were imprisoned without trial in terrible conditions, starved and often tortured, unless their families managed to purchase their release with bribes. The web of surveillance woven by the Kempeitai constituted one of the primary reasons why the Occupation was "a time of rumour and fear, secrecy and suspicion, a time when it was unsafe to voice any opinions at all" (Turnbull 1977, p. 208-9). In harsher words, Low Ngiong Ing, who lived through the Occupation, summed up the period more tersely as one when "it was each man for himself and the devil [took] the hindmost" (Low 1983, p. 267).

Much of the fear was generated by the fact that the Kempeitai's system of surveillance was an unverifiable "faceless gaze" (Foucault 1991, p. 214). One interviewee, for example, related how his cousin was taken in for

questioning by the Kempeitai for secretly listening to BBC radio broadcasts. When asked whether his family ever found out who reported his cousin to the Japanese, he said:

it was very difficult to pinpoint any particular person because ... there were so many people all around, even in your own community.³⁰

The system was as "incalculable as a thunderclap" (Low 1983, p. 281) and one could no longer be sure that speaking one's thoughts aloud to another person would not lead to trouble. What started out as an innocent question to a colleague at work as to whether a certain rumour about submarine bombings was true got one interviewee into serious trouble. Soon after, he was hauled up by the Kempeitai to their headquarters in Stamford Road, questioned, tortured and accused of spying for the British.³¹

Uncertainty was rife not only because of the fear of informers and spies in the woodpile but also because those whom one would usually trust could also be coerced under torture to implicate others. Even in the most close-knit of neighbourhoods, no one felt safe because someone close at hand may be "threatened and had to tell".³² One interviewee related that her brother worked for a wireless and cable office during the Occupation and secretly passed on information obtained over the wireless to an uncle, a "crime" for which one could "get one's head cut off":

Then... somebody squeaked and they set a trap to catch my uncle and he was caught. So, he was taken away to prison [Kempeitai headquarters]... They really tortured him... [for] about four months... Because we didn't know whether Uncle Doraisingam under torture would divulge the identity of the person who gave the information, ... we sent [my brother] away to stay with friends in K.L.³³

The web of surveillance — woven from the machinations of willing spies for the Japanese to the disclosures of those under duress — was all-ramifying. As Low (1983, p. 256) pointed out, "the dragon teeth of distrust had been sown among us. Gone was mutual trust and confidence."

The Japanese "all-seeing eye" was further magnified by contracting and coercing as many locals as possible to keep tabs on their own people. Ostensibly a means of maintaining law and order, the Japanese had a system of auxiliary organizations including the *sho cho* (police district officers), the *heiho* (auxiliary servicemen), the *jikeidan* (auxiliary police system or self-defence corps), and the *tonarigumi* system (neighbourhood watch) (Lee 1992, p. 68–69). The *sho cho* consisted of Malays and non-Malays who served as police district officers until the end of 1943, when they were replaced by the

Japanese. They were empowered to issue orders to shoot or behead anyone suspected of anti-Japanese activities, and even the local civilian administrator was subordinate to them (Cheah 1983, p. 34).

Recruited in May 1943, the *heiho* were considered volunteers, or a kind of paramilitary youth group comprising mainly Malays and Indians. While some of the volunteers were taken into the jungle to fight anti-Japanese resistance forces, most were drafted to set up observation posts and guard Japanese establishments (Lee 1992, p. 72). An interviewee recalled that at the military factory where he worked, *heiho* patrolled the factory and checked on the workers before they left to make sure that they had not taken anything out of the factory.³⁴

Another surveillance technique which required the co-operation of the locals was the *jikeidan*, a type of collective security system. Under the *jikeidan*, neighbourhoods were formed into blocks. Families were registered and householders given a peace-living certificate or *ankyosho* under this collective security system (Turnbull 1977, p. 208). Headmen were appointed to help the police keep an eye on the neighbourhood and were designated one-, two- and three-star men. Their role was to maintain law and order, report suspicious people and notify the authorities of food shortages (Cheah 1983; Thio 1991, Lee 1992). In April 1943, a Census-Taking List was introduced: all the names of people living in a particular household had to be recorded on a card, which was kept with the headman. Three copies of this list were kept at the police station. If someone wanted to visit a relative, he had to go to the headman to get his/her card so that he/she could be registered as an occupant of the other household. As a form of added control, the police would conduct surprise checks on households (*The Japanese Occupation: Singapore 1942-1945*, 1985, p. 66). This system allowed the Japanese to keep track of the people and their movements. As a result of the difficulty of changing the card, most people remained in one place and minimized their movements (Lee 1992, p. 68). One of the interviewees said that his father was chosen as a three-star man to head the Pasir Panjang area while he himself was a two-star man in the same area. As the headmen of the area, they were in charge of administrative work and the welfare of the people from Pasir Panjang and the neighbouring offshore islands. They were also expected to report to the Japanese "if there were any trouble".³⁵ Another interviewee remembered how as a member of the *jikeidan*, he was asked by the three-star man to perform night patrol duties and to report anything suspicious so that the information could be relayed to the Japanese.³⁶

Through the *jikeidan* system and other auxiliary organizations, the Japanese articulated a detailed system of control over the lives of the people by making the locals accountable for each other in terms of daily routines and movements. Each local informant became "an extra pair of eyes"; each gaze

became part of the overall functioning of power. In this way, the Japanese attempted to penetrate and make visible the tiniest details of everyday life. As Foucault (1991, p. 170–72) iterates, power is exercised not only through might and force but also through exact observation.

Surveillance: A System of Passes and Permits

The Japanese administration institutionalized a system of passes and permits as yet another surveillance measure. These passes were important in ensuring that locals could move around safely and get past sentry guards stationed at various points. Without these, one was liable to be branded as anti-Japanese or taken away for forced labour. Throughout the Occupation, a number of passes were devised.

Immediately after the mass screening, or *sook ching* (literally meaning “purification through purge”) exercises during which some 50,000 Chinese were massacred as anti-Japanese elements (Lee 1992, p. 52),³⁷ the most valued pass was a “chop” meaning “examined” stamped on the body or some item of clothing signalling that one has passed the screening and inspection exercise.³⁸ Protection notices, sometimes nothing more than scraps of paper on which the Japanese seal had been affixed, were also selectively issued. Mamoru Shinozaki (1975, p. 19), a Japanese official who issued protection passes to many people during the Occupation, described what was written on these:

The bearer of this pass is a good citizen. Please look after him and protect him, and let him go about his business without hindrance.

There were also more specific passes, such as those which allowed the use of vehicles, and employment passes given out by the Japanese to locals who worked in their offices and factories. These ensured some degree of freedom of movement and access to these passes became one of the prime motivations for seeking employment from the Japanese:

I refused to work for the Japanese but then we found out that if we didn't work, if they checked us anywhere along the road, we would just be taken away to work for the Japanese. So I got a Singapore Harbour pass and worked for the *Showa Kaisha* (Harbour Board) as a tally clerk.³⁹

Another interviewee who was hired by the Kempeitai to assist in the conversion of a garage into a torture chamber was of the opinion that as an employee of the Kempeitai, he was able to move around freely and was not subjected to interrogation or closely watched.⁴⁰

As a means of surveillance, the system of passes depended on the arbitrary nature of checks and inspections for its effectiveness. The locals could never be sure if or when they were going to be inspected by the Japanese but were fully cognizant of the consequences of not possessing a pass. Hence, while there was only a limited number of sentries and police who might demand to see their passes, the locals ensured that they had their passes with them all the time, circumscribed their movements and avoided attracting any attention to themselves even when they had their passes. As such, "only one single Japanese [could] control 100 people".⁴¹ The system of passes thus magnified the "panoptic" effect and facilitated the "enclosing, segmenting and observing [of] space at every point" to control the people.

The Limits of Surveillance

Despite its discretion, low exteriorization and its relative invisibility, surveillance as a disciplinary strategy did not completely immobilize the local people, or put a clamp to the resistance it inevitably aroused. Instead, just as disciplinary institutions have meticulous, minute techniques that create a "new micro-physics" of power, so too are the subjects of such discipline capable of "small acts of cunning endowed with a great power of diffusion" which are "all the more real and effective" precisely because they are "formed right at the point where relations of power [are] exercised" (Foucault 1991, p. 139). Usually, these forms of resistance against the imposition of surveillance are commonplace and "require little or no coordination or planning; they often represent a form of individual self-help; and they typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority or with elite norms" (Scott 1985, p. 29).

One common strategy to counter surveillance was to obtain passes through clandestine means without going through the rigours of the official channels. This was usually effected through other locals — friends and relatives — employed by the Japanese administration who were willing to help out, a measure which avoided direct confrontation with the Japanese authorities. One interviewee, for example, obtained a black⁴² vehicle label which allowed 24-hour use of the car through a friend who worked at the Registrar of Vehicles. As such, he was not checked by sentry guards or affected by any curfew.⁴³ In other instances, people obtained employment passes from friends already working at government offices or Japanese firms.⁴⁴ Despite the climate of fear and suspicion, the informal network still functioned at times as a self-help measure. Others secured their employment passes by ostensibly going to work for the Japanese. Once in possession of the passes, there were strategies to skive off work, go back to their old jobs or even participate in

black-market activities.⁴⁵ One interviewee recalled how it was possible for workers to get away with truancy on the pretext of going to the toilet.⁴⁶ Another said that once workers obtained their passes, they could get away with shoddy work because the Japanese supervisors could not keep watch over every single worker.⁴⁷ As such, while the locals might appear to acquiesce to Japanese demands at the workplace, some would not comply with regulations at work once they secured their passes. While panopticism as a technique was intended to be "all-seeing", there were certain "blind spots". The gaze was not always present in all its intensity but could be occasionally punctured by human will.

Another common strategy was to devise hiding places where the gaze could not penetrate so effectively. According to interviewees, many families hid extra food over and above the permitted rations and Straits Settlement dollars (which was banned) in secret places around the house. As the Japanese could not possibly check all premises thoroughly, some locals were prepared to run the risk.⁴⁸ The fact that many were never caught demonstrated that the gaze was sometimes myopic. Others adopted disguises, as with young girls who had their hair cut short, their faces blackened with soot and their appearance deliberately scruffy to avoid the gaze of Japanese soldiers who might attack or rape them.⁴⁹ Still others used a system of hidden codes to mask their activities, as seen in an interviewee's account:

... my father used to listen clandestinely to the BBC. [There was] a man called Canon Adams [who was] principal of St Andrew's School... he used to come to our place in the evening at 6 o'clock. And his kind of code word was: "Any fish today?" or "Did you buy any fish today?" And we said, "Yes," which meant that my father was listening in. And so he used to join my father and both of them used to listen in to the radio.⁵⁰

The fact that an open black-market flourished during the Occupation despite harsh edicts against it was further evidence that surveillance was not always effective. These activities were carried out clandestinely in a variety of places, avoiding any one fixed location in order to elude the gaze. Most of the time, these activities were carried out in rural areas where it was more difficult for the Japanese to trace the whereabouts of the black-market syndicates. According to one interviewee,

the exchange of goods always took place in different places, no fixed place where activities were carried out, no office of any kind. We often brought the goods to the *kampungs*, remote, out of town places, where we could get the help of *kampung* people, where it would be safer and where we wouldn't get caught.⁵¹

Often, villagers were also enlisted to store the goods or to spy out the land and ensure that the coast was clear of Kempetai agents. Local support networks were hence the key to averting the panoptic gaze.⁵²

Surveillance also did not have its full effects because not everyone would pass information to the Japanese, either out of a sense of sympathy for or fear of anti-Japanese elements who might be operating in their midst.⁵³ It was, for example, rumoured that the MPAJA had agents operating covertly among the people and dealt unsparingly with "traitors". One interviewee recalled that despite the *jikeidan* imposed by the Japanese, "the headman would not make reports on the anti-Japanese because if he did the anti-Japanese would come after him".⁵⁴ In a different context, Low (1983, p. 256) recalled that "out of the three or four hundred teachers of the Former English Schools ... nine tenths were passively pro-British, if not actually anti-Japanese" and that throughout the Occupation, there was not a single betrayal of a colleague by a colleague. Hence, while locals were co-opted by the Japanese to become part of the inspecting gaze, many resisted crossing the line to aid the Japanese in any active way.

While seemingly passive, covert strategies among the locals to create counterspaces hidden from the gaze helped the people carry on with their everyday lives despite daily demonstrations and reports of force and violence by the Japanese. Although these strategies did not change the pecking order and at best resulted in "temporary inversions of the power relation" (Foucault 1991, p. 27), they helped the people to limit their confrontations with the Japanese and gave them a measure of distance from their rulers.

The Spectre of Darkness

The spectacle of Japanese atrocities and brutalities and the state of living in fear under constant surveillance feature as common themes within the recollections of those who have experienced the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. While these were overriding concerns, memory is not only selective, it is a contested terrain: while people retain strong impressions of the webs of oppression, darkness and fear spun by circumstances not of their own making, they also remember with a certain poignancy the everyday strategies and daily acts of heroism through which they survived the tyranny of the times (cf. Lim 1995).

As Lai (1992/93) has argued, the recollections of those who found themselves caught in the trauma of the Occupation and who then had to cope with its day-to-day demands are sufficiently distinct to create a Mannheimian "sociological generation" comprising those who have experienced the Occupation. This is a "war generation" which has emerged from the Occupation

subscribing to certain common attitudes drawn from "personal lessons" learnt during the Occupation, such as the need to treasure the present and not worry too much about the future, the need for fortitude in trials, and the need to be cautious in whom one trusts. For members of this "generation", the Occupation was a profound biographical watershed (Lim 1995).

As others have observed, the recollection of experiences of the "war generation" have in recent years been elevated to the status of national history (Lai 1992/93; Kwa 1994; Lim 1995; Wong 1996). The spectre of darkness and fear heightened by Japanese strategies of spectacle and surveillance, as well as instances of local resistance to darkness, has been drawn upon by the post-independence state to advance the need for national defence and the construction of national identity. In calling on "younger Singaporeans" to learn from "that traumatic period of history", Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong noted:

The 44 months of Japanese Occupation were a period of terror, fear and atrocities. It was also a period of bravery, patriotism and sacrifice... From these events and in memory of these men and women, we learn to honour that quality of bravery when others around are giving up, the need to stand firm and not wilt in the face of enemy advance, and the fortitude of enduring hardship in the dark hours...

He went on:

If we want peace, we must work for it, and if necessary, fight and die for it. We may seek the help of others, but, in the end, we must rely on ourselves... Without struggle, there is no Singapore (*Straits Times*, 10 February 1992).

The Occupation thus signifies both "terror, fear and atrocities" and "bravery, patriotism and sacrifice". For the people, it is by moving between moments of fear and moments of triumph in their memories that allows them to come to terms with this difficult period of history. For the state, the hope is to reclaim this terrain as the "real heritage of World War II" in order to build a nation.

Notes

1. Information was gathered from a total of 35 oral history interviews in two categories. The first included 16 face-to-face interviews carried out in November and December 1994, and the second comprised 19 interviews selected from a collection on the Japanese Occupation carried out by the Oral History Department of the National Archives. In selecting interviewees in both categories, two criteria were borne in mind. First, interviewees must be at least sixteen years old at the end of the Occupation to ensure that the perspectives of older teenagers and young adults were maintained. Secondly, a judicious mix of interviewees in racial terms —

- Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians — was attempted to elicit views from across the different communities.
2. Charlie Cheah, a skilled worker at United Engineers Building (Interview deposited with the Oral History Department, National Archives).
 3. Chew Kong, a photographer during the Occupation (Interview deposited at the Oral History Department, National Archives).
 4. Shanmugasivanathan, who worked in the Health Department during the Occupation (Interview deposited at the Oral History Department, National Archives).
 5. Haji Borhan Muslim, who worked for the Syonan Gumu Kojo, a rubber factory (Interview carried out on 12 January 1995).
 6. Zainab binte Taris, who lived on Pulau Blakang Mati during the Occupation (Interview carried out on 11 January 1995).
 7. Chew Kong.
 8. Aziz bin Rahim Khan Surattee, assistant mechanic at Nissan Motors (Interview deposited at the Oral History Department, National Archives).
 9. Chu Chui Lum, a clerk (Interview deposited at the Oral History Department, National Archives).
 10. Charlie Cheah.
 11. Chew Kong.
 12. Chu Chui Lum.
 13. Teong Ah Chin, a coffee shop owner during the Occupation; Tan Ngiap Mong, shop assistant; and Charlie Cheah (Interviews deposited at the Oral History Department, National Archives).
 14. Chin Kah Chong, a student in his teens during the Occupation (Interview deposited at the Oral History Department, National Archives).
 15. Chew Ann Sim, who worked in the accounts department of the Yokohama Specie Bank (Interview deposited at the Oral History Department, National Archives).
 16. Chan Chean Yean, clerk; and Ang Seah San, book-keeper (Interviews deposited at the Oral History Department, National Archives). Kwek Yew Keng, housewife (Interview carried out on 11 January 1995).
 17. Kang Soon Heng, a government servant during the Occupation (Interview deposited at the Oral History Department, National Archives).
 18. Sukaimi bin Ibrahim, a 74-year-old retiree (Interview carried out on 22 December 1994).
 19. Wong Yew Fook, a 74-year-old retiree, interviewed on 22 December 1994.
 20. Goh Cheng Kheng, teacher (Interview deposited at the Oral History Department, National Archives).
 21. Ho Yit Leong, Chinese physician (Interview deposited at the Oral History Department, National Archives).
 22. Lim Choo Sye, teacher (Interview deposited at the Oral History Department, National Archives).
 23. Rajedren, a 95-year-old retiree (Interview carried out on 18 December 1994).
 24. A. Nadarajah, a medical dresser during the Occupation (Interview carried out on 3 December 1994).
 25. P.D. Jebamoney, an 85-year-old retiree, and formerly a community leader in the *jikeidan* (Interview carried out on 17 December 1994).

26. Jebamoney.
27. Nadarajah.
28. G.E. Bogaars, a student during the Occupation (Interview deposited at the Oral History Department, National Archives).
29. Charlie Cheah.
30. Trevor Hale, 74-year-old Eurasian who lived in Serangoon during the Occupation (Interview carried out on 27 December 1994).
31. Nadarajah.
32. Daisy Vaithalingam, 69-year-old Ceylon Tamil (Interview carried out on 21 November 1994).
33. Daisy Vaithalingam.
34. Charlie Cheah.
35. Haji Sukaimi bin Ibrahim, a two-star man of the *jikeidan* in his *kampung* at Pasir Panjang (Interview carried out on 22 December 1994).
36. Haji Borhan Muslim.
37. The *sook ching* operations, which began in February 1942 and lasted two months, was one of the first actions carried out by the Japanese Imperial Army to restore law and order and to remove residual vestiges of possible anti-Japanese resistance (Oral History Department 1992, p. 19).
38. Lim Kim Eng, a housewife (Interview carried out on 5 December 1994). See also accounts related in Oral History Department (1992).
39. Chu Chui Lum.
40. Kenneth Chia, a clerk-of-works (Interview deposited at the Oral History Department, National Archives).
41. Shanmugasivanathan.
42. The second type of vehicle pass was a red one which restricted the use of the car to one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening.
43. Abdeali K. Motiwalla, who ran a stationery business during the Occupation (Interview deposited at the Oral History Department, National Archives).
44. Nadarajah.
45. Chu Chui Lum.
46. Charlie Cheah.
47. Kenneth Chia.
48. Chiu Ping Chio, a 66-year-old housewife (Interview carried out on 20 December 1994).
49. Lim Kim Eng; and Kwek Yew Keng, an 81-year-old housewife (Interview carried out on 11 January 1995).
50. G.E. Bogaars.
51. Kenneth Chia.
52. Surveillance was also further weakened by the fact that some Japanese were involved in the black-market syndicates as it was extremely lucrative, or were willing to turn a blind eye to some deals cut at, for example, coffeeshops at Market Street or Katong, despite awareness of them. See Trevor Hale's interview.
53. Borhan Muslim; Chiu Ping Chio; and Low Keng Yiong, a 79-year-old retiree, who was employed by the agricultural department under the Municipality during the Occupation (Interview carried out on 28 December 1994).

54. Sim Kah Yam, a 78-year-old retiree, who did odd jobs during the Occupation (Interview carried out on 28 December 1994).

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List of Contributors

ABU TALIB AHMAD is Associate Professor in the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia; and Chairperson, Oral History Committee, Universiti Sains Malaysia.

CHEAH BOON KHENG was formerly Professor in the History Department, School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang. He is the author of *The Masked Comrades: A Study of the Communist United Front in Malaya, 1945-48* (1979) and *Red Star Over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict During and After the Japanese Occupation, 1941-1946* (1983). A Vice-President of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, he is presently engaged in research on nineteenth century Malay history, and on Malaysian nationalism.

P. LIM PUI HUEN was formerly Research Fellow and currently Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. Her research interests include Malaysian and Singapore history, Chinese culture and society, and oral and local history. Her publication "Immigrant and Patriarch: The Biography of Wong Ah Fook" is in press and she is in the process of completing an illustrated social history of Johor Bahru. She is co-editor, with James H. Morrison and Kwa Chong Guan, of *Oral History in Southeast Asia: Theory and Method* (1998). She is a Vice-President of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.

NG SIEW AI is a Lecturer in the Department of Chinese Studies at the National University of Singapore. She holds an M.A. and a Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Hawaii at Manoa and an M.A. in Chinese Studies from the Department of Chinese Studies, National University of Singapore. She has written several publications on Chinese linguistics and Singapore-Malayan literature.

P. RAMASAMY holds an undergraduate degree in political science from Indiana University, USA; M.A. from McGill University, Canada; and Ph.D. from

Universiti Malaya. He is presently Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. His main area of research has been in the field of the political economy of labour in general and plantation labour in particular. He also researches on the political economy of the Indian community in Malaysia. He is author of *Plantation Labour, Unions, Capital, and the State in Peninsular Malaysia* (1994), and many articles on labour.

KAMALINI RAMDAS holds a B.A. (Hons) in Geography from the National University of Singapore. Her chapter in this volume was based on research conducted as part of her final-year thesis, "Spectacle and Surveillance: The Politics of Space Syonan-to". Kamalini is currently working with Pyramid Research, a division of the Economist Intelligence Unit. She plans, researches, and writes articles on events and developments that define the telecommunications industry in emerging markets.

NAIMAH S. TALIB has a Ph.D. from the Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Hull, and was formerly a Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. She has done extensive research on the administrative history of Sarawak and her recent publications on Sarawak include: "The Native Officers' Service of Sarawak: Growth, Development and Eventual Dissipation", in V.T. King and A.V.M. Horton, eds., *Essays Presented to Father Robert Nicholl on the 85th Anniversary of His Birth* (1995); (with V.T. King) "Robert Burns (d. 1851), Explorer of North Borneo", in V.T. King, ed., *Explorers of Southeast Asia: Six Lives* (1995); and *Administrators and their Service: The Sarawak Administrative Service Under the Brooke Rajahs and British Colonial Rule* (forthcoming).

WANG GUNGWU is Director of the East Asian Institute at the National University of Singapore, and Distinguished Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. He has taught at the University of Malaya (in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur), and was Professor of Far Eastern History at the Australian National University. He was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong from 1986 to 1995. Among his books are *The Nanhai Trade* (1958); *The Structure of Power in North China during the Five Dynasties* (1963); *China and the World since 1949* (1977); *Community and Nation* (1981); *China and the Chinese Overseas* (1991); *The Chineseness of China* (1991); and *The Chinese Way: China's Position in International Relations* (1995). He also edited (with Jennifer Cushman) *Changing Identities of Southeast Asian Chinese Since World War II* (1988); and *Global History and Migrations* (1997).

DIANA WONG was the Deputy Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. She is a sociologist with a Ph.D. from the University of Bielefeld. Her research interests include World War II and contemporary migration. She is currently a Visiting Fellow at the Institut Kajian Malaysia dan Antarabangsa, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

YEO SONG NIAN holds a B.A. from Nanyang University, Singapore, and M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Hong Kong. He is currently Associate Professor in the Department of Chinese Studies, National University of Singapore. He has published extensively on Singapore and Malaysian Chinese literature, and on Chinese literary criticism. His chief works include: *Collected Essays on Singapore and Malaysian Chinese Literature* (1982); *A Study of Shi-Sheng, the Supplement of a Singapore Chinese Newspaper, Nanyang Siang Pau* (1990); *The Life of Labourers as Reflected in the Pre-war Chinese Literature of Singapore and Malaya* (1986); and *Problems in the Writing of the History of Chinese Literary Criticism: Late Ming and Early Qing Literary Criticism as Case Study* (1988) — all of them in Chinese. He is the recipient of several literary awards.

BRENDA YEOH is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Geography, National University of Singapore. She read geography at Cambridge for her first degree and went on to complete her doctorate (also in geography) at Oxford University. While her primary research focuses on the politics of space in colonial and post-colonial cities, she is also involved in research projects on gender and labour migration (skilled and unskilled) in the Asian context. Besides 30 journal papers, she is also author/editor (with Lily Kong) of *Portraits of Places: History, Community and Identity in Singapore* (1995); *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore* (1996); and (with Martin Perry and Lily Kong) *Singapore: A Developmental City State* (1997).

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