

**MAKING MALAYSIAN CHINESE:  
WAR MEMORY, HISTORIES AND IDENTITIES**

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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACCCIM	Association of Chinese Chambers of Commerce in Malaysia
AJU	Anti-Japanese Unit
ANM	Arkib Negara Malaysia (National Archives of Malaysia)
BHC	British High Commission
DAP	Democratic Action Party
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FMSVF	Federated Malay States Volunteer Forces
IIL	Indian Independence League
INA	Indian National Army
MCA	Malayan/Malaysian Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MIC	Malayan/Malaysian Indian Congress
MNLA	Malayan National Liberation Army
MPAJA	Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army
NEP	New Economic Policy
PRC	Peoples' Republic of China
SSVF	Straits Settlements Volunteer Forces
TNA	The National Archives of UK
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation

# Abstract

This thesis proposes a new perspective on Malaysian Chinese studies by exploring issues of identity formation refracted through the lens of contestations of war memory, communal history and state-sponsored national history. In multiethnic Malaysia, despite persistent nation-building programs towards inculcating a shared Malaysian national identity, the question as to whether the Chinese are foremost Chinese or Malaysian remains at the heart of Malaysian socio-political debates. Existing scholarship on the Malaysian Chinese is often framed within post-independent development discourses, inevitably juxtaposing the Chinese minority condition against Malay political and cultural supremacy. Similarly, explorations of war memory and history echo familiar Malay-Chinese, dominant-marginalised or national-communal binary tropes. This thesis reveals that prevailing contestations of memory and history are, at their core, struggles for cultural inclusion and belonging. It further maps the overlapping intersections between individual (personal/familial), communal and official histories in the shaping of Malaysian Chinese identities. In tracing the historical trajectory of this community from migrants to its current status as 'not-quite-citizens,' the thesis references a *longue durée* perspective to expose the motif of Otherness embedded within Chinese experience. The distinctiveness of the Japanese occupation of British Malaya between 1941-1945 is prioritised as a historical watershed which compounded the Chinese as a distinct and separate Other. This historical period has also perpetuated simplifying myths of Malay collaboration and Chinese victimhood; these continue to cast their shadows over interethnic relations and influence Chinese self-representations within Malaysian society. In the interstices between Malay-centric national history and marginalised Chinese war memory lie war memory silences. These silences reveal that obfuscation of Malaysia's wartime past is not only the purview of the state; Chinese complicity is evident in memory-work which selectively (mis)remembers, rejects and rehabilitates war memory. In excavating these silences, the hitherto unexplored issue of intergenerational memory transmission is addressed to discern how reverberations of the wartime past may colour Chinese self-image in the present. Further, this thesis demonstrates that continued marginalisation of Chinese war memory from official historiography complicates the ongoing project of reconciling the Malaysian Chinese to a Malay-dominated nationalist dogma.

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## The Author

The author of this thesis was enrolled in a PhD Research course with the university between 2010 and 2015. She graduated from Australian National University with a Bachelor of Economics degree in 1994 and obtained a Masters in Social Development at the University of Reading in 2008. Between 2008 and 2011, she was involved in a project with Holocaust survivors in Lithuania. This culminated in a documentary, which she co-produced, titled *Surviving History: Portraits from Vilna*. This short film received the Audience Poll Award at the Imperial War Museum Film Festival 2009 and the Winton Train Award 2009. As part of the project, she also co-produced an exhibition which toured Holocaust museums in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban, University College Dublin, Shropshire Council Shire Hall, London Central Synagogue, London Jewish Cultural Centre and Biddenham Upper School in Bedfordshire. In part, the impetus for this thesis emerged out of her experiences with this project. Fieldwork research for this study was conducted in Malaysia between 2009 and 2012. This involved interviews with elderly narrators and Malaysian Chinese individuals. Two focus groups were also conducted with volunteers, one in Kuala Lumpur and the other in London. Primary archival research was conducted at *Arkib Negara Malaysia* (National Archives Malaysia) and The National Archives of UK. Between 2012 and 2014, the author presented papers on related topics at several conferences, among them: “Huaqiao or Mahua? Persistent Challenges of Self-Identification among Contemporary Malaysian Chinese” at the 7th Asian Graduate Forum on Southeast Asian Studies (National University of Singapore), “Multiple Exhumations in Malaysia” at the 2nd Annual & International Conference of the Research Programme Corpses of Mass Violence and Genocide (University of Manchester), “The Japanese Occupation of British Malaya, 1941-1945, in Malaysian History and Historiography” at the Violence and Conflict Graduate Conference (University of Cambridge) and “Forgotten War: The Japanese Occupation of British Malaya, 1941-1945” at the Association of Southeast Asian Studies in the United Kingdom Conference (University of Brighton). She has contributed a chapter titled “Remembering the Japanese occupation massacres: mass graves in post-war Malaysia” to the volume *Human Remains and Identification: Mass Violence, Genocide and the ‘Forensic Turn’* edited by Elisabeth Anstett and Jean-Marc Dreyfus. This was published by Manchester University Press in August 2015.

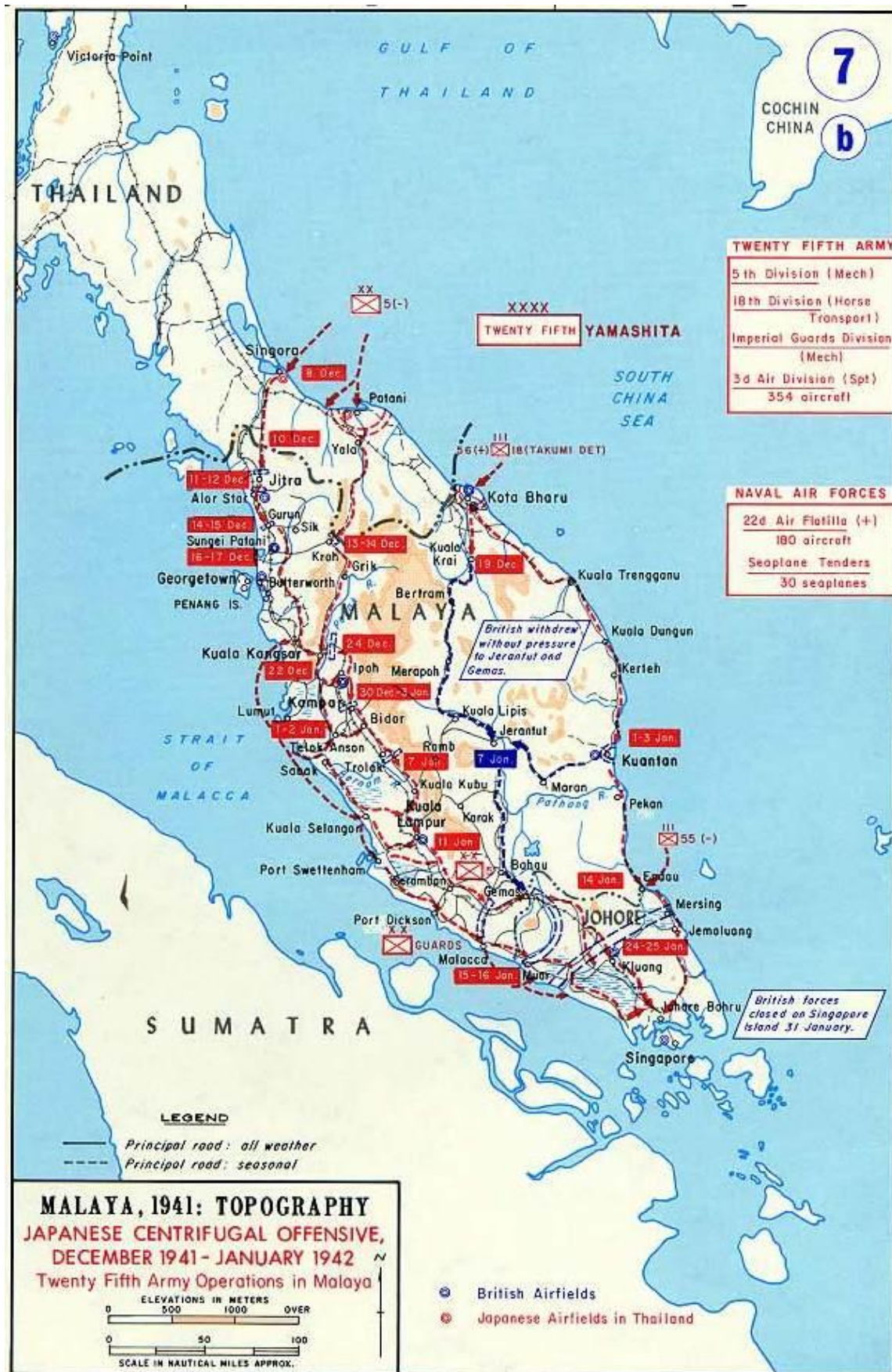


Figure 1. Japanese invasion of Malaya.

Source: United States Military Academy, Department of History.







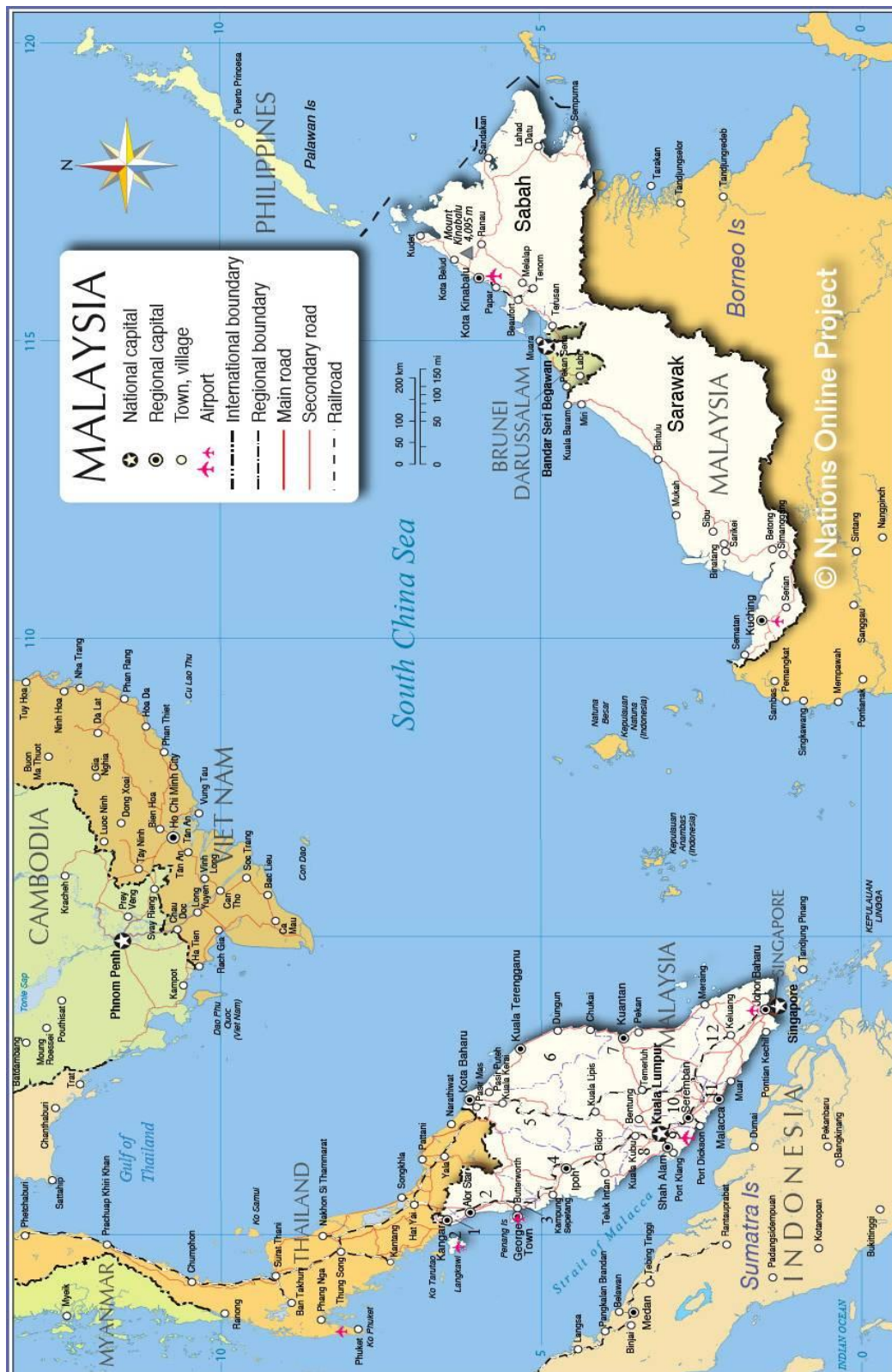


Figure 3. Present-day Malaysia.  
Source: Nations Online Project.

# Introduction

Loh Sow Ying lives in a nursing home on the outskirts of the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur.<sup>1</sup> In early 1942 she was 11 years old when approximately 60 Japanese soldiers arrived at her hometown of Tapah in Perak state, British Malaya.<sup>2</sup> Accompanying this contingent was a Chinese collaborator. The Lohs were acquainted with him; he was a resident of the town and had a wife of mixed Chinese-Japanese parentage. The Japanese officer in charge spoke fluent Malay. He produced a photograph of a well-known local communist and China Relief Fund committee member.<sup>3</sup> It was of Chan Ai Lin, Loh's mother. The officer threatened Loh and her younger brother at gunpoint to disclose Chan's whereabouts. However, neither the children nor the neighbours relented; Chan was hiding behind a false wall in their home. They were rounded up along with other townspeople and taken to a Japanese army stronghold. Over the course of a week, the siblings were instructed to write letters to their mother, pleading for her surrender in exchange for their freedom. They witnessed acts of torture including the waterboarding of a neighbour. Eventually the children were released but by then their mother had fled.

Chan was ultimately captured and executed on 10 April 1942. Witnesses confirmed that Chan had been bayoneted and left to die; her groans were heard from the execution grounds throughout the night, ceasing only at dawn. Her unfortunate fate, like many partisans and civilians, was repeated in remote *kampung* (villages), small towns and teeming cities throughout Malaya. Between February and April 1942 alone, the Japanese army conducted a territory-wide purge known as the *Dai Kensho* (big inspection) or *Kakyo Shukusei* (Overseas Chinese enforcement) operations.<sup>4</sup> This episode, referred to as the *sook ching* or

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<sup>1</sup> Loh Sow Ying, interview by author, June 2, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> British Malaya refers to the web of Crown Colonies and protectorates on the Malayan peninsula which included the Federated Malay States (Selangor, Pahang, Perak and Negeri Sembilan), the Unfederated Malay States (Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Terengganu) and the Straits Settlements states (Penang, Singapore and Malacca). British dominance began with the leasing of Penang in 1785, followed by expansion through trade and diplomatic treaties. Complete domination was achieved in 1914 following the assimilation of Johor state. See Gerald Hawkins, *Malaya* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952) and Victor Purcell, "Malaya under the British," *World Affairs* 108, 1 (1945): 33-38.

<sup>3</sup> The China Relief Fund coordinated fund-raising efforts among the local Chinese community. It was established in 1937 in response to the Japanese invasion of China. See: Stephen Leong, "The Malayan Overseas Chinese and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1941," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 10, 2 (1979): 293-320.

<sup>4</sup> The term 'purge' is derived from the description provided by Hayashi Hirofumi, "Massacre of Chinese in Singapore and Its Coverage in Postwar Japan," in *New*

'cleansing' massacres in local parlance, saw an indeterminate number beheaded, slashed, bayoneted, raked with machine gun fire, buried alive or bound in groups and drowned. The Chinese populace bore the brunt of this purge.

The devastation unleashed by the Japanese army upon Malaya has been characterised by historians Tim Harper and Christopher Bayly as the "Rape of Malaya" evoking the spectre of death and destruction visited upon Nanjing.<sup>5</sup> In similar vein, Geoffrey C. Gunn contends that the coordination and execution of the *sook ching* operations summon comparisons; further, that the ethnic and political dimensions of the massacres meet broad definitions of genocide.<sup>6</sup> Despite the enormity of this epoch, when interviewed in 2011, Loh remarked, "I wanted to tell my story for so long, but no one wants to talk about it." Loh's lament portends one of the prime concerns of this thesis – that of Chinese war memory silences in present-day Malaysia. Not only is there a perceptible lack of receptiveness for war experiences, there is an observable absence of war memory within popular consciousness.

This study however extends beyond an examination of Chinese war memory. Rather, it seeks to explore the historical legacy of the occupation in the making of Malaysian Chinese identities: to investigate aspects of Chinese war memory which may have been sustained or suppressed; to discern the defining narratives that have been deliberately or perhaps unconsciously transmitted to successive generations; and to ask how the combined effects of memory-work and memory transmission may influence the shaping of Chinese identities. To that end, it raises several key questions: What experiences of the Japanese occupation have been remembered, misremembered or forgotten? Recent decades have seen the active rehabilitation of previously marginalised war memories; why has this been so? How has war memory been transmitted? When suppressed, is the unspoken inadvertently passed on to successive generations? How has Chinese war memory influenced Malaysian Chinese "self-image," that is, representations of the Chinese self vis-à-vis relations with the community and the nation at large?<sup>7</sup>

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*Perspectives on the Japanese Occupation in Malaya and Singapore, 1941-1945*, eds. Akashi Yoji and Yoshimura Mako (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), 234-235.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain's Asian Empire & The War with Japan* (London: Penguin, 2005), 208-217.

<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey C. Gunn, "Remembering the Southeast Asian Chinese Massacres of 1941-45," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 37, 3 (2007): 273-291.

<sup>7</sup> The term 'self-image' is credited to Aleida Assmann, "Transformations between History and Memory," *Social Research* 75, 1 (2008): 49-72.

## Identity: The Perennial Question

At present, Malaysia's citizenry numbers 26 million. The two largest ethnic groups are the Malays, numbering 14.2 million or 54.6 percent of the population, and the Chinese, numbering 6.4 million or 24.6 percent.<sup>8</sup> The imbalance presented by Malay political supremacy and Chinese economic dominance is a major source of interethnic tensions. Inequalities aside, purported Chinese cultural chauvinism, reflected for example in the community's refusal to abandon 'mother tongue' Mandarin language education, is often perceived as evidence of Chinese intransigence towards embracing a common Malaysian identity.<sup>9</sup>

On the surface, little appears to have changed since the prospect of an independent Malaya was first mooted. The conundrum of identity politics remains a bone of contention in contemporary Malaysia. Fears of Chinese separatist tendencies, dating from when the Chinese were migrants and non-citizens, continue to persist. Despite almost eight decades of state-directed social engineering initiatives and the perpetuation of integrationalist tropes of nation-building, "pluralism did not," as Harper has observed, "give way to assimilation, nor ethnic politics to multiracialism."<sup>10</sup> Consequently, whether the Malaysian Chinese are foremost Malaysian or Chinese remains a perennial topic.<sup>11</sup>

China's ascendancy further problematises the issue of Malaysian Chinese identities by conjuring the "China factor," that is, the enduring perception of the Overseas Chinese as imaginary brethren to the mainland.<sup>12</sup> This impression has been fuelled in part by China's soft power policies which reify the global Chinese diaspora as ethnic and cultural extensions of the Chinese nation. While critics deride these policies as a ploy to harness the skills and wealth of this collective for China's modernising project, this contention has sparked suspicions of latent Chinese ethnonationalism in Southeast Asian states with sizeable Chinese

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<sup>8</sup> The *Orang Asli* or indigenous tribes are the third largest collective at 12.6 percent and the Indians are the fourth largest at 7.3 percent; Department of Statistics, Malaysia, *Population and Housing Census 2010*.

<sup>9</sup> See: Kua Kia Soong, *The Chinese Schools of Malaysia: A Protean Saga* (Kajang: New Era College, 2008); Tan Yao Sua and R. Santhiram, *The Education of Ethnic Minorities: The Case of the Malaysian Chinese* (Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Tim N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Leo Suryadinata, "Ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia: Overseas Chinese, Chinese Overseas or Southeast Asians?," in *Ethnic Chinese as Southeast Asians*, ed. Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: ISEAS, 1997), 15-20.

<sup>12</sup> Wang Gungwu, "Malaysian Chinese and Regional Developments," in *Malaysian Chinese: An Inclusive Society*, ed. Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, (Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies: 2011), 11.

minorities such as Malaysia.<sup>13</sup> Hence, a study on Malaysian Chinese identities has relevance beyond the local and the national. Transposed to the wider Chinese diaspora, the Malaysian Chinese condition conjures a transnational dimension which evokes the interstices between national and ethnic identities, potentially challenging national attempts at territorialising identity.<sup>14</sup> Among the aims of this thesis is to explore whether (re)connecting with Chinese war legacy acts as a form of cultural resinicisation and promotes resistance to conforming to the national historical narrative.

## Memory-Work and Identity Construction

This thesis represents a departure from prevailing scholarship on the Chinese in Malaysia by reconciling the links between Chinese war memory and contested histories on the making of Malaysian Chinese identities. Conventionally, studies of Malaysian Chinese identities are ethnographic or anthropological in nature, where historical narratives serve an ancillary function: to highlight relevant events, outline specific developments or invoke culturally significant symbols which inform Chinese identity.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, historical studies of the Chinese in Malaysia are often subsumed within broader narratives of Sino-Malay interactions, the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia or the Chinese diaspora at large.<sup>16</sup>

There have been few attempts at a comprehensive historiography of the Chinese in Malaysia. As the British colonial servant Victor Purcell once noted:

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<sup>13</sup> Elena Barabantseva, *Overseas Chinese, Ethnic Minorities and Nationalism: Decentering China* (London: Routledge, 2011), 99-107.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of the effects of globalisation on diasporas, see: Robin Cohen, "Diasporas in the Age of Globalisation," *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 155-176. For a discussion of Malaysian Chinese within the context of the Chinese diaspora, see: Tan Chee Beng, "Chinese in Southeast Asia and Identities in a Changing Global Context," in *Chinese Populations in Contemporary Southeast Asian Societies: Identities, Interdependence and International Influence*, eds. M. Jocelyn Armstrong, R. Warwick Armstrong and Kent Mulliner (Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> For example: Timothy P. Daniels, *Building Cultural Nationalism in Malaysia: Identity, Representation, and Citizenship*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005); Sharon A. Carstens, *Histories, Cultures, Identities: Studies in Malaysian Chinese Worlds* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006); Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, ed. *Malaysian Chinese: An Inclusive Society* (Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies: 2011).

<sup>16</sup> For example: Wang Gungwu, *The Chinese Overseas: From Earthbound China to the Quest for Autonomy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Anthony Reid, ed. *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001); Zhou Weimin and Tang Lingling, *A History of Sino-Malaysian Interactions*, trans. Tan Yau Chong (Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, 2011).

"Historians of Malaya have almost without exception written as if the Malays were the central and self-sufficient theme and the Chinese were extraneous or incidental to it."<sup>17</sup> As redress, Purcell's 1967 monograph, *The Chinese in Malaya*, traces early Chinese settlements from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards and Chinese migratory flows under British auspices. Yen Ching-hwang's contribution to the 2004 volume *The Chinese in Malaysia* offers a revised update but is confined to the period before 1945.<sup>18</sup> For historical accounts of the Chinese in Malaya during the war years and since, one has to refer to periodised studies on the Japanese occupation, the communist insurgency of 1948 to 1960 known as the Malayan Emergency, the decolonisation of Malaya and post-independent Malaysia.<sup>19</sup> In these accounts, the Chinese story is a constituent of larger historical narratives but not the central focus. As such, there is no discernible overarching narrative to elucidate Chinese experience from the past into the present.

Contemporary scholarship on the Malaysian Chinese is often foregrounded against post-independent development discourses which emphasise nation-building. These inevitably juxtapose the Chinese minority condition against Malay hegemony.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, explorations of war memory typically adhere to Malay-Chinese, dominant-marginalised or national-communal binary tropes.<sup>21</sup> These conceptions are understandable, if not inevitable, given that Malaya was inducted as a federation only in 1948. Through a steady process of devolution, the British colony was eventually granted independence in 1957. The union underwent several incarnations afterwards and Malaysia in its present configuration dates from 1965.<sup>22</sup> Malaysian Chinese, as a meaningful category, is therefore a relatively

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<sup>17</sup> Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), vii.

<sup>18</sup> Yen Ching-Hwang, "Historical Background," in *The Chinese in Malaysia*, eds. Lee Kam Hing and Tan Chee Beng (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> For example: Leong, "Malayan Overseas Chinese;" Paul H. Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya: A Social and Economic History* (London: Hurst & Company, 1998); Harper, *The End of Empire*; Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict During and After the Japanese Occupation, 1941-1946* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003); Tan Tai Yong, *Creating "Greater Malaysia": Decolonization and the Politics of Merger* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> For example: Lee Kam Hing and Tan Chee Beng, eds., *The Chinese in Malaysia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Lee Hock Guan and Leo Suryadinata, eds., *Malaysian Chinese: Recent Developments and Prospects* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> For example: Diana Wong, "Memory Suppression and Memory Production: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore," in *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*, eds. T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White and Lisa Yoneyama (London: Duke University Press, 2001); Kevin Blackburn and Karl Hack, *War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> The Malay Peninsula and the Straits Settlements states of Penang and Malacca were first constituted as the Federation of Malaya in 1948. In 1963, the federation

recent construct, with existing studies exhibiting a clear pre-war/postwar demarcation. Consequently, prevailing conceptions of the Chinese status quo depict contestations of memory, history or identity as temporal and episodic – because Malay war memory dominates national historiography, Chinese war memory is relegated to the margins; because of institutionalised discrimination, Malaysian Chinese identity is denigrated to second-class citizenship. While these paradigms may be accurate, they tell a part of but not the whole story.

Reflecting on existing scholarship on the Malaysian Chinese, several potential limitations become apparent: filtering Chinese minoritiness through the prism of Malay supremacy narrows the scope for potential inquiry, while periodisation of the Chinese historical past truncates the temporal scale for possible study. Arguably, in such conceptions, the totality of Malaysian Chinese experience is curtailed, and the inter-relatedness and dynamism of memory-work and identity construction are obscured. That is, these paradigms do not sufficiently reveal and/or acknowledge the undulations of Chinese war memory or the adaptation of Malaysian Chinese identity representations over time. How can we escape similar conceptual fetters? This thesis references a *longue durée* perspective and memory theory for possible recourse.

Proponents of *longue durée* have suggested that histories centred on personages and events are akin to focussing on “agitation of the surface.”<sup>23</sup> The focus on the short-term can obscure long-enduring social continuities. Only by distinguishing between momentary pressures and long-term movements can we discern the thread of ‘slow history’ which lies beneath the surface of temporal historical narratives. Thus, a *longue durée* or macrohistorical approach advocates a wide angle, long range view. This allows us to “step outside of the confines of national history to ask about the rise of long-term complexes” so that we may understand the “genesis of contemporary discontents.”<sup>24</sup> The Annales historian Fernand Braudel describes this idea another way: *longue durée* history provides a vantage point from which “all the thousands of explosions of historical time can be understood from these depths, from this semi-immobility” and that indeed,

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was reconfigured as Malaysia to include Singapore and the previous British Borneo territories of Sabah and Sarawak. In 1965, Singapore was expelled from the union.

<sup>23</sup> Frederic L. Holmes, “The Longue Durée in the ‘History of Science,’” *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 25, 4 (2003): 464.

<sup>24</sup> Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 37.

“everything gravitates around it.”<sup>25</sup> This perspective compels us to reorient our historical gaze to recognise prevailing social continuities.

In this study, so as to widen the scope of the inquiry, we synthesise existing inter-related studies into a multidisciplinary narrative. Additionally, by amalgamating periodised historical accounts, we lengthen the time scale under consideration. This enables us to then ask: what long-term complex underpins contemporary contestations of Chinese war memory, histories and identities? When we consider the historical trajectory of the Chinese, from past migrants to “not-quite-citizens” in contemporary Malaysia, the motif of Chinese as Other emerges.<sup>26</sup> Otherness undergirds the history of the Chinese: Colonial accounts characterised the Chinese as a sojourning Other in opposition to the permanently-settled Malay indigene. During the occupation, the Japanese depicted the Chinese as distinct from other “Asian brothers.”<sup>27</sup> In present-day Malaysia, Otherness is invoked through vernacular labels such as *kaum pendatang* (migrant clan). Thus, the rubric of Otherness allows us to reframe the interpretation of Chinese war memory and Malaysian Chinese identities as struggles for cultural belonging and social inclusion.

Chinese war memory within this thesis serves as an effective foil in revealing contestations of history and identity. The occupation was a watershed in the history of the Chinese in the territory. Targeted Japanese oppression heightened Chinese awareness of their ethnic identity, even as the struggle to survive and to defend their homesteads deepened their sense of attachment towards their adopted homeland. It was in the convulsions of the occupation that Chinese sojourners and settlers alike were confronted with questions of identification and allegiance. In the aftermath of the war, the Chinese had to choose between aligning their fates and that of their future generations with the new nation state of Malaya or their ancestral homeland China. Thus, Chinese war memory – what has been remembered and memorialised, what has been silenced and marginalised – serves as a barometer in tracing the development of Malaysian Chinese identities.

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<sup>25</sup> Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein, “History and the Social Sciences: The Longue Durée,” *Review* 32, 2 (2009): 181.

<sup>26</sup> The term ‘not-quite-citizens’ is borrowed from: “Malaysia at 50: Tall Buildings, Narrow Minds,” *The Economist*, August 30, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Masanobu Tsuji, “Appendix,” in *Japan’s Greatest Victory, Britain’s Worst Defeat from the Japanese Perspective: The Capture of Singapore 1942*, ed. H.V. Howe, trans. Margaret E. Lake (Gloucestershire: Spellmount, 2007), 230.



To investigate the cultural links between Chinese war memory and processes of Malaysian Chinese identity-formation, this thesis referenced, as a starting point, the Halbwachsian concept of collective memory. This conception posits that individual memory is an aspect of group memory, socially constructed and mediated through social frames, and that “no memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections.”<sup>28</sup> This emphasis upon the individual as an intrinsic member of a group, not just a “first person singular” but a “first person plural,” signalled to this researcher the associative link between memory and identity.<sup>29</sup>

In exploring how memory may serve as a form of cultural capital, from which a group may derive “an awareness of its unity and peculiarity,” this thesis drew primarily upon the works of Jan Assman, John Czaplicka and Pierre Nora.<sup>30</sup> While all three emphasise that collective memory is transmuted into cultural markers of identity through memorisation and institutionalisation (e.g. remembrance rituals, physical symbols or historical text), Nora’s treatise on *lieux de mémoire* or sites of memory highlights in particular the influence of the state in processes of memory commodification. Nora’s exposition on national symbols and their implications for the construction of national identity led this researcher to reflect on whether the Malaysian Chinese community may similarly commodify selective aspects of the war past in order to ‘nationalise’ such memories. This perspective informed the investigation of Chinese sites of memory, in particular the narratological divergence or accommodation embedded within such sites when juxtaposed against national sites.

In exploring what aspects of Chinese war memory have been commodified, or what aspects may have been deliberately suppressed, this study was also directed by historian Wulf Kansteiner’s assertion that identity politics is closely interrelated to memory production and consumption.<sup>31</sup> Kansteiner’s proposition that memory has “use-value” emphasises that memory is valorised only when it serves an individual’s or a group’s need for identification. Kansteiner’s conception of memory as having use-value is significant; it emphasises that memory and history are mutable cultural constructions, often harnessed to serve

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<sup>28</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Cosner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 43.

<sup>29</sup> Assmann, “Transformations,” 51.

<sup>30</sup> Assman, “Transformations;” Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 130; Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.” *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24

<sup>31</sup> Wulf Kansteiner, “Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies,” *History and Theory* 41, 2 (2002): 179-197.

temporal, contemporary needs, especially when identity is besieged by crisis. Thus, when reflecting upon the marginalisation of Chinese war memory from the national narrative, this researcher was guided to not overlook Chinese agency and complicity in shaping Chinese narratives of the war.

## Silence as a Concept

It would be useful to clarify what is meant by war memory silences within the context of this study. 'Silence' does not suggest a paucity of memory or forgetfulness; testimonies such as Loh's readily disprove this notion. Rather, silence is an evolving phenomenon; its volume is dependent upon contemporary socio-political exigencies. In Indonesia, state-sponsored political memory in the past only lionised resistance heroes. Civilian wartime suffering was largely silent and silenced. More recently however, *romusha* or slave labourers have been lauded as patriotic martyrs in order to augment a contemporary anti-colonial narrative despite the fact that the victims were non-combatants.<sup>32</sup> In China, the Nanjing Massacre was only belatedly reclaimed from neglect by the clamouring voices of the Chinese diaspora.<sup>33</sup> Since then, the event has been appropriated by the state as an emblem of Chinese war victimhood, deployed to unite and mobilise the nation as well as elicit international sympathy.<sup>34</sup> Within the Malaysian context, recent communal attempts at invoking the Chinese war past appear to indicate that the contemporary socio-political climate has become sufficiently favourable to warrant revival.

Silences of memory do not occupy an alternate space of remembrance. Rather, their audibility is linked to the centrality, volume and visibility of dominant national histories, where 'histories' are cultural constructs harnessed by those in power with access to means of representation and to meet specific political objectives. In such contestations, marginalised memories are often drowned out by the amplified official narrative. In Malaysia, according to Singaporean historian Diana Wong, official historiography "periodicises on the basis of prewar and

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<sup>32</sup> Boryano Rickum, "Marginalized by Silence – Victims of Japanese Occupation in Indonesia's Political Memory," in *Feelings at the Margins: Dealing with Violence, Stigma and Isolation in Indonesia*, eds. Thomas Stodulka and Birgitt Rottger-Rossler (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> On the role of the Chinese diaspora in recultivating memory of the massacre, see: Joshua Fogel, "The Nanjing Massacre in History," in *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography*, ed. Joshua Fogel (London: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>34</sup> Mark Eykholt, "Aggression, Victimization, and Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre."

postwar Malaya, with the Japanese Interregnum as an unfortunate anomaly of history.”<sup>35</sup> In characterising the occupation as a temporal event, the state has advanced a narrative of continued Malay power beginning with the 15<sup>th</sup> century Melaka Sultanate, interrupted only by European and Japanese colonisation. To augment this narrative, it serves the state to depict the occupation as “a major stepping stone on the road to independence, and towards a new, postcolonial golden age for Malays.”<sup>36</sup> There is little space for war memories which do not conform to this positive narrative.

Consequently, in present-day Malaysia, there is an observable absence of war remembrance. Wong noted that there were few commemoration activities to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Second World War. Those which did take place “were organised by foreign war veterans and their families remaining essentially foreign rituals on local sites.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed, war commemorations in Malaysia continue to fall largely within the purview of foreign governments. For example, the British High Commission (BHC) commemorates Remembrance Sunday at the Kuala Lumpur Cenotaph every year; the Embassy of the Russian Federation hosts annual commemorations at the Zhemchug memorial in Penang; while the Australian High Commission organises annual Anzac Day and Sandakan Day to remember their fallen.<sup>38</sup> These are typically formal affairs attended by diplomats from various Allied nations. Often, representatives of the Malaysian government are present as invited guests and co-participants, not protagonists. Their place in these events echoes the official narrative – Malaya was collateral war damage, a hapless victim caught in the crossfire of imperialist ambitions.

Despite the dominance of the national narrative, we are able to glimpse, through stories such as Loh’s, what Vera Schwarz describes as “fragments of

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<sup>35</sup> Wong, “Memory Suppression,” 229.

<sup>36</sup> Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory*, 263.

<sup>37</sup> Wong, “Memory Suppression,” 218-219.

<sup>38</sup> “WWII Veteran in Remembrance Day Malaysia Service,” *BBC News*, November 7, 2012; “Remembrance Day Service 2013,” British High Commission Kuala Lumpur, November 1, 2013; “British High Commission Commemorates the Fallen Heroes of WW1 at Tugu Negara,” *New Straits Times*, November 9, 2014; Vladimir Morozov, “Devoting to the 90th Anniversary from the Date of the Loss of Russian Cruiser ‘Zhemchug’ in Penang,” Embassy of the Russian Federation in Malaysia, November 14, 2004; “A Commemorative Event in Memory of Russian Sailors at Penang,” Russian Centre of Science and Culture, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, March 1, 2013; Himanshu Bhatt, “Russia Remembers Penang Fishermen’s Help, Commits to MH17 Investigations,” *Malaysian Insider*, October 28, 2014; “Australian High Commissioner Visits Sandakan to Commemorate Sandakan Day 2013,” Australian High Commission Malaysia, August 15, 2013; “2014 ANZAC Day Commemorative Service in Kuala Lumpur and Sandakan, Sabah,” Australian High Commission Malaysia, February 27, 2014.

recollection” which “break through the official performance.”<sup>39</sup> The presence of such fragments suggests that articulation is uneven and dependent upon multiple arenas for expression.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, to excavate such fragments, we need to look beyond the national, to identify silences embedded within the individual and communal realms.

Silence, or the failure to overcome the struggle for articulation, owes its impotency to several factors. At the individual level, articulating memories is akin to storytelling, a social encounter where audience members are not passive recipients but participants in the shaping of the narrative. For the narrative to be credible, gain traction or be validated, it has to follow cultural patterns recognisable to the audience.<sup>41</sup> However, without active collective remembrance, it is difficult to establish such patterns. There is no national repository for oral or written testimonies of the Japanese occupation in Malaysia. Similarly, there are no national organisations for civilians who lived through the occupation to gather, reminisce upon or record their experiences. There is little opportunity to identify common themes or formulate a shared language, the necessary and conducive precursors in the development of common memories.<sup>42</sup> Under these conditions, recollections such as Loh’s do not easily transition from personal memories to cultural memory within collective consciousness.<sup>43</sup> In such cases, personal memories become excluded from ‘history,’ instead they remain subaltern memory, confined to private discourse.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Vera Schwarz, *Bridge across Broken Time: Chinese and Jewish Cultural Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 11.

<sup>40</sup> Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, eds., *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 16-18.

<sup>41</sup> DuBois’ study on working-class Argentinian memories illustrates how narratives that diverge from dominant versions are perceived as less credible by audiences who have no knowledge of and/or do not share those memories; Lindsay DuBois, “Memories Out of Place: Dissonance and Silence in Historical Accounts of Working Class Argentines,” *Oral History* 28, 1 (2000): 75-82.

<sup>42</sup> Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 16.

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion on the conditions necessary to transform individual memory into cultural memory, see Ashplant et. al., *Politics of War Memory*, 18-19.

<sup>44</sup> Diaz, “Deliberating ‘Liberation Day,’” 159.



Figure 4. Foreign rituals on local sites.

Clockwise:

Remembrance Sunday at the Kuala Lumpur Cenotaph, 2011. Source: Argory.

Sandakan Day, 2013: From left, Sabah State Minister Teo Chee Kang, the Australian High Commissioner Miles Kupa and the British Deputy High Commissioner Ray Kyles. Source: Australian High Commission.

Zhemchug Commemoration, 2014: Standing in front of the memorial are Lim Guan Eng, Chief Minister of Penang (in black suit), and Russian ambassador Lyudmila G. Vorobyeva. Source: Lim Guan Eng.

## Multiple Wars, Multiple Histories

The Southeast Asian historian Wang Gungwu notes that “there was nothing at the time or immediately after the war to draw [various ethnic groups’] memories into a common pool for the commemoration of shared experiences.”<sup>45</sup> Without a shared narrative to bind the collective imagination, a cacophony of multiple ‘histories’ of the Japanese occupation has emerged. These narratives are embedded in gender, class and ethnic distinctions.

The following excerpts may aid in conjuring the diversity of war experiences: Tunku Abdul Rahman, a Malay prince of the Kedah state royal family, and later first premier of independent Malaysia, recalls that “the early days of the occupation were the worst.” After calm had been restored however he remembers that life was relatively uneventful. As such, while the Japanese occupation was “a period of uncertainty,” he describes himself as having “had quite a good time.”<sup>46</sup> Yahya bin Hussein, a Malay commoner from Province Wellesley in Perak state, recounts that the Japanese were draconian in enforcing order in his village and “as long as we did not loot or go against their orders, we were quite free to carry out our lives as normal.”<sup>47</sup> Dasan, who volunteered for the Japanese-sponsored Indian National Army (INA), recounts the nationalist fervor inspired by Subhas Chandra Bose’s fiery rhetoric: “Netaji’s clarion call for blood, sweat and sacrifice from the Indians...moved thousands...to join him...We had sold our lives to his dream and considered it a privilege.”<sup>48</sup> In Singapore, Chinese civilians N.I Low and H.M. Cheng recall that life was imbued with a “daily, nightly fear far worse than the fear of death” and where “one’s head might be on one’s shoulders in the morning and by the evening the two might have parted company.”<sup>49</sup> Lim Lan Ying of Kuala Lumpur remembers ruefully that rape was widespread.<sup>50</sup>

From the above excerpts, a tapestry of divergent experiences emerges. Why has this been so? The contributing factors are manifold but Japanese race-specific policies exerted considerable influence. In broad strokes, though the risk of oversimplification is acknowledged, these can be described as harsh with regards

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<sup>45</sup> Wang Gungwu, “Memories of War: World War II in Asia,” 18.

<sup>46</sup> Tunku Abdul Rahman, *Something to Remember* (Petaling Jaya: Eastern Universities Press, 1983), 126-127.

<sup>47</sup> NIE, *Remembering the Japanese Occupation and How it Affected The Malay-Muslim Community In Singapore*, Oral History Project, National Institute of Education Singapore, 2010, <http://www.hsse.nie.edu.sg>.

<sup>48</sup> *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: A Malaysian Perspective* (Kuala Lumpur: Netaji Centre, 1992); cited in P. Ramasamy, “Indian War Memory in Malaysia,” 100.

<sup>49</sup> N.I. Low and H.M. Cheng, *This Singapore: Our City of Dreadful Night* (Singapore: Ngai Seong Press, 1946), 87, 150.

<sup>50</sup> Lim Lan Ying, interview by author, April 29, 2009.

to the Chinese, supportive of the Malays, and encouraging towards the Indians.<sup>51</sup> The unevenness in Japanese racial attitudes was not lost on the local populace. Recalling the treatment meted out to fellow villagers, Yahya noted that “the Japanese were very cruel and acted horribly vicious towards the Chinese. However, they were quite relaxed in their attitude towards the Malays and the Indians.”<sup>52</sup> Similarly, researcher Arujunan Narayanan, of Malaysian Indian descent, recalls that his parents spoke often about Japanese atrocities, noting in particular those visited upon the Chinese.<sup>53</sup>

In essence, varied segments of the population experienced different wars. This divergence reflected the segmental state of Malayan society at the time. While precolonial maritime trade had promoted interethnic collaboration and cultural exchange, a colonial program of social stratification rigidified society along political, economic and ethnic lines.<sup>54</sup> Malaya, on the eve of the occupation, was more ethnically diverse than in the past, owing to the mass importation of migrants in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, the colonially mandated division of labour meant that ethnic groups were siloed within particular economic sectors. Consequently, interethnic exchanges were limited to “segmentary interactions” with little incentive for migrants to accommodate or assimilate Malay customs.<sup>55</sup> Culturally-insular community enclaves developed as a result.

In reaction to migrant competition, the distinctiveness of the Malay, as a separate and identifiable category, became entrenched through a discourse of indigeneity. This discourse not only assimilated varied subgroups within the Malayo-Indonesian archipelago into a homogenised Malay ethnicity, it conflated religious expression with ethnic essentialism, the Muslim faith with the Malay race.

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<sup>51</sup> This statement is not meant to negate the suffering experienced by other ethnic groups. As Frei points out: “the Chinese reminisce as the prime victims of Japanese reprisals and revenge; and Malay and Tamil sources reflect fewer problems with the Japanese who sought to woo these peoples;” Henry P. Frei, *Guns of February: Ordinary Japanese Soldiers’ Views of the Malayan Campaign and the Fall of Singapore 1941-42* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2004), xix.

<sup>52</sup> NIE, *Remembering the Japanese Occupation*.

<sup>53</sup> Arujunan Narayanan, “Second World War Japanese Atrocities and British Minor War Crimes Trials: The Issue of Fair Trial in Four Selected British Minor War Crimes Trials in Malaya and Singapore in 1946-1947,” (PhD diss., University of Wales, 2003), iii.

<sup>54</sup> For a discussion on how the precolonial Malayo-Indonesian archipelago resembled a ‘multiethnic macrocosm’ and how British colonialism promoted social segmentation, see: Robert W. Hefner, ed., *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 12-19.

<sup>55</sup> Hefner’s description of colonially-engineered ‘segmentary interactions’ echoes J.S. Furnivall’s idea about ‘market exchanges’ in plural societies with little cultural homogeneity; Hefner, *Politics of Multiculturalism*, 5-6.

Colonial patronage of the Malay aristocracy formally cemented the link between royal and religious authority, with the Malay rulers instated as protectors of Malay customs and religion. This configuration became the basis for indirect colonial rule, made elaborate by the invention of a Malay traditionalism centred upon the preservation of the ruling elite.<sup>56</sup>

Prewar Malay society was ideologically divided. The preceding decades had seen a flourishing of nascent political aspirations among the Malay intelligentsia. The *Kaum Muda* (Young Faction), influenced by Wahhabi ideology emanating from the Middle East, advocated the purification of Islam as the antidote for Malay backwardness. This faction eschewed blind obedience to the diktats of the religious elite. There were also anti-colonial nationalists and left-leaning liberals who championed independence or amalgamation with Indonesia. Many were anti-British and supported reform to the existing feudal system. The *Kaum Tua* (Old Faction), comprising the religious hierarchy and aristocracy, perceived these views as threats to the existing Malay social order and their interests.<sup>57</sup>

The varied outlooks of the different social classes influenced divergent Malay experiences and memories of the war. The aristocracy, elite civil servants corp and volunteer armed forces were predominantly pro-British. Many equated the defence of 'Old England' and her imperial possession with a misplaced Malayan 'nationalism.'<sup>58</sup> Radical elements were enticed by pre-invasion Japanese overtures of friendship, as well as professed Japanese intentions to expel the British colonisers and to "kill off the Chinese who have taken the wealth of your country."<sup>59</sup> Consequently, some nationalists, among them Ibrahim Yaacob, leader of the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (Malay Youth Association), engaged in fifth column activities to facilitate the Japanese invasion. The majority Malay populace however were apolitical. Among this largely unschooled rural mass, few had informed notions of Japan and the Japanese. Many associated Japan with the ubiquity of

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<sup>56</sup> For an in-depth study on the colonial invention of Malay 'traditionalism,' see: Donna J. Amoroso, *Traditionalism and the Ascendancy of the Malay Ruling Class in Colonial Malaya* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2014).

<sup>57</sup> W.R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (London: Yale University Press, 1967), 56-90.

<sup>58</sup> Abu criticises this allegiance as both "erroneous" and "delusory," arguing that loyalty to the British cause should not, strictly speaking, be categorised as nationalist; Abu Talib Ahmad, *Malay-Muslims, Islam, and the Rising Sun: 1941-1945* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 2003), 141.

<sup>59</sup> Lawrence James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (London: Little Brown, 1997), 547; quoted in Carl Vadivella Belle, *Tragic Orphans: Indians in Malaysia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2015), 185.



Japanese mass-produced goods flooding the colonial economy. Japanese rule, it was hoped, would augur a better standard of living.<sup>60</sup>

To exert control over the Malay population, the Japanese military administration co-opted the existing Malay political and religious hierarchy.<sup>61</sup> The various sultans were recognised as titular heads of Islam in their respective states and provided with honours, titles and stipends. Administrator-aristocrats were maintained in civil service, while the authority of religious elites was extended to include the power to arrest and fine Muslim delinquents. Through misappropriation of Islamic ideology and the manipulation of the Malay-Muslim elite, Japanese propaganda advanced Tokyo as the protector of the *ummah* (community of believers) and the war against Western imperialism as *jihad* (holy war).

Japanese intervention in Malay-Muslim affairs further reinforced the prominence of the Malay elite class as standard-bearers for the Malay community. The potency of Malay royalty as unifying symbols of *bangsa Melayu* (Malay race) and the Muslim faith was eventually harnessed by the postwar Malay political elite to shape Malay nationalist discourses as well as the dominant Malay narrative of the war.<sup>62</sup> This elite-led narrative promotes the Japanese occupation as a catalyst for Malay nationalist awakening. Consequently, narratives of Malay suffering, especially the experiences of those from the lower classes who had endured forced labour, were marginalised.

Similarly, class distinctions within the Indian community, in particular between the professional class and working-class labourers, have shaped differing memories of the Japanese occupation. As a result, Indian war memory yields two dominant but contrasting narratives. There are recollections of communal solidarity and Indian nationalist pride whipped up by the Japanese-sponsored Indian Independence League (IIL) and Indian National Army (INA) for the purpose of liberating India from the British, and then there are accounts of widespread suffering and deprivation, especially among plantation workers who were misled, forcibly enlisted or abducted for projects on the peninsula and the Thai-Burma Railway.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Abu Ahmad Talib, "The Impact of the Japanese Occupation on the Malay-Muslim Population," in *Malaya and Singapore during the Japanese Occupation*, ed. Paul H. Kratoska (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1995), 8-9.

<sup>61</sup> Abu, *Malay-Muslims, Islam, and the Rising Sun*.

<sup>62</sup> On how postwar Malay aristocracy both utilised and worked in concert with the ruling elite to develop a new political discourse on Malay nationalism, see: Amoroso, *Traditionalism*.

<sup>63</sup> See: Ramasamy, "Indian War Memory," and Carl Vadivella Belle, *Tragic Orphans: Indians in Malaysia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2015), 176-224.

The plethora of divergent war memories have been overshadowed by dominant communal narratives. This divergence speaks not only of a sense of separateness of one ethnic group from another; it is augmented in the retelling. In 2002, historian Kevin Blackburn interviewed a Malay elder named Mohammad Anis about the tragic events at Siglap, where approximately 1,600 Chinese men, women and children were killed. Anis was a 10-year-old when he witnessed this massacre on 22 February 1942. Blackburn was surprised to discover that Anis' recollection "was not tinged with any feelings associated with trauma or deep sadness" even though he lost several Chinese friends.<sup>64</sup> When Blackburn later reviewed Anis' earlier testimony to Singapore's Oral History Centre in 1992, he realised that Anis had not mentioned the Siglap massacre at all. Instead, in this earlier interview, Anis spoke at length about other experiences: receiving training in Japanese martial arts, joining the Japanese auxiliary military, and of how he had benefited from these opportunities. Blackburn posits that despite what he witnessed, Anis' testimony conformed to the dominant Malay narrative of empowerment; the massacre he witnessed was anomalous to this. Blackburn points out that similarly, Chinese testimonies regarding Siglap omits mention of fellow Malay villagers. These insights appear to corroborate American political scientist Rupert Emerson's observation of interethnic relations at the time. Apart from the fact that the various races lived in the same country, he noted, there seemed to be little common ground between them.<sup>65</sup>

## Ambiguous Histories, Simplifying Myths

Scholars have pointed to multiple factors that have shaped historiography and memory of the war in Malaysia, among them: public ambivalence, the politics of memory and the divergence in communal and class experiences.<sup>66</sup> Few however

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Belle's study provides an in-depth Indian experience of forced labour in some depth, also the motivations behind the defection of British Indian Army recruits to the INA, as well as the participation of Indian locals in the IIL and INA.

<sup>64</sup> Kevin Blackburn, "Recalling War Trauma of the Pacific War and the Japanese Occupation in the Oral History of Malaysia and Singapore," *The Oral History Review* 36, 2 (2009): 231-252.

<sup>65</sup> Rupert Emerson, foreword to *The New Malayan Nation: A Study of Communalism and Nationalism*, by F.H.H. King (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1957), 5.

<sup>66</sup> For example: Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory*; Helen Ting, "The Battle Over Memory of the Nation: Whose National History?," in *Controversial History Education in Asian Contexts*, eds. Mark Basildon et. al. (Oxon: Routledge, 2014); Lim, "War and Ambivalence;" and Cheah Boon Kheng, "Memory as History and Moral Judgement: Oral and Written Accounts of the Japanese Occupation of Malaya."

have explored in depth the impact of wartime collaboration upon the making of war memory silences. Indigenous collaboration left an ambiguous historical legacy in several Southeast Asian nation-states. Thailand's national historiography, for instance, rationalises wartime collaboration with the Japanese as a pragmatic accommodation which preserved Thai sovereignty. Public acceptance of this survivalist narrative has left little space for reflection. As a result, few Thais know about the government's complicity in facilitating atrocity, most prominently in relation to the construction of the Thai-Burma Death Railway.<sup>67</sup>

Similarly, Burma and Indonesia's histories are clouded by local collaboration. In Burma, the Thirty Comrades' nationalist front headed by Aung San and the *Tatmadaw* (Burma Independent Army) was concretised through Japanese sponsorship.<sup>68</sup> In Indonesia, Sukarno, who would later emerge as the independent republic's first president, was released by the Japanese from Dutch imprisonment. His hold on power was enhanced when the Japanese gave local nationalists expanded political rights and administrative responsibilities. It was also under Japanese aegis that the *Tentera Sukarela Pembela Tanahair* (Volunteer Army for the Defence of the Fatherland) was established. This local military force would later play a decisive role in the postwar Indonesian revolution.<sup>69</sup> And while neither state achieved autonomy during the Japanese occupation, both were granted some semblance of nominal local government. Both administrations were instrumental in expediting slave labourers for the Thai-Burma Railway project. In Burma, the *Tatmadaw* also actively participated in military operations against non-Burman minorities in concert with the Japanese army.<sup>70</sup> In these former Western colonies, the Japanese was able to develop mass collaborative movements through support from incumbent anti-colonial nationalists. After the war, these same nationalist factions rose to offer effective resistance against reoccupation by their former colonial masters. Under these circumstances, the postwar nationalist narratives

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<sup>67</sup> Joan Beaumont and Andrea Whitcomb, "The Thai-Burma Railway: Asymmetrical and Transnational Memories," in *The Pacific War: Aftermaths, Remembrance and Culture*, eds. Christina Twomey and Ernest Koh (Oxon: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>68</sup> See: Donald M. Seekins, "Japan's "Burma Lovers" and the Military Regime," *Asian Perspective* 24, 4 (2000): 315-334; and Jan Bečka, *The National Liberation Movement in Burma during the Japanese Occupation Period (1941-1945)* (Prague: Academia, 1983).

<sup>69</sup> See: Nugroho Notosanto, "The PETA Army in Indonesia, 1943-1945," in *Japan in Asia*, ed. William H. Newell (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1981) and Willard H. Elsbree, *Japan's Role in Southeast Asian Nationalist Movements 1940 to 1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), especially the chapter "The Development of Political Participation in Indonesia."

<sup>70</sup> On the activities of local administrations in supporting Japanese initiatives, see: John F. Cady, "Burma," in *The New World of South East Asia*, ed. Lennox A. Mills (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1949); and Rickum, "Marginalized by Silence."

which emerged exerted compelling influence, despite the moral ambiguity attached to collaboration with the Japanese and the marginalisation of civilian suffering.

The war in Malaya, however, presented a different set of circumstances. As Willard H. Elsbree noted, unequal Malay and Chinese participation in resistance and collaboration activities lent the occupation a “pronounced racial tinge.” In particular, “it was in the virtual Chinese monopoly of the resistance movement that the dynamite lay.”<sup>71</sup> To this, one can also add Chinese experience of the *sook ching* massacres. Consequently, several “simplifying myths” have emerged, depicting the Malays as the primary collaborators and the Chinese as victims and/or resisters.<sup>72</sup> Why have such myths emerged? As historian Abu Talib Ahmad notes, most Malays, including “intellectuals from the left and right, school teachers, religious leaders, local elites and the youth” collaborated with the Japanese administration out of fear, patriotism or the mistaken belief that this would lead to independence.<sup>73</sup> When the Japanese administration founded *kunrenjo* or training schools to impart *kodo seishin* (spirit of the imperial way) to local youths in preparation for future leadership, Malays formed the majority of its cadets. Many of the nation’s postcolonial leaders, among them Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak, Foreign Minister Ghazali Shafie and Penang Yang diPertua Negeri Tun Hamdan Sheikh Tahir, were *kunrenjo* alumni.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, the Japanese call to recruit local volunteers for the *Heiho* (subsoldier division within the Japanese army), the *Giyugun* (Volunteer Army) and the *Giyutai* (Volunteer Corps) was answered primarily by Malay volunteers. Some saw their participation in nationalist terms, either to “defend the motherland” or to ensure the “triumph of the Malay race in the future.”<sup>75</sup> Others were motivated by more practical considerations, among them paid salaries, free food and clothing, as well as potential protection from police harassment.<sup>76</sup> However, as these auxiliary divisions saw combat only against primarily Chinese resistance forces, broad Malay cooperation came to be seen as universal complicity with the Japanese.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Elsbree, *Japan’s Role*, 149.

<sup>72</sup> The term ‘simplifying myth’ is borrowed from Hack and Blackburn. It is not meant to imply historical inaccuracy but to emphasise that complexities have been obscured; Karl Hack and Kevin Blackburn, *Did Singapore Have to Fall? Churchill and the Impregnable Fortress* (London: Routledge Courzon, 2005), 175.

<sup>73</sup> Abu, “Impact of the Japanese Occupation,” 16-17.

<sup>74</sup> Abu, “Impact of the Japanese Occupation,” 16-24; Akashi Yoji, “Learning the Seishin,” *Malaysia History*, July 18, 2012, <http://www.malaysiahistory.net/v2/?p=103>.

<sup>75</sup> Hack and Blackburn, *War Memory*, 220-223.

<sup>76</sup> Ban Kah Choon and Yap Hong Kuan, *Rehearsal for War: The Underground War against the Japanese* (Singapore: Horizon Books, 2002), 65.

<sup>77</sup> Abu, “Impact of the Japanese Occupation,” 20; Cheah, *Red Star*, 34-35; Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 83-85.

Among the various resistance forces, the most prominent was the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), the military arm of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). According to British intelligence, the MPAJA consisted of eight divisions about 7,000 strong.<sup>78</sup> It received operational and material support from the British Special Operations Executive through Force 136 liaison officers. By war's end, it had engaged in some 340 skirmishes, inflicting approximately 5,500 casualties among the Japanese.<sup>79</sup> The MPAJA's 'home front' was the civilian network known as the Anti-Japanese Unit (AJU), which was tasked with "supplying food, money, and information, and counter-intelligence against informers and collaborators" to the MPAJA.<sup>80</sup> The MPAJA did not have widespread appeal for Malays, as many saw communism as antithetical to Muslim ideology. As a result, Chinese formed the majority of participants in the MPAJA and AJU. This lent the resistance movement a distinctly Chinese orientation. Further, the MPAJA's 'traitor killer units' conducted a violent campaign against suspected Japanese *zougou* or 'running dogs.'<sup>81</sup> Even though reprisals were meted upon Malays and non-Malays alike, Malays became excessively targeted. Thus, these acts of terrorism came to be perceived as racially-motivated.

In reality, the picture was more complex. There were Malays within the ranks of the MCP, the MPAJA and Force 136, as well as the existence of pro-British Malay resistance groups such as *Wataniah* and *Askar Melayu Setia* (Loyal Malay Soldiers).<sup>82</sup> Similarly, there was Chinese complicity with the Japanese authorities ranging from passive cooperation to active collaboration.<sup>83</sup> For example, Chinese involvement as informants, translators and sub-police within the dreaded

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<sup>78</sup> The true strength of the MPAJA was about 10,000 and this was deliberately concealed from the British authorities in readiness for ultimate war against the British to establish a communist state; Ban and Yap, *Rehearsal for War*.

<sup>79</sup> Shu Yun-Tsiao and Chua Ser-Koon, eds., *Malayan Chinese Resistance to Japan 1937-1945 – Selected Source Materials* (Singapore: Cultural & Historical Publishing House, 1984), 71-72.

<sup>80</sup> Note on Chinese Resistance Organisations in Malaya, British Military Administration Ref. No. 773/2, October 22, 1945, 1957/0469946/BMA.SCAO.9/1945, Arkib Negara Malaysia (ANM), 2.

<sup>81</sup> The MPAJA defined collaboration in very broad terms and took little notice of the ethnicity of suspected collaborators. See: Han Ming Guang, "Collaboration during the Japanese Occupation: Issues and Problems Focusing on the Chinese Community" (BA diss., National University of Singapore, 2010), 22-25.

<sup>82</sup> For accounts of Malay participation in the MCP and MPAJA during the occupation, see: James Wong Wing On, *From Pacific War to Merdeka: Reminiscences of Abdullah CD, Rashid Maidin, Suriani Abdullah and Abu Samah* (Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information Research Development, 2005). For brief accounts of Malay participation in Force 136, as well as other Malay resistance groups, see: Abu, "The Malay Community and Memory of the Japanese Occupation," 74; Abu, "Impact of the Japanese Occupation," 16-24. On Malay guerrilla units, see: Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory*, 219-220.

<sup>83</sup> Han, "Collaboration."

*kempeitai* is well documented.<sup>84</sup> However, such nuances of collaboration and resistance are obfuscated, if not completely absent, from the official historiography. In large part, this obfuscation is a result of a “black out syndrome” which emerged among the Malay elite after the war.<sup>85</sup> Many chose to downplay their cooperation with the Japanese during the occupation and emphasise their pro-British credentials instead. With the passing of time, any negative tinge associated with collaboration with the Japanese was neutralised. Malay elite influence in shaping the nationalist discourse has meant that less problematic aspects of the occupation have been valorised instead to support the myth of continued Malay sovereignty.

Of interest to this thesis is the legacy of this potentially contentious aspect of occupation history; in particular how collaborators, victims or resisters have dealt with their memories. Describing post-conflict scenarios in Rwanda and Bosnia, Dan Stone observed a form of “willed amnesia” among “former perpetrators and surviving victims who must live together in close proximity.” He suggested that under those trying circumstances, forgetting became “a meaningful way of dealing with the past.”<sup>86</sup> When we interrogate Chinese war memory, can we discern willed amnesia at work? In situations where contentious pasts are deliberately withheld or not discussed, the psychologist Dan Bar-On posits that “leakages” – hints and signs that point to the silence – are evident in families, between generations, and within communities.<sup>87</sup> Bar-On suggests that such silences are never completely inaudible. If so, are we able to discern leakages relating to issues of collaboration and resistance within Chinese war memory silences?

## Analytic Strategy and Methods

This study attempts to explore the questions raised thus far by pursuing three lines of inquiry. The first involved excavating civilian experiences of the Japanese occupation. Everyday experiences of the local populace remain a relatively

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<sup>84</sup> The *Kempeitai* was the secret military police and counter-espionage corps within the Imperial Japanese Army. In occupied territories, *Kempei* personnel were responsible for policing and surveillance of civilians, detecting fifth-columnists, suppressing insurrection, gathering intelligence, administering propaganda programs, managing comfort houses and supervising PoW camps; see: Raymond Lamont-Brown, *Kempeitai: Japan's Dreaded Military Police* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), 40-55.

<sup>85</sup> Abu, *Malay-Muslims, Islam, and the Rising Sun*, 141-150.

<sup>86</sup> Dan Stone, “Genocide and Memory,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, eds. Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 114-115.

<sup>87</sup> Dan Bar-On, *The Indescribable and the Undiscussable: Reconstructing Human Discourse after Trauma* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999).

understudied area within existing historiography. As remarked previously, multiple 'histories' of the war echo dominant communal narratives. Even in the personal recounting of war experiences, ethnic others are often excluded. It is impossible to understand the implications of divergences in war memories or indeed to even recognise war memory silences, without first gaining a more complex impression of social conditions and interactions during the occupation. To advance understanding, this study references, apart from secondary sources, primary research on war crimes trial cases and other archived media sources. A study on civilian war experience utilising war crimes trials has not been attempted previously. It is proposed that doing so offers a more nuanced understanding of the occupation.

A total of 48 war crimes trials were subjected to analysis. This resulted in a typology of Japanese war atrocities and an exposition into civilian encounters with violence. The cases examined were determined by the sequential order in which they are archived at The National Archives in UK (TNA). As these cases are not archived according to a chronological timeline, nor categorised by trial venues or locations of purported war crimes, this selection process avoids bias. Thus, the cases examined were diverse in terms of events, participants and geographical spread. There are several benefits to the use of this primary source, among them the immediacy of civilian experience. The trials examined were conducted not long after British reoccupation, between February and November 1946. Unlike recollections contained in a memoir for example, which may be written or published years later, these recollections in court are less likely to be tainted by reflection or embellishment. In answering pointed questions from the defence and prosecution, and restricting testimony to fulfill those questions, the accounts provided are strikingly forthright. The trials involved alleged perpetrators, victims, witnesses and also other social actors, such as local auxiliary police and jailers. As such, they provide a critical insight into the social milieu of the time. There are potential drawbacks in the use of war crimes cases to reconstruct civilian war experience. For example, the trials were adjudicated when trauma of the war years was still fresh. Therefore, heightened emotions could have played a part in shaping witness and victim testimonies. It is impossible to deduce the motivations for providing testimony. While compensation for personal injury or loss was not in the offing, it is unclear if victims or witnesses were aware of this at the time. Extrapolating civilian experiences from war crimes trials provides an original perspective, one which enhances knowledge of occupation conditions. It will be demonstrated that the Japanese military administration employed terror to maintain control over the civilian population. The participation of locals as informants and collaborators

inculcated general mistrust and cast a pall of oppressive silence over the population. Deteriorating social relations deepened interracial chasms, even as the disproportionate targeting of the Chinese promoted this ethnic group as a separate Other within society.

The second line of inquiry was concerned with exploring the complexities of Chinese war memory-work in response to state-sponsored narratives. It is impossible to explore Chinese memory-work without acknowledging that there are different spheres for articulation; therefore, it was necessary to look at how narratives may diverge when expressed within national, communal and individual/familial contexts, as well as in the intersections between these realms. At the national level, this study reflects upon how decolonisation and post-independent nation-building efforts have shaped Chinese remembrances of the war, the discussion focussed on three pivotal historical periods: the Malayan Emergency, the racial riots of 1969 and the 'Look East' orientation towards Japan in the 1980s. These periods are significant because they aptly illustrate how changes in the socio-political environment promoted memory suppression and the marginalisation of the Chinese war past from national historiography. Despite this, Chinese war memory persists in the communal and individual/familial spheres, as evidenced by the preservation of memorials and the practise of remembrance rituals. Their presence suggests that certain segments of the Chinese community continue to nurture the war past. This led to questions of who 'does' the remembering and why, and what aspects of the war past are remembered. Through probing various national and communal sites of memory – museums, memorials, remembrance rituals and historical texts – and contrasting the narratives embedded within them, we investigate how Chinese war memory has evolved to mediate the divergences between communal and national narratives. Certain aspects of Chinese war memory, it will be revealed, have use-value; they can be manipulated by Chinese communal elites and community organisations to reinsert the Chinese war past into the national historiography. In this respect, this investigation departs from existing studies. Apart from evaluating the cultural significance of prominent communal sites of memory, attention was paid to how these sites have been inscribed and reinscribed with different meanings over time. This suggests that Chinese memory-work is an ongoing process.

The third line of inquiry was focussed on addressing the issue of Chinese memory-work in practise, especially within the individual/familial context, and its ramifications for successive generations. A microhistorical approach was adopted to fulfil this task. This approach acknowledges individual agency in the making of personal 'histories,' whereby individuals selectively determine what aspects of their



lived experiences are valorised or suppressed. Four individuals who had experienced the occupation were interviewed. The procedure for the interviews was informed by Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method, a qualitative research method for eliciting testimony and pivotal themes with minimal researcher intervention. The interviewees were self-selected volunteers. Among the four narrators who were interviewed for this study, three are residents of a nursing home, while the fourth was introduced through family connections. As none of the interviewees were community or political leaders, their narratives offer possible insights into how the war has come to be remembered among Chinese commoners. Further, the opportunity to interview with these elders offered an insight into whether they shared their memories with their descendants.

To gain a sense of whether intergenerational transmission has shaped knowledge of and attitudes toward the war past, informal polling and supplementary interviews were also conducted with peers, acquaintances, friends and relatives. To explore the issue in a more structured manner, two focus groups with Malaysian Chinese of the postwar set were also convened. The participants comprised peers, acquaintances and students from a British higher education institution. Their personal demographics indicate that they are primarily middle-class and urban. Although the sample size comprised only 10 participants, their perspectives provide useful insights into contemporary attitudes about the Chinese war past.

The outcomes from these various lines of inquiry were collated to explore how Chinese memory-work responds to contestations between individual, communal and national histories and how these cumulatively may influence the making of Malaysian Chinese identities. In the following chapter, we retrace the historical trajectory of the Chinese in Malaya prior and up to the initial phase of the Japanese occupation. This provides a contextual background to representations of the Chinese as Other. It will be demonstrated that Chinese Otherness has its roots in the colonial past.

# Chapter 1

## Historical Context: Chinese as Other

Malaysia is a Malay-dominated plural society where official historiography is underpinned by the ideology of *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay supremacy).<sup>88</sup> Consequently, the Chinese collective past is systemically marginalised from official historical records.<sup>89</sup> Under these circumstances, it is unsurprising that the Chinese war past has been neglected, not least because it “cannot be easily integrated into the national narrative of the war.”<sup>90</sup> In this respect, the marginalisation of Chinese war memory is a by-product of Chinese socio-political marginalisation within contemporary Malaysian society. In Blackburn and Hack’s assessment however, the state does not impose “blanket suppression of memory at the national level;” it has chosen instead to valorise “highly selective memory.”<sup>91</sup> They point to how Chinese war memory has been “allowed to flourish in specifically...Chinese space, languages and cultural forms” without active sponsorship of the state.<sup>92</sup> This latter point is debatable; if the state restricts Chinese war memory to the communal sphere, is this not in actuality a form of suppression? If the state turns a blind eye to Chinese war commemoration activities, is this evidence of proliferation? Perhaps a more pertinent question is why Chinese war memory has endured despite the lack of state support. These issues will be addressed in Chapter 3, when we explore the persistence of Chinese war memory within private and communal domains, and how these memories sometimes encroach on the public sphere as counter-narratives to state-sanctioned historiography. Blackburn and Hack further assert that the state acquiesces to communal propagation of Chinese war memory, as long as it is confined to “separate deathscapes and stories” outside of Malay remembrance.<sup>93</sup> The segregation of Chinese war memory from national remembrance speaks to the perpetuation of continued separateness. How this separateness became entrenched within the Malayan/Malaysian socio-political construct is the overriding theme explored in this chapter.

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<sup>88</sup> See: Wong, “Memory Suppression;” Cheah Boon Kheng, “Memory as History;” Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory*; Ting, “Battle Over Memory.”

<sup>89</sup> See: Geoff Wade, “The Origins and Evolution of Ethnocracy in Malaysia,” ARI Working Paper Series No. 112, (Singapore: Asia Research Institute, 2009), 31-33; Moses Samuel and Meng Yew Tee, “Malaysia: Ethnocracy and Education,” in *Education in South-East Asia*, ed. Lorraine Pe Symaco (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

<sup>90</sup> Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory*, 258.

<sup>91</sup> Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory*, 6-7.

<sup>92</sup> Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory*, 341.

<sup>93</sup> Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory*, 336.

The making of the Chinese as “essential outsiders” is fundamental to understanding how the process of racialising ethnicities is intrinsically entwined with the marginalisation of minority histories and the development of various ethnic essentialisms in Malaysia.<sup>94</sup> The theme of Otherness will be developed in the progressive course of this thesis to illustrate why nuanced bases for war memory silences cannot be sufficiently explained by contemporary socio-political contestations alone. Rather, the struggle for inclusion within the national historiography is reflective of competing visions of Malaysian nationalism. Undergirding these contestations are complications of identity, (un)belonging and inclusion/exclusion.

In this chapter, we explore the textural composition of Chinese Otherness. We examine how prior to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Chinese were welcomed as migrant labourers and indispensable comprador by the British colonial administration, later feared as irredentists with Sino-centric nationalist aspirations and during the Japanese occupation, as betrayers of the ‘Asian brotherhood’ within the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere ‘family.’ It will be illustrated that throughout these historical periods, the characterisation of the Chinese as outsiders was a mainstay of multiple colonial administrations’ divide-and-rule doctrines. This chapter is presented through epithets; they serve to emphasise racial dogmas which underpin notions of Chinese Otherness.

## Heaven-sent Coolies

While the presence of early Chinese settlers in Malaya can be traced to the time of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), migration flows did not begin in earnest until maritime trade routes between China and the Southeast Asian region were firmly established.<sup>95</sup> There were several pronounced periods of migration, among them the ‘Ming gush’ of the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, the ‘Qing spurts’ of late 17<sup>th</sup> to early 18<sup>th</sup> century and the ‘colonial flood’ of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>96</sup> The latter torrent was fuelled by disasters both natural and man-made in the form of famines and floods, rebellion and revolution. Even as Qing China unravelled, prohibitive immigration policies to stem Chinese migration were enacted in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and America. Following routes of least resistance, the southern

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<sup>94</sup> Anthony Reid, *Imperial Alchemy: Nationalism and Political Identity in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 49-80.

<sup>95</sup> For early Sino-Malay encounters based on archaeological evidence, see: Zhou and Tang, *History of Sino-Malaysian Interactions*.

<sup>96</sup> Anthony Reid, “Flows and Seepages in the Long-term Chinese Interaction with Southeast Asia.”

seafaring provinces of Guangdong and Fujian disgorged its inhabitants in the direction of Southeast Asia.<sup>97</sup>

In British Malaya, the floodgates had already been thrown wide open. An earlier agreement in 1860 between China's imperial court and the British government allowed for unfettered flows of Chinese labourers to British colonies under Chinese protection. The colonial administration in Malaya was quick to absorb these migrants. Among their ranks was the colonial officer Frank Swettenham, who welcomed what he perceived to be Chinese intrepidity, as opposed to the risk-averse British capitalists, in the development of tin-mining enterprises. Most of all, he recognised the value of the "heaven-sent Chinese toiler" or coolie.<sup>98</sup> Swettenham was not alone in his views; colonial records of the time reflect similar preponderance for crediting Chinese industriousness in developing the colonial economy.<sup>99</sup> Even among detractors such as James Brooke, the White Rajah of Sarawak – whose first encounter with the Chinese in Singapore had led him to deride them as dirty yellow in colour, with filthy habits and an unbecoming, clumsy gait – the allure of cheap Chinese labour was difficult to ignore.<sup>100</sup> The perceived value of the Chinese coolie was influenced by colonial stereotypes: one Chinaman, it was thought, was equivalent to two Klings (Southern Indians) or four Malays.<sup>101</sup> This comparison was born of the belief that the native Malays were unsuited to hard work.<sup>102</sup> In comparison, the Chinese seemed adaptable to a variety of occupations and trades.<sup>103</sup>

It was not until 1930 when the impact of the Great Depression was felt in Malaya that measures to control Chinese migrant numbers were imposed.

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<sup>97</sup> Joyce Ee, "Chinese Migration to Singapore, 1896-1941," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2, 1 (1961): 33–51.

<sup>98</sup> Frank Swettenham, *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya* (London: John Lane, 1907), 292.

<sup>99</sup> Vaughan for example wrote in 1879 that "for the most part [the Chinese] are permanent residents and identify themselves with the interests of the Colony. They are the most active, industrious, and persevering of all. They equal or surpass the Europeans in developing the resources of the Colony;" Jonas Daniel Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements* (1879, repr. London: British Library Historical Print Editions, 2011), 4.

<sup>100</sup> Robert Payne, *The White Rajahs of Sarawak*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986, 22; quoted in Lynn Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor: The Story of the Overseas Chinese* (1990, repr. London: Mandarin, 1991), 39.

<sup>101</sup> The origin of this analogy has been credited to John Crawfurd, the governor of the Straits Settlements from 1823 to 1826; Vaughan, *Manners and Customs*, 3.

<sup>102</sup> Alfred Russell Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-Utan and the Bird of Paradise, Volume II* (London: Macmillan, 1869), 440-444.

<sup>103</sup> Vaughan, who resided in Malaya between 1851 and 1891, painstakingly lists some 110 prevalent Chinese occupations and trades he encountered in Malaya, followed by detailed accounts of Chinese thieves, gang robbers, domestic servants and physicians. Interestingly, he omits opium traders or users, whom Isabelle L. Bird, a fellow explorer who visited Malaya in 1879, included in her observations. See: Vaughan, *Manners and Customs*, 16-22.

However, by then, the socio-economic landscape of Malaya had been irreversibly transformed. In 1931, the Chinese represented 39 percent of the population to 44 percent of Malays; in 1938, there were almost equal numbers of Chinese to Malays; and by 1941, the Chinese marginally outnumbered the Malays.<sup>104</sup> Malaya had become, at least in terms of population, “as much a Chinese as a Malay country.”<sup>105</sup>

## Jews of the East

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese participation in Malayan industry and commerce was ubiquitous. Travelling through Malaya in 1879, the British explorer Isabella L. Bird noted: “The Chinese may be said to be everywhere, and the Malays nowhere. You have to look for them if you want to see them.”<sup>106</sup> The Malayan economic structure soon resembled those in other Southeast Asian colonial outposts “with Europeans at the top, Chinese in the middle, and natives at the bottom.”<sup>107</sup> In this arrangement, “all that the natives sold to Europeans they sold through Chinese, and all that the natives bought from Europeans they bought through Chinese.”<sup>108</sup>

The increasingly pivotal role of the Chinese soon evoked darker sentiments and they came to be seen as “pariah entrepreneurs.”<sup>109</sup> Even Swettenham, an early admirer, denigrated the Chinese as “the bees who suck the honey from every profitable undertaking.”<sup>110</sup> This depiction was echoed by other colonial administrators. “Whenever money is to be acquired by the peaceful exercise of agriculture, by handicrafts, by the opening of mines of tin, iron ore or gold,” wrote Captain T.J. Newbold, “amidst savage hordes and wild forests, there will be found the greedy Chinese.”<sup>111</sup> The popular expression “Jews of the East” came to represent the Chinese as a people whose thriftiness, work ethic and business acumen was estimable, but whose moral compass was questionable.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>104</sup> 1931 figures from Richard Winstedt, “Malaya,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 226 (1943): 97; 1938 figures are from Ian Morrison, *Malayan Postscript* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1943), 19; 1941 figures are from Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 318.

<sup>105</sup> Raymond Kennedy, “Malaya: Colony without Plan,” *Far Eastern Survey* 14, 16 (1945): 225.

<sup>106</sup> Bird, *Golden Chersonese*, 201.

<sup>107</sup> Kennedy, “Malaya,” 226.

<sup>108</sup> Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), 431.

<sup>109</sup> Reid, *Imperial Alchemy*, 56.

<sup>110</sup> Frank Swettenham, *The Real Malay* (London: John Lane, 1900), 38-39.

<sup>111</sup> T.J. Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca, Volume 1* (London: John Murray, 1839), 10.

<sup>112</sup> The term ‘Jews of the East’ has been credited to Thai King Wachirawut (Rama VI) , who issued a pamphlet of the same title in 1914 deriding the Chinese as a

They were, according to contemporary colonial assessments, clannish and insular in temperament, venal and crafty in matters of business, inscrutable and untrustworthy in their intentions and the least amenable to discipline among the Asiatics.<sup>113</sup>

It would be easy to brush aside the above characterisations as outpourings of envy or xenophobia, if not for the reality that growing Chinese numbers, wealth and influence were proving increasingly troublesome for the colonial administration. A case in point was the internecine fighting between the various Chinese *kongsi* or secret societies. The *kongsi* served to band Chinese labourers according to trade, dialect groupings or provincial origins. Their clashes spilled over into the Chinese population at large and led to mass unrest. Conflicts were recorded in Penang, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Singapore.<sup>114</sup>

Chinese competition also evoked the ire of locals, which led to multiple interracial clashes: the extermination of Chinese gold miners in Pulau in 1800, the massacre of Malays by Chinese tin miners in Lukut in 1824, the killing of Chinese in the gold-mining area of upriver Kelantan in the 1830s, and the quashing of a rebellion led by Chinese tin-miners in Sungei Ujong in 1860.<sup>115</sup> The Chinese also meddled in local politics by taking sides between warring Malay royal houses. The Selangor civil war, for example, which began as a dispute between Raja Mahdi and Sultan Abdul Samad, soon involved the participation of opposing Chinese factions.<sup>116</sup> Such disturbances necessitated increased British mediation, thus accelerating de facto British control across the territory.<sup>117</sup>

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'Yellow Peril' alongside anti-Semitic rhetoric; see: Walter P. Zenner, *Minorities in the Middle: A Cross-Cultural Analysis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 55-56; Tong Chee Kiong, *Identity and Ethnic Relations in Southeast Asia: Racializing Chineseness* (New York: Springer, 2010), 36.

<sup>113</sup> These generalisations are credited to various colonial personalities, among them Stamford Raffles, Frank Swettenham, Walter H. Medhurst, Arnold Wright and Thomas H. Reid. See: Purcell, *Chinese in Southeast Asia*, 408; Charles Hirschman, "The Making of Race in Colonial Malaya: Political Economy and Racial Ideology," *Sociological Forum* 1, 2 (1986): 346-347.

<sup>114</sup> For more details of Chinese in-group clashes, see: Purcell, *Chinese in Malaya*, 155-173; Carstens, *Histories*, 14-19.

<sup>115</sup> For more details on inter-racial clashes, see: Anthony Reid, "Entrepreneurial Minorities, Nationalism, and the State," in *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe*, eds. David Chiot and Anthony Reid (London: University of Washington Press, 1997), 47; and Purcell, *Chinese in Malaya*, 102-103.

<sup>116</sup> This account of the Selangor civil war is drawn from Carstens, *Histories*, 14-19.

<sup>117</sup> Following the Selangor civil war, the sultan, at the encouragement of the Chinese, accepted a British Resident to cement his interest and enforce order in the state. States which did not previously have formal 'protectorate' status with the British were similarly absorbed into the colonial system, either to quell rampant Malay piracy or Chinese in-fighting, or resolve inter-racial or intra-royalty disputes.

As neutral civilians without formal allegiance to either the Malay rulers or the British colonial administration, the Chinese proved to be unwilling subjects; if obeisance was required, it was given grudgingly. When the rules did not suit, they were quick to retaliate. The only authority they recognised was that of the various Capitans of each locality. Nowhere was this more pronounced than in the capital of British Malaya especially during Yap Ah Loy's tenure.<sup>118</sup> Having rebuilt Kuala Lumpur three times over during the 10-year Selangor civil war, he had an inflated sense of his own importance and authority, as illustrated by this vignette: when the British attempted to widen the roads on his property and offered another land in return, he replied that what was offered was his already.<sup>119</sup> His attitude frustrated a colonial administration keen to project its sovereignty.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the formal enactment of discriminatory policies to stem migrant, particularly Chinese, influence. The language employed was unabashedly racial. The Malays, it was reasoned, should be privileged because they were permanent settlers as opposed to transient migrants. Mobility within the higher ranks of the British colonial administration was thus restricted to those of Malay ethnicity only. In reality this privilege was extended exclusively to members of the Malay ruling class, whose offspring were granted the privilege of elite British education in preparation for civil service.

While the British succeeded in preserving the political realm for the Malay elite, they could not effectively prevent the erosion of Malay economic interests. Attempts were therefore set in motion to defend those interests, among them the prohibition of the sale of *kampung* land by Malays to foreigners. Such policies were presented as a paternalistic exercise, a concept which arose from the unique colonial structure practised in Malaya, whereby the British exercised de facto rule through a protectorate system. This arrangement dictated the placement of British Residents in the various territories, whose guidance the Sultans had to accede to, thus maintaining the "fictive façade of native self rule."<sup>120</sup> The British therefore did not claim to be colonisers; rather the justification for continued British control rested

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<sup>118</sup> Bird remarked for example that "Actually the leading man, not only at Kwala Lumpur (now the seat of government), but in Selangor, is Ah Loi, a Chinaman!;" Bird, *Golden Chersonese*, 220.

<sup>119</sup> This account of Yap Ah Loy's exploits is drawn from Carstens, *Histories*, 19-21, and Bird, *Golden Chersonese*, 220-221.

<sup>120</sup> According to Kennedy, "Malaya approached more closely than any other country in Southeast Asia the classic imperialistic status of a subject land ruled completely by an oligarchy of colonial officials sent from the mother country;" Kennedy, "Malaya," 225.

upon the perpetuation of a patronage system between the colonial administration and its Malay ruler charges.<sup>121</sup>

While the Chinese were thought to be rapacious, the Malays were assumed to be naïve. Certainly some colonial administrators genuinely believed that the Malays would be overrun if the British did not intercede on their behalf. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century boom phase, many Malays had become rent-seekers and revenue collectors. According to colonial wisdom, this had reduced the Malays to “a debtor race in the midst of plenty.”<sup>122</sup> Such sentiments were echoed in Malay land reservation legislation, enacted to restrict the sale of land “to prevent [Malays] from prodigally and improvidently divesting themselves of their birthright and inheritance.”<sup>123</sup> In some measure, such legislation was regressive for Malays; it encouraged Malay peasantry at large to remain in *kampung* settlements, thus fixing Malays to traditional agrarian pursuits.<sup>124</sup> Cumulatively, the effect of these policies augmented racial differentiation, not only economically but also geographically, with the urban population remaining primarily Chinese and the Malay predominantly rural.<sup>125</sup>

## Irredentists and Subversives

In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, British anxiety was heightened by the transposing of revolutionary fervour from China to the local scene. It was recognised that there were early Chinese settlers who had acculturated to the local landscape and native cultures, among them the creolised *Peranakan*. There were also Chinese educated in Western ways who had abandoned their native dialects and who considered Malaya their home. To these Chinese sub-groups, China was a “remote memory” and a “distant romantic notion.”<sup>126</sup> The influx from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to early 20<sup>th</sup> century however was of a different ilk. Having witnessed the

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<sup>121</sup> The concept of this paternalistic relationship was underpinned by, in Hirschman’s opinion, the characterisation of the Malays as an inept race incapable of self rule, Hirschman, “Making of Race,” 344. The legacy of this ideology is exemplified by early British objections to self-government in postwar Malaya. Hawkins for example likened this to “the unwisdom of giving a child of ten a latch-key, a gun and a cheque book;” Hawkins, “Marking Time,” 82.

<sup>122</sup> Winstedt, “Malaya,” 107.

<sup>123</sup> SSF 3013/1912: An Enactment to Preserve to the Malays the Use of their Kampung Lands, ANM, quoted in Bashiran Begum Mobarak Ali and Nor Asiah Mohamad, “The ‘Red-Ink Grants’: The Malays and the Land,” *International Islamic University Law Journal* 15, 2 (2007): 278.

<sup>124</sup> Bashiran Begum Mobarak Ali, “The Red-Ink Grant: Tracing Legitimacy in History,” *Journal of Malaysian and Comparative Law* 34, 1 (2007): 159-184.

<sup>125</sup> In 1931, the proportion of the urban population by ethnicity was 68.3% Chinese, 17.4% Malay and 11.4% Indians; Eunice Cooper, “Urbanization in Malaya,” *Population Studies* 5, 2 (1951): 122.

<sup>126</sup> Rupert Emerson, “The Chinese in Malaysia,” *Pacific Affairs* 7, 3 (1934): 263.



humiliation of China at the hands of Westerners, these migrants were more politically conscious and less beholden to the British. They were not merely sojourners incentivised to eke out a living; some were fugitives from failed uprisings against the Qing imperial court. Reportedly, thousands fled to Malaya and swelled the ranks of secret societies there.<sup>127</sup> Further, among this cohort, there were patriots who viewed their wealth and their interaction with Western cultures as a means to modernising China and restoring her rightful place in the world.<sup>128</sup> Colonial opinion was thus divided on Chinese nationalist sentiments; it was thought that some had a “passive sympathy with China’s affairs,” while others were actively “participating in China’s struggles,” and then, there were subversive elements who regarded Malaya potentially as “the nineteenth province of China.”<sup>129</sup>

Indeterminate and factionalised Chinese allegiances aroused British suspicions. There was little substantiating evidence that Chinese nationalist sentiments during this time were subversive. Nonetheless, the British regarded such sentiments as imminent threats.<sup>130</sup> This impression was magnified by the activities of prominent mainland Chinese activists, among them the reformist Kang Yu-wei (Kang Youwei) and the nationalist revolutionary Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan), who campaigned across Malaya, stirring up patriotic pride and even converting those previously passive to the cause of remaking China anew. With the death of Emperor Kuang Hsu (Guangxu) in 1908, reformist fervour faded. Nationalist zeal however found new expression in the mushrooming of Tung Meng

<sup>127</sup> By 1876, it was estimated that there were 34,000 secret society members in Singapore and Penang alone, see: James A. Cook, “A Transnational Revolution: Sun Yat-Sen, Overseas Chinese, and the Revolutionary Movement in Xiamen, 1900-12,” in *Sun Yat-Sen: Nanyang and the 1911 Revolution*, eds. Lee Lai To and Lee Hock Guan (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011), 178-179. On the political affiliations of secret societies and triads with Kuomintang and communist factions in Malaya, see: Leon Comber, “Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya: An Introduction,” *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 29, 1 (1956): 146-162.

<sup>128</sup> The case of the prominent Malayan Chinese leader Tan Kah Kee (Chen Jiageng) is illustrative. Billed as the ‘Henry Ford of Malaya,’ Tan founded Xiamen University and the Jimei Schools in Fujian province to promote educational reform as a means of modernising China. See: Tan Kah Kee, *The Memoirs of Tan Kah Kee*, ed. trans. A.H.C. Ward, Raymond W. Chu and Janet Salaff. (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1994), 11. Another example is Tan Chor Nam (Chen Jingnan) who founded Southeast Asia’s first revolutionary newspaper and distributed thousands of Zou Ron’s anti-Manchu pamphlet, *Geming jun* [*The Revolutionary Army*], throughout Southeast Asia and Southern China; see: Cook, “Transnational Revolution,” 179-180.

<sup>129</sup> Emerson, “Chinese in Malaysia,” 262.

<sup>130</sup> Png argues that Chinese revolutionary zeal did not extend to Malaya’s affairs; Png Poh Seng, “The Kuomintang in Malaya, 1912-1941,” *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2, 1 (1961): 1-32. Cook posits that Overseas Chinese who became involved in mainland politics did so because they not only wanted to affect change in China, but also hoped that a strong China could benefit their positions in their adopted country; Cook, “Transnational Revolution.”

Hui branches across Malaya, which raised funds and recruited volunteers for revolutionary activities.<sup>131</sup> Chinese from Malaya were implicated in several uprisings in China, including the Xinhai Revolution which led to the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912. Among the legacies of this fledgling nationalist movement was the erosion of traditional social barriers between Chinese subgroups and an emerging social cohesion.<sup>132</sup>

While apprehensive of growing Chinese political activism, the colonial administration remained initially neutral. However, following the establishment of the Chinese republic, there was a discernible increase in the numbers of Chinese schools and informal 'reading groups' and 'night schools' staffed by teachers imported from China. There was also evidence of growing leftist elements, due in part to the infiltration of communist ideals among splintered Kuomintang factions. Such patriotic indoctrination was tinged with anti-Western rhetoric reflective of current events on the mainland, in particular the continued humiliation of China at foreign hands.<sup>133</sup> The British took preemptive measures including the banning of Chinese political associations and censorship of the Chinese press. These were justified, according to Sir Cecil Clementi, governor of the Straits Settlement, on the grounds that the Chinese were perpetuating "subversive propaganda" which regarded Malaya "as *terra irredenta* one day to be dominated by China."<sup>134</sup> Unbeknown to the authorities, Chinese activism would soon escalate to hitherto unprecedented levels with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war.

## Overseas Chinese Compatriots

Antagonism had been simmering since the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895.<sup>135</sup> Following each successive military defeat, the tide of anti-Japanese feelings had swelled, resulting in sporadic boycotts of Japanese goods.<sup>136</sup> When total war

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<sup>131</sup> Tung Meng Hui is the predecessor of the Kuomintang (Guomindang) or Nationalist Party. For details, see: Png, "Kuomintang in Malaya."

<sup>132</sup> On how these activities enhanced communal solidarity, see: Stephen Leong, "The Chinese in Malaya and China's Politics 1896-1911," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 50, 2 (1977): 7-24; and Yen Ching-Hwang, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia and beyond: Socioeconomic and Political Dimensions* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2008), 149-210.

<sup>133</sup> On Sino-foreign interaction which precipitated China's 'century of humiliation,' see: Robert Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1832-1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

<sup>134</sup> Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements 1930, B26; quoted in Png, "Kuomintang in Malaya," 22.

<sup>135</sup> Reid, *Imperial Alchemy*, 62-67.

<sup>136</sup> See: Leong, "Chinese in Malaya," 20-21; Yong Ching Fatt, "A Preliminary Study of Chinese Leadership in Singapore, 1900-1941," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 9, 2 (1968): 278-279; C.F. Yong, "The Malayan Communist Struggle for

erupted between Japan and China in 1937, it ignited a firestorm of anti-Japanese sentiments among the Chinese in Malaya, including coolie strikes at ports, labour walkouts at Japanese mines and companies, as well as the harassment of Japanese nationals.<sup>137</sup> Stories of atrocities and destitution in China led to the swift establishment of China Relief Fund associations throughout Malaya. Eminent communal elite such as Tan Kah Kee (Chen Jiageng) exhorted fellow Overseas Chinese compatriots to fulfil their duty “in the most severe crisis of survival that our country has faced in its history.”<sup>138</sup> By October 1937, in the space of three months, the movement raised C\$6.6m, an average of C\$3 per Chinese man, woman and child in Malaya.<sup>139</sup> In late 1938, when Japanese forces blockaded Chinese ports, almost 1,000 Chinese volunteers from Malaya offered themselves for duty on the Burma Road front to transport Allied supplies into South China.

Anti-Japanese resistance efforts were not limited to Malaya. At the behest of the Chungking (Chongqing) nationalist government, the region-wide Federation of China Relief Fund of the South Seas was established on 10 October 1938, the date timed to coincide with the anniversary of the founding of the republic. Tan Kah Kee was elected chairman, while nationalist officials Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi), Wang Ching-wei (Wang Jingwei) and H.H. Kung (Kong Xiangxi) were named honorary chairmen. Among the 21 officials within this organisation, six hailed from the Philippines, Indonesia, Indochina and Burma, the rest from Malaya. As the war progressed, financial support from the Overseas Chinese became increasingly integral to China’s war effort. By 1940, almost half of all contributions from Southeast Asia originated from Malaya.<sup>140</sup>

The colonial administration, while sympathetic to events in China, cautioned restraint, reminding the Chinese that they were in Malaya “sheltering under British law and justice” and that they could not act with impunity “as if Malaya were a province of China.”<sup>141</sup> The phlegmatic response to Japanese belligerence in China echoed that of Whitehall. The British policy of rapprochement towards Japan was guided by multiple motives: on one hand, there was the need to contain Japanese expansion while safeguarding British interests in China; on the other,

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Survival, 1930-1935,” *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 69, 2 (1996): 13.

<sup>137</sup> Leong, “Malayan Overseas Chinese,” 297-299.

<sup>138</sup> Tan, *Memoirs*, 65.

<sup>139</sup> For details, see: Stephen Leong, “The Kuomintang-Communist United Front in Malaya during the National Salvation Period, 1937-1941,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 8, 1 (1977): 31-47.

<sup>140</sup> Between November 1938 and December 1940, remittances from Malaya were C\$30.4 million; this represented 47 percent of total Overseas Chinese contributions from Southeast Asia; see: Leong, “Malayan Overseas Chinese,” 307.

<sup>141</sup> Proceedings of the Legislative Council, Straits Settlements, 31 Oct. 1938, B98, quoted in Leong, “Malayan Overseas Chinese,” 305.

harsh reprisals could potentially drive an isolated Japan closer to Germany.<sup>142</sup> Further, Malaya was of considerable value to the empire and Japanese trade was vital to the economy.

India may have been the British Empire's "jewel in the crown" but Malaya was her "industrial diamond" worth an estimated £227.5m.<sup>143</sup> By 1920, Malaya's exports and imports represented 43 percent of the combined total of all British crown colonies and accounted for half of the world's output of tin and rubber.<sup>144</sup> Among non-Europeans, the Chinese were responsible for 80 percent of the tin and ranked second for ownership of rubber land by acreage.<sup>145</sup> In terms of the aggregate economy, Chinese assets amounted to £40 million compared to £90 million in British and other European investments.<sup>146</sup> War in Europe enhanced Malaya's value. The Straits Settlements alone contributed £1 million to the Imperial Defense Fund in 1939 and earmarked SS\$2 million on a yearly basis after that, while contributions from the Malay states totalled more than SS\$4 million.<sup>147</sup> To maintain the British as allies in China's War of Resistance and to demonstrate their gratitude, the Chinese community established the Malayan Patriotic Fund for Great Britain.<sup>148</sup>

Like the British, the Japanese had substantial economic interests in Malaya. The *Nanshin Seisaku* (southward advance) policy spearheaded by the government-backed *Nanyo Kyokai* (South Seas Society) had led to Japanese holdings in the iron, manganese and bauxite mining industries. Established in

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<sup>142</sup> For British considerations for appeasement and the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of July 1939, see: Aron Shai, *Origins of the War in the East: Britain, China and Japan 1937-39* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 207-230.

<sup>143</sup> Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, 33.

<sup>144</sup> Hawkins, "Marking Time," 78; Victor Purcell, "Malaya's Problems Today," *World Affairs* 112, 2 (1949): 46.

<sup>145</sup> Often Chinese holdings surpassed those of other Asians. For example, from a total of 233 approved applications by non-Europeans for rubber land in Selangor and Negeri Sembilan from 1909 to 1910, 71% were Chinese; J.H. Drabble, "Investment in the Rubber Industry in Malaya C. 1900-1922," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 3, 2 (1972): 252. For Johor, ownership by acreage in 1934 was recorded as 278,000 (Europeans), 160,000 (Chinese), 54,000 (Japanese), 14,000 (Indians) and 3,000 (Malays); Yuen Choy Leng "Japanese Rubber and Iron Investments in Malaya, 1900-1941," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 5, 1 (1974): 19.

<sup>146</sup> 1937 estimates; Purcell, *Chinese in Malaya*, 235.

<sup>147</sup> Alvin Barber, "British Malaya on a War Footing," *Far Eastern Survey* 9, 1 (1940): 4. On the economic significance of Britain's dominions during the war, see: W.E. Simnett, "Britain's Colonies in the War," *Foreign Affairs* 19, 3 (1941): 655-664.

<sup>148</sup> The fund also remitted £375,000 via the Malayan Information Agency to London and £575,000 towards the Malayan Bomber Fund; Purcell, *Chinese in Malaya*, 245. According to the 1939 annual report of the Secretary for Chinese Affairs in Malaya, the Chinese residents of Kedah state alone raised SS\$20,000 between September and December towards Britain's war chest; Leong, "Malayan Overseas Chinese," 306.

1913, the *Nanyo Kyokai* performed a similar function to the British East India Company, cultivating trade relationships in Southeast Asia and developing Japan's access to raw materials and markets in the region.<sup>149</sup> By 1933, Japanese trade accounted for 68 percent of total imports into Malaya.<sup>150</sup>

Chinese boycotts and strikes threatened resources needed by Japan's war machinery. For example, activities at the Japanese-owned Dungeon Iron Mine in Kelantan, which shipped about 2 million tonnes of iron ore to Japan annually, were scuppered by the walk-out of 2,700 Chinese workers.<sup>151</sup> Chinese boycotts impacted Japanese exports to Malaya, which fell from a height of 71.3 million yen to 22.9 million yen in 1937.<sup>152</sup> The continued loss in export earnings became so severe that the *Nanyo Kyokai* convened conferences in Tokyo, Osaka-Kobe and Nagoya in September 1939 to address the issue.<sup>153</sup>

It was not until July 1941 that the British took decisive steps to freeze Japanese assets in Malaya, a move precipitated by growing suspicion of Japanese ambitions in the region. By then Japanese trade with Malaya had dwindled considerably, a result of Chinese boycotts and the implementation of export controls to divert resources to the British war effort. Under the circumstances, the British action was hardly hostile. To mollify the developing situation, regulations were eased for the evacuation of Japanese residents from Malaya.<sup>154</sup>

While Manchuria, North China and Korea formed the economic bedrock of Japan's expanded empire, the combination of military stalemate in China, Allied embargoes, and low trade volume with Asia exacted a heavy toll on Japan's capability to maintain her extraterritorial ambitions.<sup>155</sup> Thus Japan began to

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<sup>149</sup> The *Nanyo Kyokai's* other functions included emigrant resettlement projects, disseminating business intelligence and coordinating Japanese trade efforts. See: Akashi Yoji, "The Nanyo Kyokai and British Malaya and Singapore, 1941-45."

<sup>150</sup> On the economic importance of Japan's southward expansion; see: Harold M. Vinacke, "Implications of Japanese Foreign Policy for the Philippines and Southeastern Asia," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 226 (1943): 56-57.

<sup>151</sup> Xu Hai Lang, "A Fighter's Thoughts on Anti-Aggression," in *The Price of Peace: True Accounts of the Japanese Occupation*, ed. Foong Choon Hon (Singapore: Asiapac Books, 1998).

<sup>152</sup> Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 16.

<sup>153</sup> Japanese exports to British Malaya fell by 60% between 1932 and 1938; Akashi, "Nanyo Kyokai," 29.

<sup>154</sup> Virginia Thompson, "Japan Frozen out of British Malaya," *Far Eastern Survey* 10, 20 (1941): 237-240.

<sup>155</sup> For details on Japan's war economy, including the impact of deteriorating stockpiles and declining production on her ability to efficiently wage a protracted war, see: Jerome B. Cohen, "The Japanese War Economy: 1940-1945," *Far Eastern Survey* 1, 24 (1946): 361-370. On the significance of Chinese merchants to Japanese trade in Asia, see: Kaoru Sugihara, "The Economic Motivations behind Japanese Aggression in the Late 1930s: Perspectives of Freda Utey and Nawa Toichi," *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, 2 (1997): 259-280.

contemplate the resource-rich colonies in the south. While economic necessity was a deciding factor, other considerations played their part, among them the need to bolster regional security and the desire to cement Japan's prestige as a major power.<sup>156</sup> In the following sections, we will see how these factors shaped Japanese occupation practice in the administration of Malaya, and in particular, against the Chinese in the territory.

## Nanyo Kakyo

The confluence of timely opportunism and economic necessity presaged Japan's southward advance. The war in Europe was proving fortuitous, given that the Allies were preoccupied with Nazi Germany. The stealthy encroachment into the southern colonies, timed in concert with events unfolding in Europe, followed familiar Japanese international relations and military modus operandi, a process likened by the American political analyst Evans Fordyce Carlson to "piece-meal mastication."<sup>157</sup> Following French capitulation, Japan – with the aid of German pressure on the Vichy government – demanded the prohibition of supplies to China through the French colony of Indochina. Simultaneously, by threatening Hong Kong, Japan applied pressure on the British government to close the Burma Road for three months, thus effectively blocking access to Yunnan in southern China. This was followed in September 1941 by the stationing of Japanese troops in Indochina leading to its eventual occupation. From this position of strength, Japan elicited Thailand's capitulation and both Indochina and Thailand were officially subsumed into Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

Having secured her footing in Southeast Asia, the Imperial Japanese Army was now poised to take on the British possessions of Malaya and Burma.<sup>158</sup> A decisive victory in the former would eliminate Britain's participation in the region, while subjugation of the latter would tighten her stranglehold on southern China. Control of both would assure Japan's eventual domination of Southeast Asia. Japan's military elite was convinced that "he who controls the tropics will control

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<sup>156</sup> For an overview of Japanese imperialist strategies and motivations, see: A.J. Grajdanzev, "Japan's Co-Prosperity Sphere," *Pacific Affairs* 16, 3 (1943): 311–328.

<sup>157</sup> Evans Fordyce Carlson, "Strategy of the Sino-Japanese War," *Far Eastern Survey* 10, 9 (1941): 100. Writing in May 1941, Carlsson forewarned that Singapore would be a likely target for "most of [Japan's] problems in the Far East would be solved by the occupation of this strategic point, for then all of eastern Asia would fall into her arms at one fell swoop," 103.

<sup>158</sup> On Burma's geostrategic importance as a launching point for Japanese expansion plans in Southeast Asia, see: Clarence Hendershot, "Burma's Value to the Japanese," *Far Eastern Survey* 11, 16 (1942): 176–178.

the world.”<sup>159</sup> By expanding the boundaries of the existing Co-Prosperity Sphere, and converting the territories of the southern region according to economies of specialisation, Japan would have at her behest an integrated and complementary economic model. This, it was reasoned, would “facilitate our acquisition of essential war materials and the self-support of the occupation forces,” thus providing the breakthrough necessary to alleviate Japan’s war of attrition in China.<sup>160</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Masanobu Tsuji of the Doro Nawa Unit was tasked with the feasibility study on conducting war against British Malaya.<sup>161</sup> He concluded that successful occupation would greatly enhance Japan’s access to resources and enable the Imperial Army “to hold out in a protracted struggle.”<sup>162</sup> However, control of Malaya was complicated by the presence of the economically-significant *Nanyo Kakyo* or South Seas Overseas Chinese. Pre-invasion deliberations within the Japanese military administration did not yield common consensus on appropriate *Kakyo* policy in Malaya. Some favoured a hard-line approach to succumb the Chinese to Japanese will; others preferred a conciliatory attitude aimed at soliciting Chinese cooperation.<sup>163</sup> It was reasoned that if the support of the *Kakyo* could be harnessed, it could be directed against the ‘bandit’ Chiang Kai-shek and legitimise the puppet Manchukuo government of Wang Ching-wei.<sup>164</sup> However, rousing enthusiasm for the Wang regime proved difficult. Correspondence between the Malayan entrepreneur Tan Kah Kee and Wang Ching-wei suggests that there was little Overseas Chinese support for capitulation to Japanese demands.<sup>165</sup> Several clandestine Japanese missions to ‘win the hearts’ of the Chinese prior to invasion failed to deliver any positive results.<sup>166</sup> The Chinese, it appeared, were resolutely anti-Japanese.

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<sup>159</sup> Charles A. Fisher, “The Expansion of Japan: A Study in Oriental Geopolitics: Part II. The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere,” *The Geographical Journal* 115, 4/6 (1950): 183.

<sup>160</sup> From occupation policy directive presented by Finance Minister Kaya Okinori at the Imperial Conference of 5 November 1941; quoted in Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War 1931-1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 155.

<sup>161</sup> Based in Taipei, the Doro Nawa Unit was also known as the Taiwan Army Research Centre. For details on its intelligence-gathering activities and proposed military strategy for Malaya, see: Masanobu, *Japan’s Greatest Victory*, 2-10.

<sup>162</sup> Masanobu, *Japan’s Greatest Victory*, 14-15.

<sup>163</sup> Akashi Yoji, “Japanese Policy towards the Malayan Chinese 1941-1945,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 1, 2 (1970): 61-62.

<sup>164</sup> Prevalent Japanese propaganda of the time portrayed Chiang Kai-shek as a tool of the United States and Britain and a betrayer of the Chinese people, see: Saul K. Padover, “Japanese Race Propaganda,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 7, 2 (1943): 191-204.

<sup>165</sup> See cables between Tan Kah Kee and Wang Ching-wei dated October 22-23, 1938; Tan, *Memoirs*, 134-135.

<sup>166</sup> Overtures made by the espionage agency F Kikan towards the Chinese is discussed in Akashi, “Japanese Policy,” 62-63. In other accounts, F Kikan had more success in eliciting support from Malay segments of the population, see:

On 8 December 1941, an hour and a half prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbour, the Imperial Japanese 25<sup>th</sup> Army invaded the northeast of the Malay Peninsula. After a campaign lasting 70 days, the British forces surrendered unconditionally at Singapore on 15 February 1942. Two days later, General Tomoyuki Yamashita gave the order to conduct *shukusei* (cleansing) activities against 'undesirable' elements, ranging from suspected criminals, communists to pro-British and anti-Japanese individuals.<sup>167</sup> The order was interpreted by officers and soldiers in the field as "a licence for summary killing," thus triggering the *sook ching* massacres.<sup>168</sup> While this order did not amount to the *sanguang* or 'three all' policy (kill all, burn all or loot all) practised in Nanjing, it nevertheless wreaked immeasurable havoc.

The Chinese population at large was regarded as suspect and treated as such. During the cleansing operations, Chinese civilians – primarily men aged 18 to 50, though in many cases women, children and the elderly as well – were ordered to assemble at various public spaces, temporary screening centres or detention camps, sometimes for hours or days, without food and water. Some thought they were meant to register for work or 'safe' passes. In other cases, a ruse was used to encourage compliance. In Taiping, the town's inhabitants were told to gather to receive favourable news.<sup>169</sup> They were then screened. Those who 'passed' were released, those who 'failed' were taken away; many were summarily executed. Similar scenes were played out across the territory: at a screening centre in Johor Bahru, one in five were taken away to dig their own graves at the Civil Service Club, others were machine-gunned along the seafront; in Malacca, around 90 members of the Straits Settlement Volunteer Forces (SSVF), including five Malay officers, were assembled along three trenches and shot; in Singapore,

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Fujiwara Iwaichi, *F Kikan: Japanese Army Intelligence Operations in Southeast Asia during World War II*, trans. Akashi Yoji (Hong Kong: Heinemann Asia, 1983). During the invasion of Malaya, F Kikan was also instrumental in persuading British Indian Army conscripts to disarm and hand in their weapons at Muar in Johor, see: Frei, *Guns of February*, 71.

<sup>167</sup> It should be noted that Yamashita denied knowledge of the purge conducted in Singapore. He blamed the commander of the Kempeitai but could not remember the name of the officer. See: Report on Interrogation of General Tomoyuki Yamashita by Major C.H.D. Wild, "E" Group, SEAC at Manila, 28 October 1945, WO325/30, TNA.

<sup>168</sup> Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, 211.

<sup>169</sup> Cheong Peng Yeap, "*Sejauh Manakah Pendudukan Jepun di Taiping Mempengaruhi Kehidupan Sehari-hari Komuniti Cina di Sana?*" [To What Extent Did the Japanese Occupation Affect the Daily Life of the Chinese Population in Taiping?] (Essay, Penang: Universiti Sains Malaysia); quoted in Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 99.



those killed at Changi Beach were so numerous that it took almost three weeks to bury their bodies.<sup>170</sup>

A typical screening scene involved filing past a Japanese officer, and beside him, a hooded or masked informer or sometimes a known Japanese resident.<sup>171</sup> The identities of the informers remain open to speculation. Some believed them to be renegade Taiwanese or Japanese agents, captured triad members, or simply individuals seeking revenge for past wrongdoings or favours with the new administration. At times, questions were asked about language, schooling and residence. Other times, the assembled were sorted *en masse*, by a show of hands or by category: civil servants, students, petty hawkers, and so on. In some cases, no words were exchanged, a cursory glance was all that was required; those with tattoos were thought to be triad members, while those from the Hainanese dialect subgroup were assumed to be communists. The educated – civil servants, lawyers and teachers – were also considered threats. Wearing spectacles was taken to be indicative of intellectual status. Thio Chan Bee recounted how he narrowly escaped by ignoring the order to assemble at the Jalan Besar camp in Singapore. There, two of his less fortunate but equally bespectacled colleagues were never seen again.<sup>172</sup>

The number of victims killed during this period has not been ascertained. In Singapore alone, 70,699 were captured; the number of survivors is unknown. Japanese propaganda justified these actions as a preemptive strike against anti-Japanese and criminal elements.<sup>173</sup> Details of massacres on the Malayan peninsula during this time are fragmented. It appears that villages, towns and cities with large Chinese populations were particularly affected. In some cases, the inhabitants of entire villages, such as those in Simpa, Parit Tinggi, Jelulung and Johol, were massacred.<sup>174</sup> In these locations, screening operations were dispensed with; men, women and children were rounded up and killed.

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<sup>170</sup> Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, 213-214.

<sup>171</sup> See: Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, 212; Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 99; Sterling Seagrave, *Lords of the Rim: The Invisible Empire of the Overseas Chinese* (London: Corgi, 1996), 175-176.

<sup>172</sup> Thio Chan Bee, *Extraordinary Adventures of an Ordinary Man* (London: Grosvenor Books, 1977), 36.

<sup>173</sup> A report by the news agency Domei on 3 March 1942 cites that those captured were anti-Japanese Chinese and anti-Axis persons; Cheah, *Red Star*, 22. In the *Asahi Shimbun* article of 4 March 1942, those captured were referred to as 'Chinese suspects'; Chua Ser Koon, "The Japanese's View of the War 50 Years After."

<sup>174</sup> Qiu Jing Fu, ed. *Rizhishiqi Senzhou Huazu Mengnan Shiliao* [A Historical Record of the Suffering of the Negeri Sembilan Chinese People under the Japanese Occupation] (Seremban: Negeri Sembilan Chinese Assembly Hall, 1988).

Scholars have since debated the severity and causes of the *sook ching* massacres. In his analysis of the *Malai Gunsei* or Japanese military administration in Malaya, Japanese historian Akashi Yoji concludes that, despite initial proposals to solicit Chinese cooperation, “the voice of moderation fell by the wayside.”<sup>175</sup> He fingers Watanabe Wataru, the deputy chief of the *gunsei*, as the primary voice of excess. According to Akashi, Watanabe’s previous experience of guerrilla resistance in China convinced him that the “crafty as anything and hard to control” Chinese “should be dealt with unsparingly.”<sup>176</sup>

Other historians have suggested that the last-stand battle for Singapore played its part in precipitating the massacres. During the siege, Japanese forces met with tenacious but ineffective defence on the part of Chinese irregulars of the SSVF. These volunteers had been called upon only two weeks before the Japanese arrival and were barely trained and poorly armed. Despite this, Ian Morrison, the Australian war correspondent for *The Times*, observed that they “put up a good fight” for “they had what the Indian and Malay troops lacked, personal venom against the Japanese, who for four years had been killing their fellow countrymen in China.” However, rather presciently, Morrison also predicted that this could lead to “terrible reprisals once the Japanese armed forces were in full control.”<sup>177</sup> Several historians, among them Cheah Boon Kheng, Paul H. Kratoska and Yap Hong Kuan, concur with Morrison’s view.<sup>178</sup>

Japanese historian Hayashi Hirofumi disagrees that the massacres were retaliatory, pointing to the lack of corroborative Japanese sources to substantiate this conjecture. He argues instead that the massacres were a progressive escalation of tactics adopted in China, pointing to Yamashita, who led the invasion forces, as “the link that connected Japanese atrocities in Manchuria and North China with those in Singapore.”<sup>179</sup> In his prior posting as Chief of Staff of the North China Army, he had become acquainted with Watanabe, then head of the *Tokomu Kikan* espionage unit. Hayashi suggests that Yamashita and Watanabe were staunch supporters of *genju shobun* (harsh disposal) and *genchi shobun* (disposal on the spot) methods honed in Manchukuo and north China. Yet others have

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<sup>175</sup> Akashi, “Japanese Policy,” 63.

<sup>176</sup> Watanabe Wataru, *Daitoa Senso Kaisoroku, Part 1: Syonanhen*, 437-438; quoted in Akashi, “Colonel Watanabe Wataru,” 40.

<sup>177</sup> Morrison, *Malayan Postscript*, 171-172. Morrison’s observations aside, it should be noted that there were displays of bravery by non-Chinese in the defence of Singapore. For example, Malay officers Lt. Adnan Saidi, Captain Yazid Ahmad and Warrant Officer Ismail’s heroics have been recognised; see Abu, “Impact of the Japanese Occupation,” 10-11; and Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory*, 212-216.

<sup>178</sup> Cheah, *Red Star*, 19; Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 40; Ban Kah Choon and Yap Hong Kuan, *Rehearsal for War: The Underground War Against the Japanese* (Singapore: Horizon Books, 2002), 39.

<sup>179</sup> Hayashi, “Massacre of Chinese,” 236-239.

pointed to Masanobu Tsuji, who headed the Doro Nawa research unit and was subsequently operations officer of the invading 25<sup>th</sup> Army, as the mastermind behind the Chinese massacres.<sup>180</sup>

The massacres triggered a series of unforeseen consequences. Many Chinese fled the cities for the interior, thus depressing trade and industry further. Others became incentivised to join guerrilla groups in the jungles, among them “rubber-tappers, tin-mining coolies, and vegetable gardeners,” not because of ideological motivations but just so they could “have a crack at the Jap.”<sup>181</sup> Kratoska has suggested that the intent of the massacres may have been to “bludgeon the entire Chinese population into submission;” however, its effect was to generate “hatred among people who might otherwise have acquiesced to Japanese rule.”<sup>182</sup> In response, the Chinese adopted a “recalcitrant and intransigent attitude” which “inspired still more harsh methods of repression.”<sup>183</sup> Attempts in late 1943 to pacify the Chinese by integrating them into business, education and government advisory councils could not breach these initial hostilities; instead, “the Chinese reciprocated with non-cooperation and resistance.”<sup>184</sup>

In his unpublished memoirs, Major General Fujimura Masuzo, who succeeded Watanabe in 1943, emphasised the perennial Chinese thorn in the side of the Japanese military administration. The *Malai Gunsei* he opined was in actuality a *Kakyo Gunsei* or Overseas Chinese administration. Its duties were hindered by the continuous need to deal with the Chinese for “it was the *Kakyo* who organised an anti-Japanese army, the *Kakyo* who cooperated with the *gunsei*, and the *Kakyo* who opposed cooperation with the *gunsei*.”<sup>185</sup> Just like the British before them, the Japanese had to contend with the shifting sands of factionalised Chinese allegiances.

In contrast to the response of the Chinese, the Japanese enjoyed “the generally cooperative attitude of the Malays.” This made them appear to be the “chosen instrument of the Japanese” which aroused Chinese resentment.<sup>186</sup> As the Malays had no war with Japan, armed resistance by primarily Chinese partisans

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<sup>180</sup> Masanobu’s role in the *sook ching* operations remains a source of dispute. See: Hayashi, “Massacre of Chinese,” 237-239; Mamoru Shinozaki, *Syonan – My Story: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2006), 28; Ian Ward, *The Killer They Called A God* (Singapore: Media Masters, 2003); Ban and Yap, *Rehearsal for War*, 38-39.

<sup>181</sup> F. Spencer Chapman, “Travels in Japanese-Occupied Malaya,” *The Geographical Journal* 110, 1/3 (1947): 28.

<sup>182</sup> Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 120.

<sup>183</sup> Akashi, “Japanese Policy,” 89.

<sup>184</sup> Cheah, *Red Star*, 41.

<sup>185</sup> Akashi Yoji, “An Annotated Bibliographical Study of the Japanese Occupation of Malaya/Singapore, 1941-45,” 259.

<sup>186</sup> Akashi, “Japanese Policy,” 89.

reinforced impressions of the troubles in Malaya as an extension of the Sino-Japanese conflict. Thus, racial differences were intensified by the stark contrasts in Japanese treatment.

Thus far, we have outlined the various motivations behind Japanese occupation policy regarding the Chinese in Malaya. We have not touched upon Japanese racial dogma in the shaping of race-based policy in Malaya. Existing scholarship tends to neglect or downplay this factor. For example, Kratoska acknowledges that there was a “strong ethnic slant” despite Japanese attempts to promote “an Asian identity, a concept of Asian unity and a pan-Asian nationalism.”<sup>187</sup> However, in dissecting how these ethnic slants influenced the divergent treatment of the various collectives, Kratoska interprets these policies as arising out of the need to subjugate a multiracial population. Akashi’s study on *Kakyo* policy hints at Japanese perceptions of the Chinese as nothing more than “an economic animal who found his life’s satisfaction in making money.”<sup>188</sup> However, this observation is not explored further. Hayashi too suggests that the massacres could have been racially motivated as “there was a culture of prejudice towards the Chinese.”<sup>189</sup> Yet his deliberation fails to address how racial prejudice transmuted into violence. Cheah reflects on how differential policies towards the Chinese and Malays exacerbated interethnic relations but is silent on whether Japanese racial doctrine played a part in shaping these differences.<sup>190</sup> As such, within Japanese occupation historiography, there has been little attempt at reconciling the racial ideology which underpinned Japanese imperialism with the conduct of war and occupation perpetrated upon the colonised. This overlooked aspect can potentially inform our understanding of not only the shaping of Japanese race-based policies but how these policies were enacted on the field.

## Colonisers

Japanese imperialism, as both concept and practise, derived its sense of righteousness and entitlement from Japan’s perception of her place in Asia and the world. The Japanese vision of *sekai shinchitsujo* (new world order) dictated Japan’s divine mission to engage in a just war to repel European oppressors,

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<sup>187</sup> Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 92.

<sup>188</sup> Akashi Yoji, “Japanese Policy,” 89.

<sup>189</sup> Hayashi, “Massacre of Chinese,” 239.

<sup>190</sup> Cheah Boon Kheng, “Japanese Army Policy toward the Chinese and Malay-Chinese Relations in Wartime Malaya,” in *Southeast Asian Minorities in the Wartime Japanese Empire*, ed. P.H. Kratoska (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002).

liberate the nations of the south and unite them under the leadership of Japan.<sup>191</sup> This expanded empire, it was imagined, would be guided by the principles of a universal brotherhood or *hakko-ichiu* (eight corners of the world).<sup>192</sup> Within this new social order, the peoples of the south were younger brothers tainted by colonisation who had to be purified through 'Nipponisation.' While contemporary Western commentators cynically dismissed such professions as mere propaganda, the influence of such indoctrination should not be understated.<sup>193</sup>

To Japanese steeped in 'Holy Japan' mythology, the emperor and the ancient Japanese gods from whom he was descended were "carriers of unique Japanese virtues" and in his person the emperor embodied "a cosmic life-force;" by extension, his subjects were a divine race.<sup>194</sup> Collectively, the Japanese people were the mythical living entity *kokutai* or nation-body incarnate.<sup>195</sup> From this fusion of the mythical and the quasi-religious, the 'Greater East Asia War' was portrayed as "a purifying exorcism, a cleansing ablution."<sup>196</sup> To sacrifice oneself as a member of the *bushi* or warrior elite was the ultimate honour; a glorious death held the promise of being deified as *kami* or a divine spirit. And to die in service of the emperor was to "realise the highest hope of a member of our race."<sup>197</sup> Departure from this script was not permitted and dissenting voices were silenced by the *Tokubetsu Koto Keisatsu* (Special Higher Police) or 'thought police'.<sup>198</sup>

In 1890, an imperial decree formalised the delivery of this nationalist ideology through the education system.<sup>199</sup> Amidst the heady fervour sparked by the first Sino-Japanese war, the themes of war and patriotism increasingly came to dominate curricula. Schoolchildren were actively encouraged by their teachers to

<sup>191</sup> This was the main narrative of Japan's 'Greater East Asia War;' Ken'ichi Goto, *Tensions of Empire: Japan and Southeast Asia in the Colonial and Postcolonial World* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), 39.

<sup>192</sup> The term *hakko ichiu* has been credited to an edict by Emperor Jimmu (660-585 BC) issued to unite the various races of Japan as 'one family under one roof;' see: John H. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 223, 283-284.

<sup>193</sup> It has been suggested that Japan learnt to use racist propaganda by observing the Germans: "The men of Nippon saw that racism – like radio, bombing planes, telephones, and rifles – was a machine that worked. So they adopted it;" Padover, "Japanese Race Propaganda," 193.

<sup>194</sup> See: Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany & Japan*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Atlantic Books, 2009), 189-190.

<sup>195</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites: The Origins and History of the Passions of War*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Granta, 2011), 215-216.

<sup>196</sup> Tokutomi Ichiyo, *Hissho Kokumin Tokuhon* [A Citizen's Reader for Certain Victory] Tokyo: Mainichi Shimbunsha; quoted in Dower, *War without Mercy*, 225.

<sup>197</sup> Quoted from a standard military conscription letter; Frei, *Guns of February*, 11.

<sup>198</sup> On the measures undertaken by the *Tokubetsu Koto Keisatsu* against Japanese civilians, see: Lamont-Brown, *Kempeitai*, 14-20.

<sup>199</sup> The following description on the indoctrination of schoolchildren to military ideals is based on Ienaga, *The Pacific War*, 13-32.

show contempt for the 'cowardly' Chinese. In Takamatsu Elementary School, for instance, teachers prepared a 'war report,' part of which read: "Chinese corpses were piled up as high as a mountain. Oh, what a grand triumph. Chinka, Chinka, Chinka, so stupid and they stinka."<sup>200</sup> From 1917 onwards, military officers were assigned to each institution and military training became a part of school curriculum. Youth training centres with four-year programs involving 400 hours of military training were also operationalised. Thus, Japanese youth came to be militarised, politicised and racialised.

For conscripts, military training emphasised *seishin kyoiku* or spiritual training. This emphasised "spirit or morale as superior to materiel in combat."<sup>201</sup> War was seen as a test of faith and in this reckoning the indomitable *Yamato* or divine Japanese spirit was bound to triumph.<sup>202</sup> The words 'surrender,' 'retreat' and 'defence' disappeared from the lexicon of military speak. In their place was emphasis on absolute obedience, strict training, teamwork, fighting spirit and spiritual endurance. These principles were literally beaten into fresh conscripts to desensitise them to the savagery of war. Frei's collection of Japanese soldiers' voices describes the persistent punishment endured by recruits at the hands of their superiors. Such brutality was rationalised as a means of providing the army with "if not inhumans, at least efficient cogs for the military machine."<sup>203</sup> To Allied leaders however, the Japanese soldier was a supreme fighting machine precisely because he was "seemingly inhuman in his tenacity, valour and willingness to die."<sup>204</sup>

The philosophy of war drummed into the Japanese soldier was based on the ideal that "war is the Father of Creation and the Mother of Culture. Rivalry for Supremacy does for the state what struggling against adversity does for the individual."<sup>205</sup> Thus, war was not only a means to achieving national aims; it was an end in itself. The preceding account of the militarisation of Japan provides a glimpse into the psychological makeup of the men who were unleashed on battlefields across the Asia-Pacific including Malaya.

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<sup>200</sup> Frei, *Guns of February*, 23.

<sup>201</sup> Leonard A. Humpreys, *The Way of the Heavenly Sword: The Japanese Army in the 1920s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 106.

<sup>202</sup> On how *seishin koikyū* combined the ideals of *bushido* (the warrior code) and *kodo* (the Imperial Way) and was employed to glorify war, see: Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil Military Relations* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1981), 127-130.

<sup>203</sup> Frei, *Guns of February*, 15.

<sup>204</sup> Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millet, *Military Effectiveness: Volume 3, The Second World War*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 39.

<sup>205</sup> War Ministry Pamphlet 1934; quoted in Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 129.

Japan's holy war was not mere rhetoric; among her military men, many sincerely internalised this divine mission. Masanobu Tsuji, who had, according to some, planned the *sook ching* operations, saw the liberation of Malaya as freeing her native peoples from the plundering grasp of the British and Overseas Chinese. For doing so, Masanobu wrote: "these Asian peoples who were emancipated by the fall of Singapore will eternally pronounce benedictions on their benefactors."<sup>206</sup> A similar message was propagated wholesale to Japanese troops. Soldiers of the 25<sup>th</sup> Army were issued with 40,000 copies of the 'Read This Alone – And the War Can Be Won' pamphlet prior to the invasion of Malaya. In it, the impending war was characterised as "a struggle between the races." The native Malays were to be "pitied for past sins" which had led them to "groan beneath the white man's oppressive rule." Blessed with homelands that were "the treasure-houses of the world," they had become "idlers" and had "reached a point of almost complete emasculation." The natives, it was cautioned, should be "treated with kindness;" but whilst "we may wish to make men of them again quickly... we should not expect too much."<sup>207</sup> These professions were eerily reminiscent of early European colonial stereotypes of the 'lazy native.' Such racial sentiments suffused Japanese occupation policy. For example, in a despatch to Tokyo, the Japanese *chargé d'affaires* in Bangkok wrote:

The greater part of the people who are the special object of administration are politically dull-witted and the fact that they are lacking in intellect plays an important part in facilitating government... Viewed objectively it may indeed be said that, provided the country is well administered, the prospects of the Administration in Malaya give cause for optimism.<sup>208</sup>

The Japanese vision of Pan-Asianism can be traced to the early 1800s with Japanese scientist Sato Nobuhiro's assertion that Japan was the "foundation of the world," and that other countries of the world should be considered "provinces and districts" of Japan.<sup>209</sup> Similarly, in Professor Fujisawa Chikao's 1942 treatise, *The Great Shinto Purification and the Divine Mission of Japan*, Japan was depicted as the cradle of civilisation, "the sacred motherland of all human races."<sup>210</sup> What was the place of the Chinese within this divine, ancient and naturally-determined hierarchy? Popular Japanese characterisations of the Chinese from that period

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<sup>206</sup> Masanobu, *Japan's Greatest Victory*, xvi.

<sup>207</sup> Masanobu, "Appendix 1: Read This Alone – And the War Can Be Won," 228.

<sup>208</sup> HW1-563: Japanese Report on Conditions in Malaya, No. 814, May 5, 1942, From Japanese Chargé, Bangkok, to Foreign Minister, Tokyo, National Archives (NA), Kew.

<sup>209</sup> Ienaga, *Pacific War*, 5.

<sup>210</sup> Dower, *War without Mercy*, 225-226.

characterised the Chinese as “ethnologically inferior” on account of Chinese “mixed blood.” In contrast, the *Yamato* race was “chosen by the gods, is the race of races, possessor of the purest blood.” Because of this comparable inferiority, the Chinese were inherently immoral and “bad people.”<sup>211</sup>

The Japanese training pamphlet distributed to the troops of the 25<sup>th</sup> Army depicted the Overseas Chinese as “colonists” who had “by a variety of clever schemes concerted with the European administrators” to “steadily extort money” from the natives. As a result, the troops were assured that the conniving Chinese were despised by the natives. Further, it was asserted, “they have no racial or national consciousness, and no enthusiasms outside the making of money.” Under the circumstances, the soldiers were cautioned, it would be difficult to appeal to Chinese awareness “as members of an Asian brotherhood.”<sup>212</sup>

Viewed through the lens of Japanese racial dogma, it is perhaps inevitable that the Chinese were disproportionately targeted. In transplanting Japan’s new world order to Malaya, the Chinese were consigned to pariahdom.<sup>213</sup> If they were to be redeemed at all, they had to earn their atonement through *misogi* or spiritual cleansing. This conviction is reflected in Watanabe’s rationale for the use of excessive force against the Chinese. In his memoirs, he wrote:

They must be held accountable for their past misdemeanours. It is my policy to make them reborn with a clean slate. Depending upon the extent of their penitence, we will allow them to live and will return their property. To retrieve life to a condemned person will be most appreciated. It is what I mean by ‘minimum pacification as deemed necessary.’ For this reason, I planned, as repressive measures, to levy taxes, to coerce their contributions, to cut off their relations with China, and to deny their appointment to administrative positions as well as equality.<sup>214</sup>

Did impressions of the Chinese as lacking morality dehumanise them in Japanese eyes? Did presumption of native resentment towards the Chinese provide a cover of impunity for Japanese actions? During the *sook ching* operations, Royal Goho, leader of the Singapore branch of IIL, reportedly assured the Japanese that the “Indians and Malays were deeply hostile towards those

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<sup>211</sup> From a public statement by Dean Tromosaburo Takagi from Tokyo Law School; quoted in Padover, “Japanese Race Propaganda,” 194. See also Dower’s assertion that Japanese preoccupations with ‘purity of blood’ and references to conceptions of ‘blood’ and soil’ share Nazi affinities; Dower, *War without Mercy*, 276-277.

<sup>212</sup> Masanobu, *Japan’s Greatest Victory*, “Appendix,” 230.

<sup>213</sup> Elsbree, *Japan’s Role*, 140-141.

<sup>214</sup> Watanabe Wataru, *Daitoa senso ni okeru Nampo gunsei no kaiko* (unpublished), pp. 27-29; quoted in Akashi, “Japanese Policy,” 65.



Chinese who had been exploiting them,” and claimed that “some even rejoiced in the massacre of the Overseas Chinese.”<sup>215</sup> However, he pleaded with the Japanese to halt actions as the fear incited by the massacres was threatening to spill over into the general populace. Was Goho merely parroting Japanese propaganda? Or was it an honest statement reflecting general apathy for the plight of the Chinese? Was this why the Japanese were emboldened to decimate entire villages, mutilate women or impale babies with bayonets?<sup>216</sup> Did racism contribute to the commission of unnecessary atrocities beyond the simple horrors of war? It is possible that the negative stereotyping of the Chinese coloured Japanese, and perhaps even local, attitudes towards them. The targeting of the Chinese in full view of other ethnic groups suggests that these racial dogmas were potent; they inscribed the Chinese as a separate Other who were deserving of their treatment.

In the next chapter, we investigate how Chinese Otherness was amplified during the occupation. While it is acknowledged that the Chinese suffered disproportionately, how did this manifest in practise? Emphasis is thus placed on reconstructing everyday civilian encounters with violence. Through a methodical survey of war atrocities, we examine how the Japanese perpetuated a system of terror. The prevailing atmosphere nurtured the seeds of interracial mistrust; it deepened the sense of separateness and isolation, not only of one ethnic group from another, but also within the Chinese community itself.

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<sup>215</sup> Fujiwara, *F Kikan*, 192.

<sup>216</sup> In Braddon’s memoir of his time as a prisoner of war, he writes that in one village of 200, all of the men were killed and all the women mutilated; Russell Braddon, *The Naked Island* (London: Werner Laurie, 1952), 136. Witness’ accounts of Chinese babies being impaled with bayonets and swords during the E-Lang Lang (Jelulong) massacre of 18 March 1942 were published in *New Thrill* newspaper, 23 October 1976; quoted in Cheah, *Red Star*, 23.

## Chapter 2

### Landscape of Terror

In scholarly discourses on Chinese war experience in Malaya, a prominent theme emerges – that of the Chinese as victims.<sup>217</sup> This representation is inevitably yoked to the *sook ching* massacres of 18 February to 3 March 1942 in Singapore. By supplanting other atrocities, these massacres have become emblematic of Chinese war experience during the occupation. The preponderance of scholarly attention, especially from the 1980s onwards, on what happened, who was responsible and why, has been invaluable.<sup>218</sup> However, an inadvertent outcome is a narrowing of the historiography of civilian war experience in Malaya. Critiquing historical writings on the Nanjing Atrocity, Chinese historian Yang Daqing points to an overriding obsession with determining the numbers of victims as exerting a reductionist influence, rendering the atrocity to an abstraction and offering little else by way of understanding the violence that was committed in Nanjing.<sup>219</sup> Arguably, in a similar way, focus on the *sook ching* massacres has obfuscated the extent and pervasiveness of Japanese war atrocities in Malaya. To overcome this historical myopia requires a systematic study of Japanese war crimes, which raises the question: why is such a study historiographically significant? To answer this question, we address how the topic of war atrocities represents a notable gap within existing historiography. We also examine how primacy afforded to the *sook ching* massacres has potentially distorted knowledge of war crimes and civilian experience in Malaya.

On one level, the Japanese occupation of Malaya is a topic within the wider subject of Japanese imperialism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These studies depict the occupation as an event which kindled nascent nationalist sentiments and incited a break from the colonial past, without which independent Southeast Asian states such as Malaysia may not have emerged.<sup>220</sup> More focussed accounts have

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<sup>217</sup> See for example: Akashi Yoji, "Japanese Policy:" 61-89; Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 93-102; Cheah, "Japanese Army Policy," Hayashi, "Massacre of Chinese," Gunn, "Southeast Asian Chinese Massacres." Hack and Blackburn, *War Memory*, 135-173.

<sup>218</sup> Excepting Akashi Yoji's 1970 journal article, the majority of academic writing on the *sook ching* massacres was published from the 1980s onwards.

<sup>219</sup> Yang Daqing, "Convergence or Divergence? Recent Historical Writings on the Rape of Nanjing," *The American Historical Review* 104, 3 (1999): 842–865.

<sup>220</sup> See: Harry J. Benda, "The Structure of Southeast Asian History: Some Preliminary Observations," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 3, 1 (1962): 129-133; Ken'ichi, *Tensions of Empire*; and Elsbree, *Japan's Role*.

mapped the socio-economic terrain of the occupation in Malaya.<sup>221</sup> The human drama inflicted by Japan's military tsunami has not escaped attention; Bayly and Harper's *Forgotten Armies* contain substantial sections dedicated to events in Malaya, while Swiss historian Henry P. Frei's *Guns of February* focusses solely on the conquest of Malaya through Japanese eyes. More recently, the little known histories of Malayan civilians who laboured on the Thai-Burma Railway or the women who served in comfort stations have received preliminary attention.<sup>222</sup> Collectively, these studies offer glimpses into the lives of civilians and fighting men subjected to the tyranny of war.

And yet, knowledge of civilian war experience remains fragmented. While there have been attempts at excavating war memory through a bottom-up approach that draws upon written testimonies and oral accounts, the outcomes have been uneven. There are a variety of reasons: because narrators appear ambivalent about the wartime past, because memory suppression has led to a conflation of the occupation with the communist insurgency period, but mostly because war memories remain resolutely defined by communal narratives.<sup>223</sup> It is difficult to gauge the imprint of the occupation on the wider collective. The field of civilian war experience, especially in relation to war atrocities in Malaya, remains notably sparse. Whenever incidences of war crimes are discussed, the *sook ching* massacres have come to dominate discourse.<sup>224</sup> Thus, a methodical survey of Japanese war atrocities can fill this gap in the historiography of the occupation.

The prominence of the *sook ching* massacres in historical discourse has inadvertently promoted several misperceptions. The first concerns the extent of the *shukusei* or cleansing operations. Thus far, academic attention has been predominantly focussed on events in Singapore. This is not necessarily the result of scholarly neglect. *Shukusei* was initiated in Singapore before 'mopping up' operations moved up the peninsula. It was in Singapore that the magnitude of its effects was most felt, owing to the size of the Chinese population relative to other ethnic groups, and in full view of witnesses, which produced multiple corroborating

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<sup>221</sup> For example: Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*; Akashi, "Colonel Watanabe Wataru;" Ota Koki, "Railway Operations in Japanese-occupied Malaya," and Yoshimura Mako, "Japan's Economic Policy for Occupied Malaya."

<sup>222</sup> Nakahara Michiko, "Malayan Labor on the Thai-Burma Railway," in *Asian Labor in the Wartime Japanese Empire: Unknown Histories*, ed. Paul H. Kratoska (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2005); Hayashi Hirofumi, "Japanese Comfort Women in Southeast Asia," *Japan Forum* 10, 2 (1998): 211-219; and Nakahara Michiko, "Comfort Women in Malaysia," *Critical Asian Studies* 33, 4 (2001): 581-589.

<sup>223</sup> See for example the various chapter contributions within Lim and Wong, eds., *War and Memory*; also Blackburn, *Recalling War Trauma*; and Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory*.

<sup>224</sup> For example: Gunn, "Southeast Asian Chinese Massacres;" Akashi Yoji, "Japanese Policy;" and Hayashi, "Massacre of Chinese."

accounts. Further, these killings achieved a measure of sensationalism and prominence during the Singapore Chinese Massacres Trial after the war.<sup>225</sup> In contrast, *shukusei* operations on the peninsula have become peripheral to the main event in Singapore. It is only belatedly that historians have linked other mass killings on the peninsula to the *sook ching*.<sup>226</sup> As a result, the first known massacre in Pasir Puteh on 20 December 1941, shortly after the initial Japanese landings off the coast of Kelantan, has been recognised as a “prelude or testing ground” for the purge which came after.<sup>227</sup> Accounts of massacres in other locations from February to April 1942, such as those which occurred in Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Negeri Sembilan and Johor have been documented, though they too have received less detailed attention. Consequently, knowledge of *shukusei* operations on the peninsula is piece-meal; they do not evoke a similar spectre to the *sook ching* massacres in Singapore.<sup>228</sup>

Secondly, disproportionate attention to the *sook ching* massacres appears to imply that other atrocities were neither significant nor prevalent. And because the *sook ching* is almost exclusively affiliated with Chinese war experience, atrocities experienced by non-Chinese segments of the population have been diminished. If we had more intimate knowledge of other atrocities, how would the *sook ching* compare? Was the *sook ching* an aberration or merely a well-known episode within a catalogue of Japanese atrocities? If we knew more about the methods employed, the victims selected and the prevalence of violence, how might this augment our understanding of the Japanese occupation?

Thirdly, existing debates over why the *sook ching* massacres occurred can seem apologist: the Chinese were considered anti-Japanese, so they were targeted; or the battle-hardened 25<sup>th</sup> Army had experienced guerrilla combat in China, so they were predisposed to violence against the Chinese. While these factors played their part, do they sufficiently explain the commission of war atrocities throughout the occupation? Examining other atrocities beyond the *sook ching* may potentially shed clarifying light on why and under what circumstances the Japanese military resorted to violence.

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<sup>225</sup> The Singapore Chinese Massacres Trial is documented in WO235/1004: Trial of Lieutenant General Takuma Nishimura and six others, Singapore, 10 March 1947 to 8 May 1952, The National Archives of United Kingdom (TNA). On public response in Singapore, see: Kwok, “Justice Done?” and Narayanan, “Second World War Japanese Atrocities.”

<sup>226</sup> See: Cheah, *Red Star*, and Gunn, “Southeast Asian Chinese Massacres.”

<sup>227</sup> Gunn, “Southeast Asian Chinese Massacres:” 275.

<sup>228</sup> The term ‘big round up’ is contained in the petition of accused Shaeki Katsuji. Details of this ‘big round up’ conducted in Penang 1942 bears the hallmark of *shukusei* operations similar to that which took place in Singapore; see WO235/931: Trial of Higashigawa Yoshinobu and 34 others, Penang, 30 Aug - 28 Sept 1946, TNA.

After the initial spate of *sook ching* killings, Harper contends that “over the fear a veneer of normal living had to be restored.”<sup>229</sup> What did a ‘veneer of normal living’ look like? In this chapter, we draw upon a variety of sources, in particular war crimes trial cases, to reconstruct everyday life in the shadow of a totalitarian regime. It will be demonstrated that the Japanese military administration established a “system of terror” to subjugate the colonised.<sup>230</sup> This regime was sustained by tacit mass submission if not outright collaboration between local perpetrators, bystanders and witnesses. In the final analysis, we explore how, from the Chinese perspective, these atypical conditions compounded the collective’s Otherness within Malayan society.

## Sources and Methodology

This methodical survey of Japanese war atrocities relies substantially on war crimes trial cases. The choice of primary source material was dictated by several limitations. In the first instance, there is a lack of Japanese military documentation detailing civilian atrocities, largely because superiors often issued verbal rather than written orders.<sup>231</sup> Also, there was wholesale destruction of official documents following the Japanese surrender on 15 August 1945.<sup>232</sup> Secondly, there is only a small body of published literature from local civilians who lived through the war; within these accounts, the war is often mentioned only in passing.<sup>233</sup> While some Chinese associations have published testimonies from victims and witnesses, these tend to be emotive in tone, and often, lacking historical specifics.<sup>234</sup> By comparison, there is a larger body of personal accounts from Japanese military personnel. However, the majority of these sources tend towards elaborate

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<sup>229</sup> Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, 223.

<sup>230</sup> The use of the term ‘system of terror’ emphasises the institutionalised dimensions of violence and fear propagated in the service of maintaining regime control; E.V. Walter, “Violence and the Process of Terror,” *American Sociological Review* 29, 2 (1964): 248-258.

<sup>231</sup> On the lack of written orders, see for example testimonies from: Sergeant Taki, Major Onishi Satoru, Sergeant Uekihara Susumu and Sergeant Matsumoto Mitsugi; WO235/843, Trial of Lieut. Yamaguchi Akuni and four others, Singapore, 21-26 February 1946, TNA.

<sup>232</sup> On orders to destroy documents, see for example testimonies from: Matsunaga Matao, WO235/833, Trial of WO Ikuma Tomoshige and two others, Labuan, 8-10 April 1946, TNA, 38; Seah Chong Sin, WO235/877, 18; and Shin Shigetoshi, WO235/819: Trial of Sgt. Terada Takao and four others, Singapore, 18-19 February 1946, TNA.

<sup>233</sup> See Lim’s assessment of publications in the English and Malay languages; P. Lim Pui Huen, “Memoirs of War in Malaya.” For the paucity of references to the war in memoirs by prominent Malay leaders, see: Abu, “The Malay Community,” 46.

<sup>234</sup> See for example: Qiu, *Rizhishiqi*; and Foong, *Price of Peace*.

accounting of *gunsei* policy, strategy and operations.<sup>235</sup> Several of these contain indicting details concerning the conduct of the Japanese military in Malaya, but by and large, most omit mention of specific atrocities.<sup>236</sup> Among those who acknowledged perpetuating atrocities, the worst-scarred were those involved in the *sook ching* operations. Some have spoken of the enduring shame that clung to them for the remainder of their lives.<sup>237</sup> Others describe the uneasy reluctance they felt when ordered to hastily inflict “severe punishment” on civilians.<sup>238</sup> However, this kaleidoscope of perspectives is too fragmented for use in a methodical survey. Thirdly, unlike Singapore, Malaysia has no central repository for testimonies relating to the Japanese occupation.<sup>239</sup> Searches conducted at *Arkib Negara Malaysia* (National Archives of Malaysia) using relevant keywords, such as ‘Japanese war crimes’ or the ‘Japanese occupation,’ returned invalid or access denied options. Only a scant number of documents were retrievable and these relate primarily to events after British reoccupation. Hence there are few publicly available primary sources. In contrast, access to war crimes cases at TNA provided this researcher with the opportunity to survey a wide range of alleged atrocities committed during the occupation. These cases became the basis for the following evaluations: victims’ ethnicity, methods employed, geographical spread of war crimes, participation of social actors, as well as the pervasiveness of atrocities.

The collection of war crimes records held at the TNA relate to 1,911 trials conducted by British military courts across Europe and the Asia-Pacific.<sup>240</sup> A preliminary review identified that 211 cases were potentially pertinent to war crimes conducted in British Malaya and British Borneo.<sup>241</sup> In omitting cases involving Allied prisoners of war, so as to focus only on civilian experience, the number identified

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<sup>235</sup> For a comprehensive review of available Japanese sources and contents, see Akashi, “An Annotated Bibliographical Study.”

<sup>236</sup> Masanobu Tsuji’s personal account of the campaign of Malaya must surely fall within this category. H.V. Howe writes: “Allied historians have since also attributed to [Masanobu] unsavoury characteristics, having to do with brutality and fanaticism on the battlefield as well as mistreatment of civilians. In this volume, the reader will fail to encounter a hint of the Japanese attitude toward prisoners that has since been revealed to have caused widespread suffering among non-combatants;” H.V. Howe, Publisher’s Note to *Japan’s Greatest Victory* by Masanobu, vi.

<sup>237</sup> Frei, *Guns of February*, 164.

<sup>238</sup> See accounts by Miyake Genjiro, Onishi Satoru and Yokoda Yoshitaka, in Frei, *Guns of February*, 151-157.

<sup>239</sup> Between 1981 and 2011, the Oral History Centre (OHC) at the National Archives of Singapore documented 361 interviews (1,120 hours) as part of its Japanese Occupation of Singapore project. ANM does not have a similar counterpart to the OHC.

<sup>240</sup> WO235: Judge Advocate General’s Office: War Crimes Case Files, Second World War, TNA.

<sup>241</sup> War atrocities committed in the British Borneo states of Sarawak and Sabah were included in this study. The author felt it pertinent to include these territories as both are component states of present-day Malaysia.

for further possible investigation was narrowed to 113 cases. While some of these cases have received scholarly attention, the majority remain unexamined.<sup>242</sup> For this study, a total of 48 cases were examined in depth.<sup>243</sup> This involved more than 4,000 documents, ranging from trial transcripts, affidavits, official correspondence to submitted evidence, among them death certificates, military records and images.

The cases examined were determined by the sequential order in which they are archived at TNA. This selection process avoids bias because the cases are not archived according to chronological timeline, or categorised by trial venues or locations of purported war crime events. For example, within the WO235 collection, 138 trial cases with the call numbers range of WO235/815 to WO235/953 were examined. These cases encompassed trials and war crime events across the South Asian, Southeast Asian and Far East regions, among them Malaya, Borneo, Hong Kong, Thailand and Indonesia. It should be noted that trial venues were not indicative of the locations of purported war crimes. For example, the case archived as WO235/814 involves a trial conducted in Singapore. However, it relates to war crimes perpetrated upon Burmese civilians on Andaman island, which was British India territory. A total of 38 cases among the 138 examined was eventually identified as relating to war crimes against civilians in British Malaya and British Borneo (Sabah and Sarawak). It was also noted that two cases were missing from the archives.<sup>244</sup> These relate to two trials conducted in

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<sup>242</sup> Notable exceptions include two unpublished thesis; see: Kwok, "Justice Done?" and Narayanan, "Second World War Japanese Atrocities." These focused on the fairness of the trial proceedings and of sentences passed. Together these dissertations covered four trials; three conducted in Singapore and one in Penang. Narayanan also noted that there were three published accounts covering two specific trials after the war, namely the first war crimes trial that was conducted in Malaya and the 'Double Tenth' trial. These were: B.A. Mallal, *The Double Tenth Trial, War Crimes Court in re. Lt. Colonel Sumida Haruzo and Twenty Others* (Singapore: Malayan Law Journal Office, 1947), Colin Sleeman, *Trial of Gozawa Sadaichi And Nine Others* (London: William Hodge & Co, 1948) and Colin Sleeman and S.C. Silkin, *Trial of Lt. Colonel Sumida Haruzo and Twenty Others (The "Double Tenth" Trial)* (London: William Hogde & Co, 1951). However, he found these to be verbatim accounts which mirrored the court transcripts. While Narayanan's thesis was not published, he contributed a journal article based on his findings; see: Arujunan Narayanan, "Japanese Atrocities and British Minor War Crimes Trials After World War II in the East," *Jebat: Malaysian Journal of History, Politics and Strategic Studies* 33 (2006): 1-28.

<sup>243</sup> This study examined 38 files from the WO235 collection, supplemented by nine cases detailed in WO311/543: Japanese War Crimes: Monthly Summaries and Results of Trials, April 1947-August 1948, NA, and one case contained in WO325/30: War Office: General Headquarters, Allied Land Forces, (South East Asia) War Crimes Group: Investigation Files – Killing of Chinese of Straits Settlements Volunteer Force in Singapore, August 1945-February 1946, TNA.

<sup>244</sup> WO235/834: Trial of Kita Tomio and 19 others, Singapore, 29 July 1945-23 June 1946, and WO235/835: Trial of Awakuni Riyosuke and 5 others, Singapore, 8 January 1946-30 June 1946.

Singapore. As it was impossible to examine them, it is unclear whether the trials relate to war crime events in Malaya and Borneo.

Due to time constraints, other possible cases for study, contained within the remaining call number range of WO235/954 to WO235/1117, were not included in this study. The 38 cases selected were submitted to in-depth investigation, and supplemented by 10 further cases detailed in two related war crimes summary files, WO311/543 and WO325/30. While the 48 cases analysed represent only 42 percent of total possible cases for study, they nevertheless serve as a sufficiently comprehensive and representative collection.

Each war crimes case refers either to the trial of a particular accused or multiple accused. Punitive charges against various accused involved either incidents committed on specific dates or multiple incidents over the course of a particular period. What this means is that each case does not correspond neatly to one incident of alleged wrongdoing. At times, the charges levied against the accused were precise; for example in a case pertaining to the execution of Ah Kim on 2 July 1945 in Kinarut, why and how he was executed was clear.<sup>245</sup> At other times, the charges were less defined. In a case against 35 accused based at the Penang *kempeitai* office, the men were charged for multiple crimes committed between 1 March 1942 and 30 September 1945; among these, “ill treatment of persons in their custody, which ill treatment resulted in the deaths of hundreds of the said persons and in physical suffering to many of the said persons.”<sup>246</sup> It was noted that in a large number of cases, many of the victims were not named and often, the number of casualties were often approximations.

In utilising war crimes cases as the basis for a survey of Japanese atrocities, several caveats should be noted. While these cases are useful in providing an indication of the scale of war crimes committed in Malaya, it is likely that many went unreported or undocumented. Although significant efforts were made in the immediate aftermath of the war to investigate war crimes, the British military administration faced substantial difficulties. While many civilians came forward to testify against previous oppressors and collaborators, there were also many who were unable or reluctant to do so. For example, Loh Sow Ying, whom we met in the introductory chapter, claimed that she was forbidden by the trustee of her father’s estate to approach the British authorities. That there was reluctance in stepping forward may also be surmised from multiple appeals to the public published in the contemporary press. In an article in *The Straits Times* on 10 November 1945, the public was berated that it was “their duty to give evidence”

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<sup>245</sup> WO235/828: Trial of Sgt. Maj. Hasegawa Sadeo and Sup. Pte. Osamu, Labuan, 12-15 April 1946, TNA.

<sup>246</sup> WO235/931, TNA.



and that “this is the only way that such criminals can be brought to justice.”<sup>247</sup> In contrast to the situation in Singapore, witnesses on the Malayan mainland appeared to have been less forthcoming. At a press conference in Kuala Lumpur, Brigadier H.C. Willan complained: “In spite of the agitation by the public and the press for the establishment of the Special Courts... the public has not yet made any complaints of collaboration offences to the special magistrates.”<sup>248</sup> A deadline of 15 February 1946 was tentatively set. When the deadline had passed, *The Malayan Daily News* issued yet another plea for “all citizens of Malaya who can help the authorities in their task” to step forward as witnesses. The urgency of the request was punctuated by the phrase “*this evidence is wanted now*” (original italics).<sup>249</sup>

The English language press deduced that public reluctance stemmed in part from the perceived leniency of sentences handed down and painful disappointments when not guilty verdicts were returned.<sup>250</sup> Further, during the occupation, many evened the score with their enemies or obtained favours by denouncing others to the Japanese. As such, a sense of hyper-vigilance lingered after the war. Many became wary that they would be drawn into “a game of pro-Japanese accusations.”<sup>251</sup> Hesitation and anxiety were also compounded by confusion; few seemed certain as to what constituted collaboration.<sup>252</sup> After all, so many had cooperated with the Japanese in one way or another. Initially, the dragnet for suspected quislings was cast far and wide; even the Sultan of Selangor, Tengku Musa Eddin, was not spared.<sup>253</sup> This must have worried potential informants that they too may be implicated. Some chose to attest to atrocities they had witnessed but did so anonymously.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> “Chinese Offer Evidence against Jap Criminals,” *The Straits Times*, 10 November 1945.

<sup>248</sup> “Collaboration Complaints Must Be Made Before February Next,” *The Straits Times*, November 14, 1945.

<sup>249</sup> “Bringing Jap Criminals to Book,” *The Malayan Daily News*, February 21, 1946.

<sup>250</sup> For examples of such sentiments, see: “Editorial,” *The Straits Times*, March 7, 1946; “Jap Atrocities,” *The Malayan Daily News*, March 7, 1946; “Kempei Man Not Guilty,” *The Straits Times*, July 3, 1946; “The Terror of Kelantan Escapes Gallows,” *The Straits Times*, September 7, 1946.

<sup>251</sup> B.A. Mallal, “Under the Japs,” *The Straits Times*, October 8, 1945; G.E.N. Oehler, “Let Those Who Sit In Judgement Remember,” *The Straits Times*, October 11, 1945.

<sup>252</sup> “Collaborators?,” *The Straits Times*, November 2, 1945; and E.E. Joey, “Women Collaborators,” *The Straits Times*, November 7, 1945.

<sup>253</sup> “Puppet Sultan Arrested,” *The Straits Times*, September 11, 1945. Reports of large scale arrests of suspected collaborators were common, for example: “98 Held in Singapore,” *The Straits Times*, October 6, 1945; “Penang Chinese is Held,” *The Straits Times*, October 8, 1945; “22 Political Prisoners Buried Alive in Kampar: Jap Sponsored Police On Trial,” *The Straits Times*, November 14, 1945.

<sup>254</sup> For example, in an account describing the machine-gunning of 30 Chinese men in front of the Naafi Building in Singapore on 20 February 1942, the anonymous

The trials were conducted as military tribunals and subjected to the constraints of immediate post-war conditions; consequently, they exhibit markedly different standards from trials conducted during peacetime. Law scholars Durwood Derry Riedel, Kwok Wai Keng and Arujunan Narayanan have examined specific cases within the Nuremberg and Singapore war crimes trials respectively.<sup>255</sup> Based on their conclusions, several factors should be borne in mind: the objective of these trials was to establish guilt or innocence and to impose appropriate penalties where applicable. Admissible evidence was focussed solely on proving or disproving the charges. Speed, efficiency and simplicity were prized; rules of evidence were more flexible and procedurally less formal. For example, both Kwok and Arujunan have raised the issue of affidavits in place of testimony in several trials. This curtailed what would have been more robust cross-examinations if the victims or witnesses had been in court. However, among the cases examined by this researcher, there were no trials where evidence of the prosecution's case relied solely on affidavits. It was noted that in cases where no other corroborating evidence was available, the alleged crime was removed from the charge sheet.

Judgements were meted out with an eye on public response. These were open trials, meant to showcase justice, punish wrongdoings and salve the open wounds of loss and suffering. Thus, conduct of the trials was not immune to public pressures of the day.<sup>256</sup> Objectivity had to be balanced against racial sensitivities. Kwok points out for example that because the trials did not involve civilian juries, "the native Chinese population did not perceive justice to have been served precisely because it was not their justice but a British concept of justice."<sup>257</sup> This sense of misgiving arose out of verdicts passed in several early trials; they appeared to signal that crimes against the local population were less weighty than those committed against Allied personnel. For instance, sub-unit commander Mizuno Keiji was sentenced to life imprisonment for killing "about 120 Chinese;" in comparison, petty officer Hikiji Susumu received the death penalty for "the execution of several American P.O.W.s, formerly the crew of a B29" and the "execution of several Allied P.O.W.s, the crew of a submarine."<sup>258</sup>

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letter writer used the handle 'Eyewitness;' "A Terrible Story," *The Straits Times*, November 7, 1945.

<sup>255</sup> See: Durwood Derry Riedel, "The U.S. War Crimes Tribunals at the Former Dachau Concentration Camp: Lessons for Today?," *Berkeley Journal of International Law* 24 (2006): 554-609; Kwok, "Justice Done?," Narayanan, "Second World War Japanese Atrocities."

<sup>256</sup> Captain R.H. Tyson, a member of the bench at the Singapore Chinese Massacres Trial, during an interview with the press, admitted that the vindictive public atmosphere influenced the bench's speedy approach to wrapping up the trial; Narayanan, "Second World War Japanese Atrocities," 138-139.

<sup>257</sup> Kwok, "Justice Done?," 40.

<sup>258</sup> WO311/543, TNA.

The perceived lack of justice led to mounting pressure for more death sentences and public executions.<sup>259</sup> Such vindictive sentiments were especially prominent in Chinese newspapers. *Nanyang Siang Pau*'s front-page story on 16 March 1946 is a prime example.<sup>260</sup> This was the first time that a newspaper had published photographs of public executions.<sup>261</sup> The accompanying article is subtitled "three Japanese war criminals entered the gates of hell together yesterday morning."<sup>262</sup> The captions assigned to the photographs were steeped in vengeful language, capturing the charged atmosphere which prevailed during the trials. (See: Figure 6.)

Among the cases examined, the earliest trial was conducted between 5 and 7 February 1946, the latest between 7 and 22 November 1946. As these trials were adjudicated fairly rapidly, within a space of six months to approximately a year after British reoccupation, the timing of these trials suggests that emotions were likely to have remained high for the duration. Therefore, when examining testimonies from victims and witnesses, this researcher was alerted to the possibility that some could have exaggerated their suffering. However, as the British administration had made no provisions to compensate for personal injury or loss, it is unclear as to what advantages or gains induced these participants to testify. Further, it was noted that the overwhelming majority of victims and witnesses were of the lower classes. Many appeared to be illiterate. As a result, their answers to questions posed to them were perfunctory, even conspicuously simplistic in their straightforwardness. Whether this was a result of how their answers were rendered by court translators is unclear.

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<sup>259</sup> Kwok, "Justice Done?," 31.

<sup>260</sup> Nanyang Siang Pau, "*San ming eguanmanyang de kou zhan fan*" [Three Heinous War Criminals], 16 March 1946, 1.

<sup>261</sup> It is noteworthy that an examination of coverage in English language papers, *The Straits Times* (7 September 1945-1 December 1945; 2 July 1946-25 September 1946) and *The Malayan Daily News* (1 January 1946-28 June 1946), and Malay language newspaper *Seruan Rakyat* (10 October 1945-10 February 1946) did not contain similar graphic details of public executions.

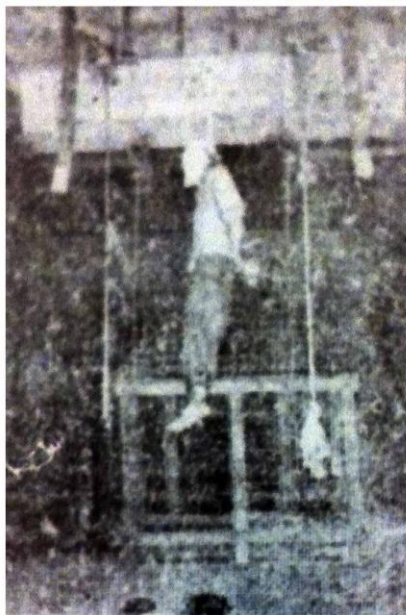
<sup>262</sup> Nanyang Siang Pau, "*Sharen wu yi zhong bei tian zhu*" [Brutal Killers Finally Sent to Meet Their Punishment from the Heavens], 16 March 1946, Singapore National Archives, 2.



Lieutenant Nakamura was walked to his deserved end. Although his face was covered by a white cloth bag, but this reporter could see that he was clearly clenching his jaw. Evidently, this 'samurai' is not as unafraid of dying, but was clearly resisting Death.



One minute later, Nakamura was standing before Death itself. The executioner put the rope around his neck; the board beneath his feet abruptly fell, and Nakamura was left hanging, blood spattered all across his white clothing. According to reports, medical officers did not pronounce him dead until 19 minutes later.



As for Captain Komai, although he lived an hour longer than Nakamura, he was not spared the same fate, and was left hanging in the air. If you look at the bottom left corner of this picture, the already-departed Nakamura and Iijima are quietly lying there, but their sins will never be washed away!

Translated from original captions.  
Source: Reel # NL2675,  
Microfilm: Singapore Collection,  
Lee Kong Chian Reference Library,  
National Library Board Singapore.

Figure 5. "Three Heinous War Criminals," Nanyang Siang Pau, 16 March 1946.

A critical approach was also employed when examining accused testimonies. This was informed by historian Christopher R. Browning's observation that there is a tendency for "exculpatory, alibi-laden, and mendacious testimony" in the course of a courtroom trial.<sup>263</sup> The accused may refrain from comments that are self-incriminating or may try to implicate comrades instead. He may depict victims as deserving of aggression or as combatants in the guise of partisans. In the cases examined, it was noted that many accused often referred to victims as 'communists,' 'anti-Japanese elements,' 'bandits' or simply 'bad people;' most claimed that oppressive measures were necessary to maintain 'law and order.'<sup>264</sup> Many also insisted that they were merely following orders or discharging their duties.<sup>265</sup> However, this "defence of superior orders" strategy proved unsuccessful; it was determined that military personnel were not immune merely because they were following orders.<sup>266</sup>

Lastly, omissions by those in Japanese employ are also to be expected, especially the many who worked as translators, drivers, clerks, jailers, auxiliary police and so on, so as to maintain distance and expiate the guilt of witnessing or engaging in atrocities. For example, among those who served as translators or sub-police personnel, most denied participating in atrocities even though they were present during raids or interrogations. Bearing the abovementioned potential limitations in mind, this researcher catalogued the information contained within the 48 war crimes cases. Several distinct patterns emerged. These were categorised thematically to develop a typology of strategies employed by the Japanese military towards exercising power and maintaining control over the civilian population. It should be noted however that the analysis of war crimes which follows does not represent an exposition into the minutiae of court proceedings or a debate into issues of guilt and culpability. Rather, attention will be paid to violence experienced

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<sup>263</sup> Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (London: Penguin, 2001), xv.

<sup>264</sup> See for example testimonies by Capt. Harada Kensei, Sgt. Shin Shigetoshi and Chief Inspector Mori Yoshitada; WO235/928: Trial of WO Yoshino Iku, Singapore, 4-6 July 1946, NA; WO235/819; and WO235/830: Trial of Chief Inspector Mori Yoshitada, Kajang, 4-6 March 1946, TNA.

<sup>265</sup> It should be noted that of the 48 cases examined, only in one case, that of Otda Hiroshi, did the accused enter a plea of guilty. However, Otda defended his actions as being in line with *kempeitai* policy; WO235/815: Trial of Sgt. Maj. Otda Hiroshi, Alor Setar, Kedah, 11 February 1946, TNA. Similarly, Hamada Kazumi's defence stated he had no choice but to participate in torture "which in few cases demanded and perhaps justified terror methods against citizens;" Closing plea of Defence Counsel, WO235/824: Trial of Cpl. Hamada Kazumi, Kuala Lumpur, 30-31 January 1946, TNA.

<sup>266</sup> On discussions of the 'Nuremberg defence' that is, defence of superior orders, see: David Estlund, "On Following Orders in an Unjust War," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 15, 2 (2007): 213-234; and Paola Gaeta, "The Defence of Superior Orders," *European Journal of International Law* 10 (1999): 172-191.

by civilians, the conditions in which they were subjected to violence, and the participation of other social actors.

## Mapping Violence

At the International Military Tribunal for the Far East conducted in Tokyo from April 1946 to November 1948, the Allied prosecution successfully established that war crimes perpetrated across Japanese-occupied territories were part of an “overall strategy of rule by terror” sanctioned by the military elite in Tokyo.<sup>267</sup> This verdict suggests that Japanese war atrocities should not be perceived as isolated or random events but as a fundamental component of occupation policy. In Malaya, the implements within the *gunsei* arsenal to perpetuate terror included surveillance, mass killings, summary executions, torture, arbitrary detention, abductions, rape, coercion and blackmail. These were persistently and systematically applied throughout the occupation. The result was that violence and terror were endemic.

Institutionalised terror, according to anthropologist Michael Taussig, functions as “mediator par excellence of colonial hegemony.”<sup>268</sup> Its effects are not restricted to the individual and the psychological, it is also social and collective; it seeps into the fabric of society, disrupting existing social networks and dissolving trust between its members. Where violence is normalised, the authority of the totalitarian regime is legitimised, drawing perpetrators, bystanders and witnesses into an entwined web of complicity.<sup>269</sup> Under such circumstances, terror is insidious and pervasive, an always present threat. In its wake, a landscape of terror comes into being. To map this landscape, we must first delineate the boundaries. This will allow us to establish the fundamentals: What atrocities took place? Where and when did they occur? And who were the victims?

In all 48 cases examined, the court upheld the validity of the charges.<sup>270</sup> In terms of geographical distribution, atrocities were documented throughout the Malay Peninsula, Singapore and British Borneo. The scenes were varied, from remote villages to larger towns and cities: 11 cases relate to atrocities committed in

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<sup>267</sup> Arnold C. Brackman, *The Other Nuremberg: The Untold Story of the Tokyo War Crimes* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1990), 22.

<sup>268</sup> Michael Taussig, “Culture of Terror – Space of Death: Roger Casement’s Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture,” in *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, eds. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 39-40.

<sup>269</sup> Bar-On, *Indescribable and the Undiscussable*, 126.

<sup>270</sup> In five of the 48 cases examined, several accused received acquittals or ‘guilty with exception’ verdicts which carried a lesser charge. However, this did not negate the charge as co-perpetrators received guilty verdicts for the same crime.

Singapore, 11 in British Borneo and 28 on the Malayan mainland.<sup>271</sup> (See: Figure 7.) There was a disproportionately high number of cases in Singapore, relative to population size and land mass. The number of incidents was fairly even throughout the various states on the peninsula, with the exception of Terengganu which recorded no incidents.

Several deductions can be inferred from these results: it is likely that the civilian population in Singapore was predisposed to reporting atrocities. This is perhaps unsurprising; in 1941, the almost 600,000 Chinese residents represented 78 percent of the population and the *sook ching* massacres alone claimed a vast number of Chinese casualties.<sup>272</sup> Further, the population on the island was densely concentrated, and often, the alleged crimes were witnessed by others. In a case involving the mass killing of 80 to 150 Chinese SSVF members at Changi Point on 22 February 1942, Brigadier K.S. Torrance was among several who gave evidence. He had watched as the victims were brought to the location, driven into the water, some bound to barbed wire, shot, and afterwards buried by Allied prisoners of war.<sup>273</sup>

Similarly, witnesses were able to provide explicit evidence concerning the massacre of Chinese civilians on 29 February 1942 at a rubber plantation at 10<sup>th</sup> mile Changi Road, from the number of trucks (seven) deployed, descriptions of some victims ("high-class women with permed hair"), the method in which they were despatched (machine-gun fire was heard) to the specific time of the alleged crime (between 4pm and 5pm that day). In the aftermath, those living in the vicinity collectively appealed to the Japanese authorities for permission to bury the dead as the stench had become

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<sup>271</sup> In two of the cases examined, the accused were charged for alleged war crimes in multiple locations; Nishi Yoshinobu for crimes committed in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Klang, Selangor, between 1 June 1944 to 15 August 1945, see: WO235/870: Trial of Sgt. Nishi Yoshinobu, Kuala Lumpur, 24-26 June 1946, NA; and Takamine Kiyotoshi, a civilian interpreter, for crimes committed in Kuala Lumpur and Port Swettenham, Selangor, between 1 September 1943-30 September 1944, see: WO235/904: Trial of Takamine Kiyoyoshi, Kuala Lumpur, 11-12 July 1946, TNA.

<sup>272</sup> Estimates of *sook ching* victims in Singapore vary widely. The estimate of 5,000 was accepted during the 'Chinese Massacres Trial' and this number has been upheld by the Japanese authorities; see: "*Singaporu niokeru Kakyo Shodan Jokyo Chosho*" [Record of Investigation on the Execution of Overseas Chinese in Singapore], 23 October 1945. However, there is also a secret report which claims that 11,110 were purged; see: Intelligence Record of 25<sup>th</sup> Army No.62, 28 May 1942; both quoted in Hayashi, "Massacre of Chinese." Shinozaki, adviser at Defence Headquarters of the Japanese military administration, estimated the number of victims to be 6,000; Mamoru, *Syonan*. Chinese sources claim that at least 50,000 were killed; see: "War Death: Plea for Payment is Being Studied," *The Straits Times*, March 9, 1962.

<sup>273</sup> See: Affidavit of Brigadier K.S. Torrance, "Major Events at Changi from 17 February to 16 August 1942," 24 August 1945, WO325/30, TNA.

unbearable. The bodies were eventually interred in 23 trenches.<sup>274</sup> In both cases, there were numerous witnesses, as “spectators were chased away” or “the people staying nearby were chased away” from the scene. In contrast, the populations on the Malay Peninsula and British Borneo were more dispersed. Often, the scenes of the atrocities were remote: isolated villages, rubber plantations, estates, and near rivers or jungles. In such cases, the prosecution had to rely upon testimonies from the accused themselves, surviving victims, fellow prisoners or local auxiliary police.

The alleged crimes spanned the duration of the occupation, from February 1942 to September 1945, with little temporal reprieve from violence. (See: Figure 8.) The final months were particularly intense amid concerted efforts to eliminate blacklisted persons, potential witnesses and suspected political agitators. Atrocities persisted in the interim between the Japanese surrender on 15 August and British reoccupation several weeks later.

Among the cases examined, 88 percent involved Chinese victims, while 58 percent involved solely Chinese casualties. (See: Figure 9.) There were 21 reported incidents of mass killings; 20 involved Chinese civilians, while 12 involved solely Chinese victims. Mass killings represented a third of the atrocities reviewed.<sup>275</sup> Among the 13 casualties of summary execution, eight were of Chinese ethnicity, four Malay and one Indian. By and large, the most prevalent crime (45 percent) involved torture.

Collectively, the metrics presented thus far confirm that atrocities were geographically widespread, recurrent and that Chinese formed the majority of victims. Having established these broad strokes, we now turn to a more detailed exposition of the war crimes in order to elucidate how they impacted civilian life.

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<sup>274</sup> See: Summary of examination of Neo Kuay Leh and Ong Foot Yeong, 7 January 1946, WO325/30, TNA.

<sup>275</sup> Incidents of mass killing were differentiated from summary executions in the following manner: ‘mass killing’ refers to the killing of several or numerous victims in a single incident. In incidences where only one victim was killed, these were categorised as summary executions. The mass killing incidences documented ranged from the killing of several people to hundreds.



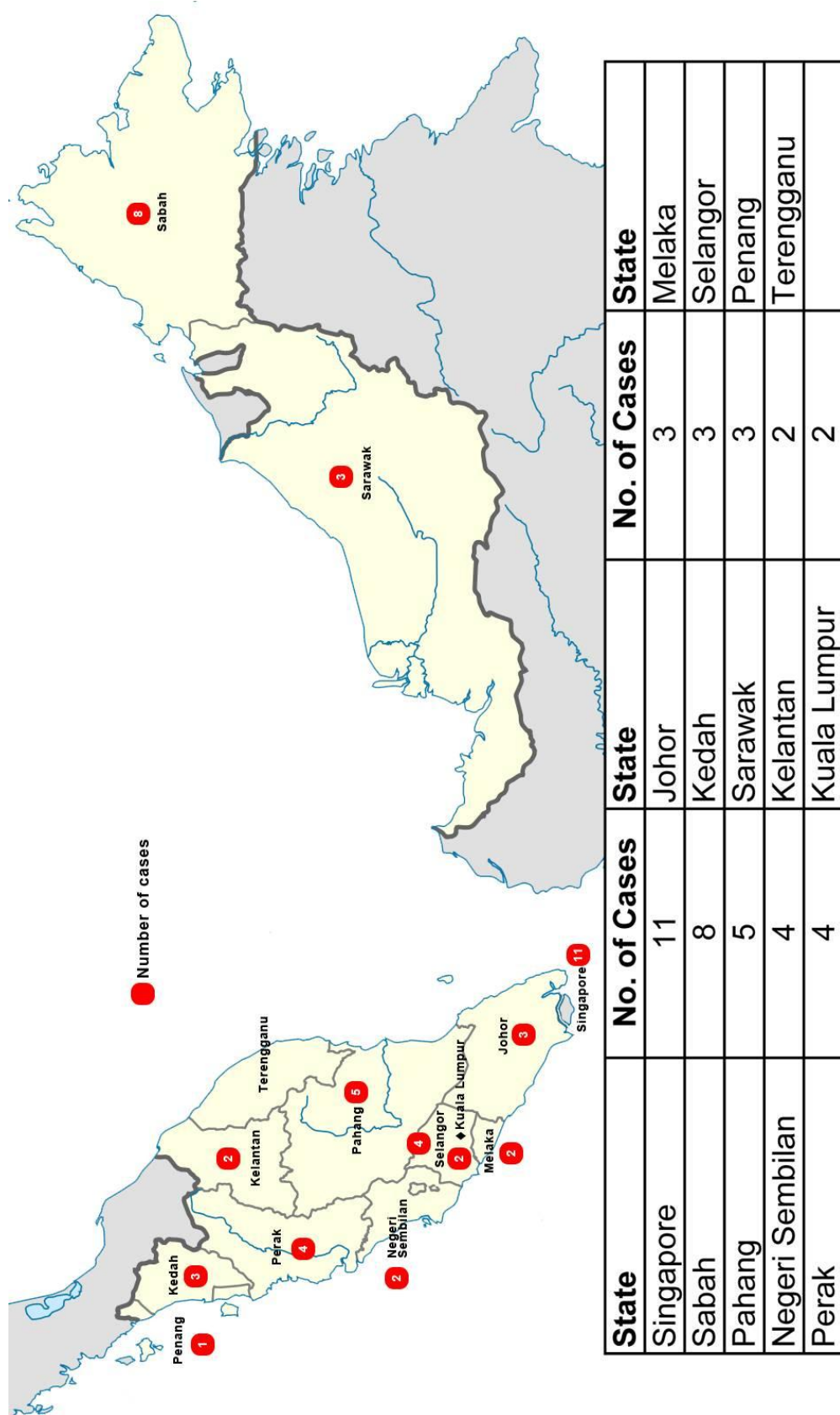


Figure 6. Geographical spread of war crimes (number of cases).

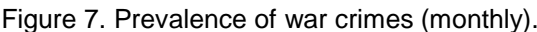


Figure 8. Distribution of war crimes by ethnicity (number of cases).

## Abnormal Times

For the average civilian, the Japanese occupation represented “abnormal times.” Abnormal, according to prosecutor S.K. Bannerji, because those in authority “exercised an absolute discretion over the lives and property of the civilian residents and more often than not, this discretion was exercised to the fullest possible extent and in the most arbitrary manner.”<sup>276</sup> The sense of abnormality was magnified by the actions of the *kempeitai* military police who had unlimited powers to arrest, torture and mete out summary judgement. Whether the purported infringements were valid or speculative, no one was above suspicion. Outside the physical threat to life and limb, and perhaps even more dire, was the threat of being randomly targeted.

In some incidents, the candidates for arrest were predictable, as in SSVF personnel T.W. Ong’s case. During the *shukusei* operations of February 1942, Ong was arrested and subjected to 21 days of torture before he was set free. Though he was released, this did not guarantee against future persecution. Two months later, Ong was detained and subjected to 27 days of torture; and again in September 1943 for 24 days.<sup>277</sup> It appeared that once a suspect, one was likely to remain blacklisted. Sometimes, this led to tragic results as in the case of Low Yoon Kim. In May 1945, Low was summoned by Sergeant Sasaki Saburo to the Telok Anson police station. A Chinese informant was sent to fetch him. When he returned home three hours later, Low had clearly been tortured; his body was covered in burns from electric shocks. Two weeks later, he was again summoned to meet Sasaki in a nearby park. This time, Low did not return; his son testified to seeing his body floating in the river.<sup>278</sup> However, it was never established in court as to why Low was detained twice; it seemed he had simply become a suspect.

Ong and Low’s stories are representative of the numerous incidents of torture documented within the war crimes cases. A collective reading yields an overwhelming sense of random suddenness. Koh Soo Keng for example was arrested on 14 August 1944 while at the park and later subjected to four months detention and torture. Of his ordeal he said, “I was not told the reason, but I was asked to admit and I did not know what to admit.”<sup>279</sup> Like Koh, many victims appeared baffled as to why they were persecuted; few admitted to acts of resistance or heroics. One would imagine that it would have been

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<sup>276</sup> Prosecutor’s Closing Address, WO235/877: Trial of Anraku Chosaku, Kampar, 20-21 June 1946, TNA.

<sup>277</sup> WO235/872: Trial of Sgt. Maj. Toyoda Akiichi, Singapore, 3-8 July 1946, TNA.

<sup>278</sup> Testimony of Low Thiong Mong, WO235/866: Trial of Sgt. Sasaki Saburo, Telok Anson, 17-18 June 1946, TNA.

<sup>279</sup> Testimony of Koh Soo Keng, WO235/819, TNA.

advantageous for victims to admit they had been involved in anti-Japanese activities or had harboured pro-British attitudes. Instead most exhibited hapless ignorance. Lim Guet Keow for instance was arrested at her home in November 1942 and tortured in a cell adjoining her husband's. Her husband died after two months of incarceration. When asked why they had been arrested, she answered simply, "I was not told for what reason." When probed as to whether her husband had been involved in any subversive activities, she was adamant, "No Sir, my husband didn't join any [secret] society." What about her, had she been involved? "No, Sir. Never mixed up with any friends," she claimed, "always in the home."<sup>280</sup> Similarly, Yu Song Moi recalled how, along with 26 others, she had been arrested in January 1945. After months of torture, she was admitted to Sibu Hospital. When asked if she knew why she had been arrested, she replied, "As far as I know, no reason at all."<sup>281</sup>

It appears that *Kempeitai* procedure involved casting the net of aspersion far and wide, often abetted by baseless accusations from local informants, only to whittle down the throngs of guileless suspects through a systematic escalation of abuse. The prized objective was intelligence, be it admission of wrongdoing or providing potential leads on subversive activities. When coercion and abuse failed to produce a confession, attempts often turned towards cultivating the victim as a future informant, thus perpetuating the cycle of (mis)information. Lam Keong Kong for instance was arrested with his father, mother, uncles, brother and sister-in-law. He was suspected of hiding firearms for the resistance. After six months of torture, when the Japanese were satisfied that there was nothing to be elicited from Lam, he was released. During this time, two of his family members died in custody while the rest went missing. According to Lam, he had been released on condition that he report back periodically to provide information on suspected communists. The accused however provided conflicting testimonies on Lam's involvement with the *kempeitai*: one claimed that Lam had become friendly with his previous torturers on his own accord, even inviting them home to dinner and lending 200 yen to another; another attested that Lam had served as an orderly to the station's staff sergeant while in detention, which was unusual for prisoners; and yet another denied Lam was ever an informant or under *kempeitai* employ.<sup>282</sup> Lam stated that he was "forced to have a friendship" with the *kempeitai* and admitted he had received "favourable treatment" after his release, including gifts of rice.<sup>283</sup> This case is

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<sup>280</sup> Testimony of Lim Guet Keow, WO235/819, TNA.

<sup>281</sup> Testimony of Yu Song Moi, WO235/890: Trial of Lt. Murakami Seisaku and three others, Singapore, 14-17 August 1946, TNA.

<sup>282</sup> Testimonies of Hase Ryosuke, Murata Yoshitara and Shin Shigetoshi, WO235/819, TNA.

<sup>283</sup> Testimony of Lam Keong Kong, WO235/819, TNA.

illustrative in highlighting how collaborative relationships were cultivated. It also demonstrates that boundaries in the relations between the oppressed and oppressors were vague, blurring the distinction between collaboration and coercion.

*Kempeitai* officers were under immense pressure to produce intelligence, no matter how dubious the methods employed or the information obtained. Sergeant Shin Shigetoshi testified that his commander had demanded “information and results at all costs;” failure to do so, he claimed, was tantamount to insubordination which was a punishable offence.<sup>284</sup> Similarly, Lim Say Chong, a Chinese clerk at the Ipoh *kempeitai* office, overheard the officer-in-charge Anraku Chosaku order two Taiwanese interpreters to extract information from a prisoner. Anraku allegedly told the men: “Take him away, must get a confession out of him even if you have to kill him.”<sup>285</sup> The suspect, Foong Koon Hoy, subsequently died as a result of water treatment.

Victims often caved in and confessed to crimes they knew little about. Some went to extreme measures to satisfy their torturers. Lam Nai Fook affixed his thumbprint to three statements he was given, even though he admitted: “I was made to sign but what were the contents I do not know.”<sup>286</sup> Tan Cheng Chuan was similarly perplexed. The Japanese had accused him of being involved with the resistance. After days of torture, a Chinese detective, Chia Koon On, urged him aside to confess lest he be beaten to death. Whether Chia had Tan’s interest at heart is unknown but Tan eventually confessed that he was a communist. “Then the Japanese gave me a cigarette,” he recalled. “They asked me to which communist I belonged to so I answered the Triangle Communist. In fact I don’t know what Triangle was, I bluffed them.”<sup>287</sup>

While torture was endemic, several accused steadfastly denied that *kempeitai* policy advocated abuse.<sup>288</sup> Others offered conflicting testimonies.<sup>289</sup> Among them, Sergeant Major Otda Hiroshi’s deposition stands out as he was the only individual, among a total of 162 accused, who pled guilty to the charges levied against him. Otda however justified his plea; he had merely discharged his duties

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<sup>284</sup> Testimony of Shin Shigetoshi, WO235/819, TNA.

<sup>285</sup> Testimony of Lim Say Chong, WO235/877, TNA.

<sup>286</sup> Testimony of Lam Nai Fook, WO235/819, TNA.

<sup>287</sup> Testimony of Tan Cheng Chuan, WO235/872, TNA.

<sup>288</sup> See for example testimonies from: Maj. Onishi Satoru, Sgt. Uekihara Susumu and Sgt. Matsumoto Mitsugi, all three were based at the *kempeitai* headquarters in Oxley Rise, Singapore; WO235/843, TNA.

<sup>289</sup> In the same trial as above, i.e. WO235/843, other accused provided convoluted testimony as to what methods were employed. Most agreed that physical abuse was used but either denied engaging in such acts themselves, or that abuse was perpetrated only when interrogators had run out of options. See testimonies from: Sgt. Matsumoto Mitsugi and Sgt. Shimomura Tomohei.

according to “the policy of the *kempeitai* and living up to its traditions to the best of my ability” and he sincerely believed that his “treatment of [the victims] was for the common good.”<sup>290</sup> During cross examination, he described the interrogation methods practised at the Alor Setar police station. These were summarised during the prosecution’s closing address:

...beating and poking with sticks, kicking, slapping the face with hands or slippers, suspending upside down, suspending by the wrists tied behind the back, burning with hot strips of metal or cigarette ends, water torture – victim placed on his back, flannel over his face, water is played from a hose attached to a tap, and water is sucked in, this continues until the victim’s stomach is filled with water and distended, sometimes a plank is placed upon the stomach and pressed or stood upon until the water is forcibly expelled.<sup>291</sup>

The methods employed at Alor Setar were common practise.<sup>292</sup> Clearly, these abusive techniques were either well established and therefore sanctioned, or widely shared and therefore encouraged. Euphemisms were often used to describe various torture methods, as in ‘water treatment’ or ‘electric treatment.’ They differed only slightly from field office to field office; ‘water treatment’ for example could mean dunking the victim’s head into a basin of water,<sup>293</sup> placing the victim’s head face upwards under a flowing tap,<sup>294</sup> submerging the victim upside down inside a tank filled with water<sup>295</sup> or lowering the victim into a well.<sup>296</sup> However, at times, rather bizarre methods were also employed. In Penang, torturers often flung the station’s pet monkey at suspects during interrogations.<sup>297</sup> In Kota Bahru, Ho Chid’s fingernails were extracted, after which he was wrapped in barbed wire and rolled about on the floor.<sup>298</sup>

Abuse was steadily escalated when a suspect proved uncooperative. Lim Nai Meng’s story is a prime example. He was arrested on suspicion of having organised an anti-Japanese unit. After repeated beatings over several days which rendered him semi-conscious, he was suspended from the ceiling with ropes tied

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<sup>290</sup> Appendix ‘E’: Petition against the Sentence of a Military Court, 11 February 1946, WO235/815, TNA.

<sup>291</sup> Prosecuting officer’s closing address, WO235/815, TNA.

<sup>292</sup> For example, Sgt. Nishi Yoshinobu, who was based in the Kuala Lumpur *kempeitai* office, describes similar torture methods. See: Evidence ‘A’: Summary of Examination, 24 June 1946, WO235/870, TNA.

<sup>293</sup> Testimony of Tham Keng Yam, WO235/821: War Crimes Trial of Sugimoto Heikichi and two others, Singapore, 5-7 February 1946, TNA.

<sup>294</sup> Testimony of Low Kiang Pin, WO235/819, TNA.

<sup>295</sup> Testimony of Sithamparam Pillay Karthigesu, WO235/953: Trial of Ogata Tsuyoshi, Kota Bahru, 21-24 October 1946, TNA.

<sup>296</sup> Testimony of Bhag Singh, WO235/931, TNA.

<sup>297</sup> Testimony of Syed Mohd, WO235/931, TNA.

<sup>298</sup> Testimony of Sithamparam Pillay Karthigesu, WO235/953, TNA.

to his thumbs until “the bones inside it could almost be seen.”<sup>299</sup> Burning papers were applied to his buttocks, legs and private parts. Intermittently, between beatings, he was submerged in a water tank. When returned to his cell, his hands were bound for fear that he would commit suicide. Nevertheless, Lim was found dead one morning with his tongue bitten off.

For those who withstood torture their ordeal did not stop as long as they remained in captivity. Ultimate survival depended on their capacity for endurance, as rations were scarce, medical attention inadequate and detention cells vermin-infested. Some prisoners proved resilient, such as Low Kiang Pin, who endured 10 months of torture until liberation on 6 September 1945.<sup>300</sup> Many were less hardy, succumbing to a combination of torture, illness and deprivation. How many endured captivity is inconclusive as Japanese record-keeping was erratic, highly inaccurate and most records were destroyed.

The situation at Penang Prison is illustrative. Available records admitted into evidence reveal large gaps, most notably between March 1942 and March 1944, when registrations of death were suspended.<sup>301</sup> It was estimated however that the death toll throughout 1943 averaged 10 to 15 a day.<sup>302</sup> Available records dating between 22 March 1944 and 24 August 1945 indicate that 589 persons met their demise. Of these recorded deaths, 15 were ascribed to hanging while the rest were attributed to illnesses, from beriberi, tuberculosis, septicaemia to even senility.<sup>303</sup> Whether these deaths were hastened by complications arising from torture is unknown. Evidence suggests medical officers were often instructed to downplay prisoners’ health conditions or falsify the causes of death.<sup>304</sup> Hence, deaths attributed to illness belie potential ill treatment. When Lee Teck Hua retrieved the body of his son at Outram Road Jail, he was convinced that Lee Tee

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<sup>299</sup> Testimony of Chong Seng Ee, WO235/872, TNA.

<sup>300</sup> Testimony of Low Kiang Pin, WO235/819, TNA.

<sup>301</sup> Testimony of Sheikh Ahmad Jelani, WO235/931, TNA. Sheikh Ahmad Jelani was the deputy registrar of births and deaths at the prison hospital. His testimony is corroborated by Corporal Bhag Singh who claimed that deaths in the prison were not recorded in 1942 and 1943, but that record-keeping resumed in 1944.

<sup>302</sup> Testimonies of Dr. Randmangan Letchmanasamy and Abbas Hussein bin Bacha, WO235/931, TNA.

<sup>303</sup> Evidence ‘J:’ List of Deaths in Prisons (Penang) Registered at General Hospital Penang, WO235/931, TNA.

<sup>304</sup> See for example: Testimony of Ayadurai, WO235/843, NA. Ayadurai, a senior dresser at Outram Road Prison hospital was tasked with recording admissions; he testified that “Mikizawa, the Japanese Commandant, was always objecting to persons being stated to be other than in good condition” even though “with very rare exceptions, no prisoner was ever in good condition.” The death of Ngu San Tieh was recorded as due to natural causes even though he died while being tortured; see: Testimony of Victor Francis Xavier, WO235/878: Trial of Sase Yoriyuki, Singapore, 17-19 July 1946, TNA. The death of Lall Singh Bull was recorded as an accident, though he too died while being interrogated; see: Testimony of Gorbex Singh, WO235/870, TNA.

Tee had been “beaten to death” for he was “beaten until unrecognisable.”<sup>305</sup> He had to rely on a clerk to point out the body. The death certificate however stated the cause of death simply as beriberi.<sup>306</sup> This suggests that even when documentation exists it may present only a partial picture of reality. As further proof, it should be noted that records of the 15 Chinese who were allegedly hung in Penang Prison span only three months, from June to September 1944.<sup>307</sup> It is dubious there were no other hangings before or after this period. Similarly, between 22 September 1942 and 10 August 1943, only two Indians, three Malays and 13 Chinese were reportedly executed.<sup>308</sup>

According to Corporal Bhag Singh, the Indian head of security at the prison, there were at least 1,500 prisoners in 1942 alone. While 500 were released, many died from starvation. By April 1943, Singh testified that the “120 that were left were just about to die.”<sup>309</sup> Corroborating testimonies from Malay and Indian sub-warders suggest that the prison population remained substantial throughout the occupation. There were three primary halls with multiple cells. Each cell held between 15 and 20 prisoners. Hall A and B were reserved for Chinese prisoners, while Hall C, which had 104 cells, had a mixed population of Chinese and Indian inmates, among them up to 800 women.<sup>310</sup> The women were subjected to similar ill treatment as the men. Indian medical officer Govindasamy recalled seeing female corpses in the hospital mortuary, where “the women were very thin, emaciated and their legs swollen up.”<sup>311</sup> Cecilia Wong, a Chinese matron attached to the women’s ward at Penang Hospital, recalled attending to Wong Kah Foong in October 1943 and Hwa Lan in February 1944.<sup>312</sup> Both had been tortured; one alleged she had been stripped, tied up and her genitalia prodded with a stick. In Kajang prison, Chen Foh Shin testified that during his incarceration, he knew of one cell that housed only women inmates.<sup>313</sup> At the Ipoh *kempeitai* office, Leong Sie Chun recounted how a female prisoner of 20 had been stripped naked during an interrogation, her breasts pierced with wires and her genitalia scorched.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> Testimony of Lee Teck Hua, WO235/843, TNA.

<sup>306</sup> Testimonies of Lee Keok Seng, WO235/843, TNA.

<sup>307</sup> Evidence ‘H.’ Return of Deaths in the Penang Prison from 1.1.1944 - 3.9.1945 (Jud: Hanging), WO235/931, TNA.

<sup>308</sup> Evidence ‘G.’ Deaths (Executions) from 1.6.42 – 14.2.44, WO235/931, TNA.

<sup>309</sup> Testimony of Bhag Singh, WO235/931, TNA. On the prison population and conditions, see also corroborating testimonies from sub-warders Kassim Ali bin Hashim, Ismail bin Mat Taib, Hashim bin Arshad and Abbas Hussein bin Bacha.

<sup>310</sup> Testimonies of Hashim bin Arshad and Hashim bin Kaji Kadar, WO235/931, TNA.

<sup>311</sup> Testimony of Govindasamy, WO235/931, TNA.

<sup>312</sup> Testimony of Cecilia Wong, WO235/931, TNA.

<sup>313</sup> Testimony of Chen Foh Shin, WO235/830, TNA.

<sup>314</sup> Testimony of Leong Sie Chun, WO235/837, TNA.



The only available records on deaths at Penang Prison list the 589 victims by name. Apart from these identified prisoners, it is impossible to know for certain who or how many were incarcerated, let alone how many lost their lives. Corpses were disposed of at multiple mass burial sites. Chinese caretaker Goh Teng Leong was among several employed to remove bodies from the prison and bury them at Rifle Range near Kampung Bahru. He testified that on average, he buried between three and six bodies a day. When asked what was the most he ever buried in a day, he replied, "five, six, seven or eight, I am not certain."<sup>315</sup>

Another mass burial site was Bukit Dunbar on Thien Eok Estate. When this site was discovered by the War Crimes Investigation Unit No. 6, a partial excavation was undertaken. One mass grave measuring 50 feet in length and three feet wide was opened up to a depth of six feet, even though it was estimated that the grave was possibly 10 feet deep or more. Major Douglas Hayhurst counted 232 skulls, after which the remains were reinterred *in situ*. He also testified that there were at least three mass graves on the site but these were not disturbed.<sup>316</sup> Even though the prison population was not exclusively Chinese, the British authorities only consulted local Chinese associations about this discovery. Further, the authorities provided photos of the exhumations to the Chinese press as the trial was underway. (See: Figure 10.) It is unclear as to why the British were not motivated to inform other ethnic community organisations. One can only deduce that the Chinese community was more vocal in seeking revenge or justice. Perhaps the British authorities were keen to placate the Chinese that justice was being served.

Persecution by the *kempeitai* was not restricted to suspects. Often, family members were also abused to compel a suspect to talk. Dr. Sybil Kathigasu, of Eurasian ethnicity, endured needles stuck under her fingernails and canes pressed into the sockets of her kneecaps. She was also burned with heated iron rods and hung upside down and beaten. However she refused to admit she had provided medical assistance to guerrillas. The *kempeitai* changed tack; they strung up her 7-year-old daughter in a tree and lit a fire beneath her. Kathigasu stood firm; she knew that if she spoke it would mean "death for thousands of people up in the hills."<sup>317</sup> Unable to break her, the *kempeitai* released her daughter but turned their attention to her husband. Under torture, he broke down and Kathigasu was

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<sup>315</sup> Testimony of Goh Teng Leong, WO235/931, TNA.

<sup>316</sup> Testimony of Douglas Hayhurst, WO235/931, TNA.

<sup>317</sup> Evidence 'C': Affidavit of Sybil Kathigasu, WO235/837: Trial of Sgt. Yoshimura Ekio, Ipoh, 18-20 February 1946, TNA. Upon liberation, Kathigasu was sent to London for medical treatment. She was awarded the George Medal in 1947. However, before she could return home, she succumbed to septicaemia and died. Her story is documented in her memoir, *No Dram of Mercy*.

sentenced to life imprisonment. In another incident, Tham Keng Yam's father was escorted to his residence and subjected to water treatment in front of him, after Tham denied owning a radio set. They were both beaten and incarcerated. Tham was asked to identify his father's body and released. The Japanese never located a radio set. Tham was simply told, "Your father's case is over and you are free now."<sup>318</sup>

The picture of the occupation that emerges from the trial cases is one of a deep and hopeless malaise. Many appear to have succumbed to apathetic helplessness or bewildered disconcertment. When violence occurred in their midst, they were reduced to meek onlookers. When violence was visited upon them, there was hapless resignation. Never was this more evident than in cases involving random and sudden violence. The plight of Anis bin Elok is a prime example. A stranger to Sibuloh, the Malay man had wandered into the town. As he was passing the police station, he heard the cries of a man being tortured and entered the premises to enquire. For his curiosity, he was strung up and beaten and his torturers left him tethered to the ceiling. When they returned an hour later, he had expired. Anis' body was cut into pieces and thrown into a nearby river.<sup>319</sup> In Rengas, Chong Chuan's husband was rounding up their drove of pigs for the night. Without warning, a report rang out in the dark. Her husband, Hee Than, was killed by Hayashi Sadahiko with a single rifle shot from 20 feet away. Chong was cautioned to not report the incident on pain of death.<sup>320</sup> In Melaka, Tay Kiam Aik was arrested and brought to the police station. The Chinese man appeared to be of unsound mind; when questioned, all he did was laugh. Tay was promptly beheaded, his head placed in a wooden box and displayed at a road junction.<sup>321</sup> In Perak, Tan Lim's son was bundled into a car by several Japanese officers. He followed on his bicycle and saw his son taken into a shop. Several hours later, Tan Put Kim was escorted to the back of the premises next to a river. Tan Lim then heard the sound of gunshots and watched his son's body float away.<sup>322</sup> In Bentong, Tan Ching Leong was escorted between a Japanese officer, Shima Nobuo, and a local interpreter. The party marched up Ah Peng Street, where they met with another Japanese officer named Wada. The district officer was a Malay man known as Dato' Hussein, who had been in a meeting with Wada. He testified that the officers exchanged a few words, following which, Shima "unsheathed his sword

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<sup>318</sup> Testimony of Tham Keng Yam, WO235/821, TNA.

<sup>319</sup> Testimony of Jackie Young, WO235/878, TNA.

<sup>320</sup> Testimony of Chong Chuan, WO311/543, Case No. 65225: Trial of Sgt. Hayashi Sadahiko and Toriumi Mamoru, Johore Bahru, 2-12 July 1947, TNA.

<sup>321</sup> Testimony of Ali bin Sidan Idin, WO235/888: Trial of WO Osaki Giichi and two others, Melaka, 26-27 August 1946, TNA.

<sup>322</sup> Testimony of Tan Lim, WO235/866, TNA.

and executed the Chinese with one stroke.”<sup>323</sup> The beheading was perfunctory and accomplished with aplomb. It was witnessed by local residents, who kept their heads down and went about their business.<sup>324</sup> Tan’s corpse was left in the street until midday.<sup>325</sup>



Figure 9. Exhumations at Bukit Dunbar, Penang.

Source: Evidence ‘C,’ WO235/931: Trial of Higashigawa Yoshinobu and 34 others, Penang, 30 Aug - 28 Sept 1946, NA.

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<sup>323</sup> Testimony of Dato Hussein, WO235/881: Trial of Sgt. Maj. Shima Nobuo, Bentong, 15 July 1946, TNA.

<sup>324</sup> Testimonies of Ho Swee Kei, Wong Chun, Chia Ah Fah and Ng Hai Chew, WO235/881, TNA.

<sup>325</sup> Testimony of Tan Cheow, WO235/881, TNA.

The Japanese army displayed similar equanimity in the commission of wholesale slaughter. In Negeri Sembilan, officers of the 11<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the 25<sup>th</sup> Army were instructed to “summarily execute any Chinese found in their areas.”<sup>326</sup> On 10 March 1942, a force of 70 soldiers arrived into Senaling. They arrested four prominent Chinese families and an indeterminate number of Chinese. The men, women and children were taken to Kuala Pilah by lorry. Behind the town’s former English school, they were bayoneted and cut with swords. Four days later, the regiment returned to Senaling where Captain Iwata Mitsugi briefed the assembled villagers. He announced that the four families would not be returning. Their belongings were given to a Malay villager to auction. On their way out of the village, the regiment rounded up 76 Chinese refugees who had been squatting in the market and marched them to Kuala Pilah. Once there, some were released while the majority met the same fate as the previous victims. The following day, the same regiment marched into the nearby town of Parit Tinggi and assembled the villagers under the ruse of dispensing safe passes. The 675 men, women and children were despatched in the surrounding vicinity and the village was set alight.

Sporadic lightning raids on homes, villages and businesses were recorded throughout the occupation.<sup>327</sup> These operations were intended to weed out anti-Japanese guerrillas, turn up outlawed items or punish anyone suspected of providing support to the resistance. In an unusual case, the Chinese village of Sungei Lui was raided in August 1942 purportedly to search for a missing Malay man named Zakanah bin Bassir.<sup>328</sup> The significance of Zakanah was not established in court. The men were shot in batches of 10, while the women and children herded into a shop where they were machine-gunned. In Tenghilan, during a raid on Chau Kee Sundry Shop in October 1943, the proprietor was found in possession of a Nationalist Chinese flag and summarily executed.<sup>329</sup> A search for “Chinese agitators” on Mentanani island in February 1944 led to the mass killing of 60 Suluk men, women and children, and several Chinese.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Abstract of Evidence, WO311/543, Case No. 65272: Trial of Capt. Watanabe Tsunahiko and two others, Kuala Lumpur, 22 Sept ember-13 October 1947, TNA.

<sup>327</sup> For other raids, see: Swee Radio Service, a shop in Bukit Bintang Road in Kuala Lumpur, in November 1943, WO235/904, TNA; Khoo residence, Singapore, in October 1943, WO235/907: Trial of Sgt Okayama Hikoji, Singapore, 25-26 June 1946; multiple raids on Pinji Estate including July 1945, WO235/845: Trial of Nagayasu Mamoru, Ipoh, 1-2 May 1946, TNA; Bukit Koman in May 1944, WO235/873: Trial of Sgt. Maj. Tanaka Hideo, Raub, 18 July 1946, TNA; Raid on Cho residence, Brinchang, in June 1945, WO235/866, TNA.

<sup>328</sup> WO311-543, Case No. 65275: Trial of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Hashimoto Tadashi , Kuala Lumpur, 21-29 July 1947, TNA.

<sup>329</sup> WO235/926: Trial of Kato Chuichiro, Borneo, 20-22 November 1946, TNA.

<sup>330</sup> WO235/882: Trial of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Shimizu Kiyogi and seven others, Singapore, 15-29 July 1946, TNA.

Sometimes, the objective of the lightning raids was unclear. In the village of Kuala Kubu for example the villagers were preparing for a wedding on 28 April 1944 when a contingent of soldiers arrived and fired a shot into the air. The villagers fled helter-skelter. Seven Chinese men were herded into a house, bayoneted and the house was set on fire.<sup>331</sup> When asked why the villagers had been targeted for Japanese action, Lei Kow, one of the surviving victims, replied, "I do not know the cause." When asked by the defence counsel if he had been "in league with the notorious Chinese bandit Communist Party?," Lei Kow denied this. "No, not so," he answered, "I devoted all my time to planting food crops. I have a lot of children."<sup>332</sup> In December 1944, a 30 man-strong detachment comprising Japanese officers and Indian, Malay and Chinese sub-police, raided the Soon Foh mine in Kampar. The coolies were asked if there were any anti-Japanese people on site.<sup>333</sup> When no one stepped forward, the coolies were beaten, and the staff quarters and machinery set on fire. Why did the Japanese scupper production at the mine? It is highly unlikely that their aim had been to disrupt output. There appeared to have been little tangible benefit to such operations except to keep the populace on edge.

In 1945, as the tide of war began turning against the Japanese, there was a corresponding escalation in atrocities. The highly-charged atmosphere bordered on paranoia; any whiff of dissent or suspected infraction was met with swift reprisals. Civilians careless enough to let slip that a future Allied victory was imminent were accused of spreading propaganda and summarily disposed of.<sup>334</sup> Repressive measures were stepped up to tighten security and maintain control. In Kampar town for example 40 to 45 "beggars" – most likely displaced persons or refugees – were trucked to the outskirts in early 1945 and shot; in May, several Chinese teens suspected of theft were executed without trial; in June, Chinese farmers who were clearing jungle foliage without obtaining prior permission were machine-gunned on site; that same month, a Malay man, Ali Zaman, was executed for "blasphemy" against the emperor; and in August, six pork sellers and several others were rounded up in the town market for "spreading communist propaganda" and shot.<sup>335</sup>

From mid-1945 onwards, there were concerted efforts at eliminating witnesses and destroying evidence. Captain Harada Kensei testified that in

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<sup>331</sup> WO235/824, TNA, 14.

<sup>332</sup> WO235/824, PRO, 14.

<sup>333</sup> Testimonies of Yeong Choy and Cheong Hon Leong, WO235/877, TNA.

<sup>334</sup> Such incidents were recorded in Penampang, Telipong, Menggatal, Kuala Belait and Jesselton between June and July 1945; see: WO235/884: Trial of Capt. Harada Kensei, Singapore, 8-11 July 1946, NA, and WO235/833, TNA.

<sup>335</sup> Testimonies of Lall Singh, Soo Peng Hui, Tan Teck Oi, Niaz Mohamed and Seah Chong Sin, WO235/877, TNA.

preparation for imminent Allied landings, the Jesselton *kempeitai* had received the order to implement the “Third War Plan.” This, he said, involved “clearing out all elements detrimental to the peace,” including blacklisted persons and suspects in custody.<sup>336</sup> The existence of a ‘Third War Plan’ has not been raised in any known academic discourse on the Japanese occupation nor did any other accused mention it. Nevertheless, it is clear that ‘clearing out’ activities accelerated during this time. In Keningau, prominent civilian internees were marched to Renau and executed by firing squad in July 1945. They included the British Chief Secretary, Silis Drummond Le Gross Clerk, rubber plantation owner Ronald Macdonald, American engineer Henry William Webber, Dr. Valentine Alexander Stookes and the Chinese Consul-General, Cho Huan Lai.<sup>337</sup> That same month, 17 Chinese internees at Bentong police station were trucked to the 11<sup>th</sup> mile Karak Road and killed.<sup>338</sup>

Elimination operations continued even after the Japanese surrender on 15 August. Between late August and early September 1945, the cells at Kampar police station were emptied out. Malay constables testified that the Chinese prisoners were shot in batches in the neighbouring hills.<sup>339</sup> On 5 September in Melaka, 14 Chinese civilians were arrested from among 50 who had gathered at the Overseas Chinese Association building. They were spirited away to a remote island where they were bayoneted and thrown down a well.<sup>340</sup> Having heard of the Japanese surrender, they had gathered to discuss future plans for the community.

While the atrocities described in some detail thus far are not exhaustive, these multiple accounts, it is hoped, convey in some limited measure the destitution and degradation unleashed during the occupation. Wives were left to dig for the bones of their husbands on the beach;<sup>341</sup> fathers fished their sons’ bodies out of rivers;<sup>342</sup> while strangers disposed the corpses of unknown dead.<sup>343</sup> Meanwhile, profiteers flourished in the black market, women canoodled with Japanese officers at dance halls, desperate mothers scavenged for food, and scores of orphaned feral children roamed the streets, even as informants exchanged accusations for favours.

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<sup>336</sup> Testimony of Capt. Harada Kensei, WO235/928, TNA.

<sup>337</sup> WO235/883: Trial of Lt. Col. Abe Kiichi and three others, Labuan, 29 April-4 May July 1946, TNA.

<sup>338</sup> WO235/880, TNA.

<sup>339</sup> WO235/877, TNA.

<sup>340</sup> WO235/875: Trial of Capt. Kamezawa Matsutoshi and ten others, Melaka, 5-6 July 1946, TNA.

<sup>341</sup> Testimonies of Edith Chong and Mrs Leong Chong Fah, WO235/833, TNA.

<sup>342</sup> Testimonies of Tan Lim, Low Thiong Mong and Beh Chin, WO235/866, TNA.

<sup>343</sup> Testimonies of Tham Heng, WO235/880, NA; and Lee Ah Fong, WO235/926, TNA.

Such abnormal times were made possible by the undercurrent of chronic terror which ran beneath the surface of normal living. In maintaining hegemony, the Japanese administration was aided by local Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians, who, while often reluctant, were obsequious servants. Many felt fear and in turn perpetuated fear. The participation of collaborators, as the historian Timothy Brook has pointed out, allows for the narrative of atrocity in war to be normalised.<sup>344</sup> Those in Japanese employ inadvertently legitimised and maintained the Japanese system of terror.

Systemic terror, of the kind which persists within an authoritarian regime, cannot be equated with fear in the usual sense; it is far more potent and impregnating. The German philosopher Kurt Riezler proposes that there is a difference between ordinary fear – a fear of something definite – and indefinite fear, which he described as a “fear of everything for everything.” The conditions for the latter arise when societal norms are radically altered, so much so that the consistency of meanings, principles of action, and norms of behaviour and expectation are overturned. In such an event, fears and assumptions can no longer be managed, confusion reigns and paralysis is crystallised. Such “total fear,” Riezler surmises, is “worse than the fear of death.”<sup>345</sup> We may recall the similarity in N.I. Cheng and H.M. Low’s choice of words in describing life during the occupation as one imbued with a “daily, nightly fear, far worse than the fear of death.”<sup>346</sup>

The random violence employed by the Japanese administration to subjugate the civilian population is also reminiscent of political theorist Joseph S. Roucek’s description of conditions which are conducive to breeding chronic terror:

“...a persistent and well-organized series of terrorist acts [which] leaves the masses uncertain when and where another step will be taken. Periodical lapses in the application of terror are suddenly, and often without warning, replaced by the wave of terrorism which often even has no rhyme or reason. The goal is attained by repeating similar ‘up and down’ actions...”<sup>347</sup>

The Japanese administration excelled in such ‘up and down actions.’ The façade of normal living was grotesquely adorned with displays of disembodied heads and spectacles of broken bodies on one hand; and on the other by the

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<sup>344</sup> Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 242.

<sup>345</sup> Kurt Riezler, “The Social Psychology of Fear,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 49, 6 (1944): 491.

<sup>346</sup> Cheng and Low, *This Singapore*, 81.

<sup>347</sup> Joseph S. Roucek, “Sociological Elements of a Theory of Terror and Violence,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 21, 2 (1962): 170.

carnival-like mood of Japanese victory parades and celebrations.<sup>348</sup> Life was thus socialised to terror and suffused with a “surreal quality.”<sup>349</sup> People found themselves perpetually suspended in proverbial limbo between the uncertain, the vague and the unknown. Sociologist Linda Green, in her field work with Mayans living under an oppressive Guatemalan regime, witnessed a fear that thrived on ambiguities which destabilised social relations by creating distrust and divided communities through suspicion and apprehension.<sup>350</sup> Similarly, in Malaya, there was a “coarsening of conscience” where “each for himself” was the order of the day. The territory had become “a witch’s cauldron of resentment and bitterness, suspicion and hatred.”<sup>351</sup>

How did the Chinese in Malaya negotiate the distrust, suspicion and apprehension which flourished under the Japanese occupation? In the immediate aftermath, many Chinese sought revenge and justice, not only against Japanese perpetrators but also collaborators in their midst. Upon the Japanese surrender, some took matters into their own hands. At Upper Paya Lebar district, for example, Chinese farmers exacted a revenge killing upon Mu Cheng Mui, a Chinese auxiliary policeman who had persecuted them during the occupation.<sup>352</sup> Others had initially looked to the MPAJA to ‘clean up’ society. (See: Figure 11.) But accounts of MPAJA guerrillas emerging from the hills, striding arrogantly into rural villages and towns, abducting suspected collaborators, hosting kangaroo courts, and dispensing their own brand of violent justice only inflamed an already volatile interracial situation.

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<sup>348</sup> On a discussion on contrasts between ‘spectacles of terror’ and ‘spectacles of celebration and compliance’ during the occupation, see: Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Kamalini Ramdas, “Remembering Darkness: Spectacle, Surveillance and the Spaces of Everyday Life in Syonan-to,” 165-171.

<sup>349</sup> Oehler, “Let Those Who Sit In Judgement Remember.”

<sup>350</sup> Linda Green, “Living in a State of Fear.”

<sup>351</sup> Low and Cheng, *This Singapore*, 136, 145.

<sup>352</sup> Han, “Collaboration,” 35-36.





Figure 10. "Big Clean Up!"

The "People's Anti-Japanese Army" is depicted sweeping away "traitors and running dogs" with the broom of "public opinion."

Source: *Hwa Chiau Jit Pau*, September 27, 1945.

During the occupation, repressive MPAJA measures had ignited Malay self-defence measures. The most prominent were militant religious groups which coalesced into a *Sabilillah* (Holy War) movement.<sup>353</sup> With the support of the Japanese military, sporadic attacks on Chinese enclaves began in earnest from May 1945 onwards. In the interregnum between the Japanese surrender and British reoccupation, the MPAJA received British endorsement to establish interim control.<sup>354</sup> To the Muslim militants however, their worst fears had materialised; the “pig eaters” were taking over the country. There were also rumours that the British intended to hand over the country to the Chinese and the MPAJA upon reoccupation. In response, Muslim militants in Johor took matters into their own hands. By August 1945, an estimated 4,000 Chinese were massacred and 20,000 displaced.<sup>355</sup> Interracial violence soon spread to Perak, Melaka, Pahang, Kedah, Terengganu and Kelantan. To dampen the situation, the British disbanded the MPAJA and other guerrilla forces beginning in December 1945, though several breakout groups absconded with their weapons into the hills and to the porous borders between Thailand and Malaya. Some segments of the Chinese populace were dissatisfied with this turn of events. They not only applauded the MPAJA for weeding out collaborators, the MPAJA was perceived as the only viable protection against further Malay attacks. Nevertheless, Chinese armed threat was effectively neutralised.

To soothe interracial hostilities, the British had to tackle the issue of collaboration headlong. However, distinguishing between those who had been coerced into service and those who had willingly collaborated was not easy. Collaboration is not a tidy concept. Did the men who volunteered for auxiliary police service know they may have to kill? If their intention was to feed their families or safeguard them from harm, could they be considered willing collaborators? Collaboration is difficult to pin down as it evokes a host of ambiguities, of intentions and of unknowable consequences.<sup>356</sup> After the war,

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<sup>353</sup> For an in-depth discussion on interracial Malay-Chinese clashes during the occupation and in the interregnum period, see: Cheah, *Red Star*, in particular the chapter “The Malay/MCP/Chinese Conflict,” 195-240.

<sup>354</sup> Allied leaflets dropped into Malaya after the Japanese surrender read: “The Japanese capitulated on the 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1945. Until the arrival of the British military authorities, the Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army will take charge,” Sybil Kathigasu, *No Dram of Mercy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Kuala Lumpur: Prometheus, 2006), 177.

<sup>355</sup> Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the British Embassy in Nanking, 7 February 1946, MU Secret 346/46; quoted in Cheah, *Red Star*, 218.

<sup>356</sup> Brook, *Collaboration*, 240.

several trials involving collaborators had led to successful convictions.<sup>357</sup> However, many others escaped prosecution. During the occupation, the pre-existing Malayan civil service had been absorbed into the Japanese administration machinery. To reestablish rule, the British required the service of many of the same civil servants. Consequently, the British adopted a conciliatory attitude towards such personnel so as to “dissipate as speedily as possible whatever pro-Japanese sentiments may remain.”<sup>358</sup> As for those who had been in the Japanese auxiliary police or military, the British soon concluded that many had cooperated under duress. Chief Civil Affairs Officer Colonel M.C. Hay, for example, emphasised that strong evidence was required to show that alleged collaborators “went out of their way to help the Japs,” saying, “I am not certain myself how I would have behaved with a Japanese bayonet pointed at my throat.”<sup>359</sup>

It is noteworthy that among the cases examined, few of those implicated, among them prison sub-warders, *kempeitai* interpreters and auxiliary security personnel, faced prosecution. The case involving Lee Ah Kim, a resident of Pinji in Perak, is illustrative. Lee’s son, Chong Tet Siew, was arrested during a raid on their estate on 19 July 1945.<sup>360</sup> That evening, family members went to the police station to enquire into Chong’s plight. The local police at the station, among them members of the earlier raiding party, feigned ignorance. Chong’s body was discovered the next day under a fresh mound of earth. Lee had to obtain consent from the local authorities to bury him. However, the permission slip read: “Cause of death: Illness.” (See: Figure 12.)

Lee saved her son’s blood-soaked shirt as evidence. She had clung to hopes for eventual British redress because “my son was shot dead on the 19th and after that I saw aeroplanes coming every day and so I thought the British would come back to Malaya very soon.” During the trials, it emerged that a Malay constable named Haroon bin Arshad had pulled the trigger. Haroon testified that “it was quite obvious that if I did not shoot the boy I myself would be killed.” The Japanese commanding officer, Nagayasu, however denied wrongdoing. He testified that Haroon had killed Chong of his own accord because Chong had tried to escape. Kok Ah Lek, a Chinese detective involved in the raid, was only able to

<sup>357</sup> For example: “Death for Jap-Enrolled Police,” *The Straits Times*, December 1, 1945; “Penghulu To Die,” *The Malayan Daily News*, February 5, 1946; and “Death Sentences On de Silva,” *The Malayan Daily News*, February 9, 1946.

<sup>358</sup> See: Memorandum on Treatment of Renegades and Quislings, and Policy Regarding the Trial and Punishment of Disloyal Persons in Malaya Who Collaborated with the Enemy, WO203/4203A; quoted in Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 312-313.

<sup>359</sup> “No Heresy Hunts For Collaborators in Johore,” *The Straits Times*, November 7, 1945.

<sup>360</sup> Testimonies of Lee Ah Kim, Chong Tet Shin, Kok Ah Leck, Haroon bin Arshad and Nagayasu Mamoru, WO235/845, TNA.

provide partial corroborating evidence. He claimed he was walking away when he heard the sound of multiple gunshots, so had not witnessed the shooting directly. He had asked Haroon why he had shot Chong. Haroon had replied that Nagayasu had given the order. The trial judges concluded that Nagayasu was guilty. Haroon and Kok however were not charged for complicity.

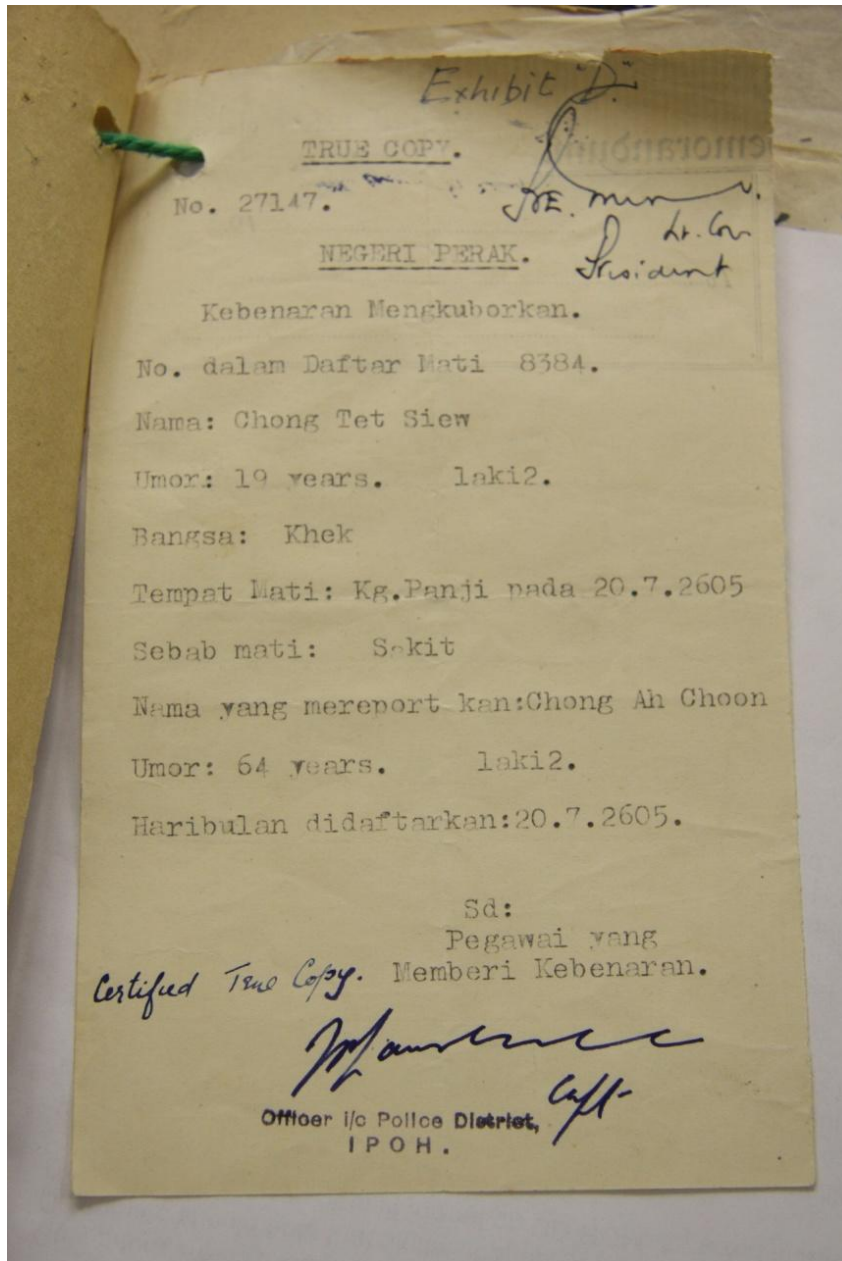


Figure 11. "Permission for Burial."

Source: Evidence 'D,' WO235/845: Trial of Nagayasu Mamoru, Ipoh, 1-2 May 1946, NA.

Lee Ah Kim's story offers an insight into how far society had degenerated. There had been no one within her community or among the authorities she could turn to for redress. The usual civil institutions which governed social relations, law and order had broken down. The local police had turned a dispassionate blind eye to her plight, while the authorities had wilfully falsified the cause of her son's death, and those involved in her son's death were free to move with impunity within the community. For many, like Lee, the occupation was a lonely and isolating experience, a composite of countless personal tragedies. When the oppressed are co-conspirators in the oppression, what does one do with such lived contradictions but remain silent? Those who had suffered grievance held their tongue and bided their time. Silence nurtured on fear is infectious; it becomes a survival strategy. This type of silence is burdened by the not-knowing and compounded by the indefinite fear of potential violence which, "like fire; it can flare up and suddenly burn you."<sup>361</sup> It envelopes not just the victims but the oppressed group from which both the victim and perpetrator are plucked.

One can only wonder if Lee was appeased by the court's judgement. Or perhaps Lee harboured no ill will towards the local police. Perhaps she excused them on the grounds that they had no choice. Unlike the MPAJA guerrillas, who held a dim view of any cooperation with the Japanese, the wider populace appeared resigned that most had cooperated in order to survive. Their venom was reserved especially for those who had been *kempeitai* informants, who had actively engaged in abuse or who had benefited unfairly from Japanese favours.<sup>362</sup> Thus, many chose to remain silent and relatively few local collaborators were charged or investigated. A public statement by the authorities, upon the detention of 346 alleged collaborators, lauded the small number in comparison to the total population. This, it was asserted, "speaks well for the loyalty to the British and Allied cause of all the communities in this country."<sup>363</sup>

Apart from the initial spate of war crimes trials, there were few formal avenues to vent Chinese suffering. A 'blood debt' appeal, presented to the British authorities in 1946, was not pursued.<sup>364</sup> Subsequent British claims for war reparations from Japan on behalf of Malaya excluded allowance for loss of life and personal injury. Rather, compensation was focused primarily on the "restoration of

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<sup>361</sup> Green, "Living in a State of Fear," 186.

<sup>362</sup> Han, "Collaboration," 31-38.

<sup>363</sup> "346 Alleged Collaborators Detained In Malaya," *The Straits Times*, November 19, 1945.

<sup>364</sup> Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 336.

property and production for the good of Malaya.”<sup>365</sup> Further, the British ceded to mounting pressure from the American government to terminate prosecution.<sup>366</sup> With an eye towards the developing Cold War with the Soviet Union and a rapidly ‘red’ China, Allied priorities shifted towards reshaping Japan into a viable anti-communist outpost.<sup>367</sup> Consequently, war crimes trials ceased in December 1948.

By 1951, a rehabilitated Japan was readmitted into the community of nations through the San Francisco Peace Treaty. Among its provisions, Japanese war criminals detained outside Japan were repatriated to Sugamo Prison in Tokyo, effectively transferring supervision for war criminals to Japan. Many were afterwards acquitted, while the status of those who had received death sentences was posthumously commuted so they could be deified at Yasukuni Shrine.<sup>368</sup> With issues of war reparations effectively nullified, a line was drawn under Japanese war responsibilities.<sup>369</sup> Notably, only six Asian countries were among the 48 signatories to this peace treaty; China and Korea, who had been vocally opposed, were excluded.<sup>370</sup> Asian civilian war experience was thus consigned to history. In Malaya, the impetus for silencing war memory had begun, foreclosing the possibility for reconciling divergent civilian war experiences in a manner that could engender a shared sense of the past.

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<sup>365</sup> Memorandum on Proposals for a Malayan War Damage Compensation Scheme, 1948, 2006/0033588, NAM.

<sup>366</sup> Narayanan, “Second World War Japanese Atrocities,” 38. The US government was keen to limit war crimes prosecution; for a discussion on the many reasons for this stance, see: Christopher Simpson, “Shutting down the United Nations War Crimes Commission,” *Criminal Law Forum* 25 (2014): 133-146.

<sup>367</sup> See: Hugh Borton, “American Occupation Policies in Japan,” *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 22, 4 (1948): 37-45; and Robert A. Scalapino, “The American Occupation of Japan – Perspectives after Three Decades,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 428 (1976): 104-113.

<sup>368</sup> Kosuke Nobuko, “The Tokyo Trials and British-Japanese reconciliation: the question of *tu quoque*, political oblivion and British prisoners of war,” in *Japan and Britain at War and Peace*, eds. Hugo Dobson and Kosuke Nobuko (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 90.

<sup>369</sup> Ivy Lee, “Probing the Issues of Reconciliation More than Fifty Years after the Asia-Pacific War,” in *The Search for Justice: Japanese War Crimes*, ed. Peter Li (London: Transaction Publishers, 2008), 19.

<sup>370</sup> The six Asian signatories were: Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam in Southeast Asia, and Ceylon and Pakistan in South Asia.

## Chapter 3

### Chinese War Memory and Silences

Post-war Malaya experienced multiple historical convulsions which saw the fate and future of the Chinese hang ever more precariously in the balance. At stake were issues of allegiance, belonging and identity. The geopolitical landscape of Southeast Asia had transformed: Burma, Indonesia, Vietnam and Cambodia were now independent states. Malaya alone remained “an island of colonialism...in a great sea of new nations.”<sup>371</sup> The initial euphoria of liberation soon turned into uncertainty when rising hopes for common citizenship became mired in inter-communal wrangling. Frustrated by continued British occupation, and upon the instigation of external communist influences, the MCP resorted once again to armed struggle.<sup>372</sup> This sparked the Malayan Emergency of 1948 to 1960, which saw Malaya transformed into a “hot front in a cold war” when the largely Chinese guerrilla force pitted itself against the administration of the day.<sup>373</sup>

The rocky path towards self-government culminated in a hasty amalgamation of the Malayan peninsula, the Borneo territories of Sabah and Sarawak, and Singapore into the independent federation of Malaysia in 1963.<sup>374</sup> The proceedings had been fraught, marred by reticence from the Philippines, revolt in Brunei and open hostility from Indonesia which perceived ‘Greater Malaysia’ as a thinly-disguised neo-colonial construct towards cementing British dominion in Southeast Asia.<sup>375</sup> The British however did not have a grand design for consolidating its power in Southeast Asia. Rather, postwar Britain’s stance was one of disentanglement from its colonial dominions abroad, while creating an anti-

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<sup>371</sup> D.C MacGillivray, “Malaya-The New Nation,” *International Affairs* 34, 2 (1958): 158.

<sup>372</sup> On the impact of the international communist movement on uprisings in Asia, see: Ian Morrison, “The Communist Uprising in Malaya,” *Far Eastern Survey* 17, 24 (1948): 281-286.

<sup>373</sup> T.H. Silcock, “Policy for Malaya 1952,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 28, 4 (1952): 445.

<sup>374</sup> The fiery negotiations and horse-trading between Malay and Chinese elites, with Britain as facilitator, are captured in Tan Tai Yong’s treatise on the political processes leading up to 1963. Tan argues that the seeds of the union’s ruin were planted when many unresolved issues – citizenship criteria, political and economic arrangements – were deliberately left unclarified; Tan, *Creating “Greater Malaysia.”*

<sup>375</sup> Indonesian hostility erupted in armed incursions on Borneo island following President Sukarno’s implementation of *Konfrontasi* (confrontation) from 1963 to 1965. Sukarno’s stance was emboldened by support from Beijing; John O. Sutter, “Two Faces of Konfrontasi: ‘Crush Malaysia’ and the Gestapu,” *Asian Survey* 6, 10 (1966): 523-546.

communist bulwark which would protect British economic and security interests.<sup>376</sup> This merger, forged through expediency, soon broke down, resulting in the expulsion of Singapore in 1965.

Against this tumultuous backdrop, the Chinese civil war between nationalist and communist forces in China also cast its shadow. The retreat of the nationalist government to Taiwan and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) signalled the beginning of the end of the motherland's reach. The about-turn in China's policy in the 1950s meant that the Overseas Chinese were set adrift. To garner recognition for the communist regime, the Chinese government jettisoned its previous position which claimed all Chinese abroad as its own; a move interpreted in Southeast Asia as China's willingness to "sacrifice her sons."<sup>377</sup> This offered a *carte blanche* to Southeast Asian governments to pursue more rigorous nationalist and assimilationist measures to counter the Chinese problem in their midst.<sup>378</sup>

The Chinese in Malaya now stood at the crossroads: to return to the motherland or to assimilate with the host society. Initially many had wanted "the best of both worlds" – to obtain Malayan citizenship but also remain Chinese nationals.<sup>379</sup> However, with China's change in policy, this option lost its allure. Further, the communist regime's persecution of the mercantile and middle classes in China made repatriation increasingly untenable. This was a time for pragmatism and many were willing to *luodi shenggen* (strike ground and grow roots).<sup>380</sup> Among

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<sup>376</sup> For an in-depth analysis of how successive postwar British governments managed the 'decline of the Empire' and the symbolic and historical significance of Britain's withdrawal from Malaya and Singapore, see: P.L. Pham, *Ending 'East of Suez': The British Decision to Withdraw from Malaysia and Singapore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>377</sup> William G. Skinner, "Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 321 (1959): 146.

<sup>378</sup> In Indonesia, following a Sino-Indonesian agreement in 1955, the Chinese were given a moratorium of two years to decide between Indonesian and Chinese nationality. In Thailand, Thai syllabi was adopted in previously Chinese schools; see: Mallory, "Chinese Minorities," 261-267. The impact of Thailand's repressive measures resulted in accelerated political naturalization and cultural assimilation of the Chinese within Thai society; see: Edward Van Roy, "Sampheng: From Ethnic Isolation to National Integration," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 23, 1 (2008):1-29.

<sup>379</sup> In a survey run by *Nan Chiau* newspaper in 1947, of the 4374 responses received, 86 percent opted for dual citizenship; Hawkins, "Marking Time," 82.

<sup>380</sup> On the question of allegiance, the influence of Chinese pragmatism cannot be overlooked. Mallory observed for example that in Indonesia, "There is no knowing how genuine the popular feeling is on either side; the rapid shift of sentiment would suggest that the motivation is opportunistic and often prompted by personal rather than patriotic motives." Chinese pragmatism was encapsulated in this anecdote: "The experience of this casual observer in Indonesia in 1953 led to the belief that every Chinese shop owned three flags – the Communist, the Nationalist and the



the second and third generations especially, many were ready to abandon ties with China in favour of exclusively Malayan citizenship.<sup>381</sup> Although the community resisted outright assimilation, there was a gradual erosion of overt Chinese nationalism. This was fuelled by deportations to China and the banning of Chinese political organisations and the annual Double Tenth celebrations (which marked the birth of the Chinese republic). The community was thus set on course towards Malayanisation.<sup>382</sup>

How did the Chinese respond to the national project to remake him into a Malayan? What did domestication entail? And more importantly, how did these factors influence the content and texture of Chinese war memory? In this chapter, we propose that the transition from migrant to citizen was an anxious one, and the dilemmas inherent in negotiating between identities coloured Chinese war memory. We outline significant postwar socio-historical factors which influenced the process of domesticating the Chinese. This will be followed by an exploration of Chinese war memory and memory-work. Lastly, we examine the outcome of these various struggles in the shaping of contemporary Malaysian Chinese perspectives of the war past.

## The Making of Silences

The momentum for marginalisation of Chinese war memory can be traced to several defining historical moments. The Malayan Emergency of 1948 to 1960 and the racial riots of 1969 accelerated efforts to domesticate the Chinese and underscored the imperative to promulgate a shared Malayan/Malaysian identity. Paradoxically, these events also served to reinforce perceptions of the Chinese as inherently subversive. In the 1980s, Malaysia's modernisation project was epitomised by the 'Look East' policy towards Japan. This period reinforced the state's ambivalent stance with regards to Japanese war transgressions. In response, Chinese demands for restitution were transmuted into appeals for acknowledgement of suffering. When these too were rejected, Chinese war memory was, for all intent and purposes, invalidated.

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Indonesian – and that the owner flew the one that seemed most appropriate for the occasion,” Mallory, “Chinese Minorities,” 256.

<sup>381</sup> Lawrence S. Finkelstein, “Prospects for Self-Government in Malaya,” *Far Eastern Survey* 21, 2 (1952): 11.

<sup>382</sup> Hara Fujio's treatise on the Chinese in Malaya's conversion in 'identity consciousness' argues that a combination of repressive measures on the part of the British authorities and self-initiated conciliatory gestures on the part of the Chinese community set the Chinese on the course to Malayanisation; Hara Fujio, *Malayan Chinese & China: Conversion in Identity Consciousness 1945-1957* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003).

### The Malayan Emergency

To understand why the Malayan Emergency has displaced Chinese war memory, we need to revisit events immediately after the war. In October 1945, shortly after reoccupation, the British government announced plans for “equal citizenship rights to those who can claim Malaya to be their homeland” as an avenue to overcoming communalism.<sup>383</sup> This was welcomed by a migrant population who believed that common citizenship was a *fait accompli*.<sup>384</sup> Malay opposition however soon crescendoed, with contemporary Malays expressing fears that granting “citizenship to foreigners” was a “death knell” given the “handicaps of the Malays and the progressive nature of the foreigners.”<sup>385</sup>

The Malay aristocracy closed ranks in political opposition to the proposed Malayan Union by invoking the potent symbols of Malay traditionalism, embodied in the persons of the Malay rulers.<sup>386</sup> Evoking the spectre of Chinese control, they played up fears that Malay privilege would be lost, though in reality, only Malay elite privileges were truly at stake. A new political body representing the interests of the Malay elite, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), emerged from this opposition movement. By characterising their opposition to the Malayan Union as a nationalist struggle, the Malay elite came to the forefront as defenders of the Malay community. In the process, Malay radical groups advocating independence and democracy were vilified as being traitorous to the Malay race. The British supported UMNO because its demands amounted to maintaining the façade of Malay sovereignty under British protection and were reactionary in contrast to the radical Malay left. Following much political manoeuvring and secret negotiations with UMNO and the Malay rulers, the Federation of Malaya was established in early 1948. The union, as it was first envisioned, was effectively “stillborn.”<sup>387</sup> Stringent conditions were imposed on migrants to qualify for citizenship, among them: the requirement that both parents be Malayan-born, proof of minimum 10 years residency, and the ability to read and write English or Malay.<sup>388</sup> Given that

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<sup>383</sup> Purcell, “A Malayan Union,” 27.

<sup>384</sup> Many Chinese welcomed the proposal, believing that past privileges the Malay community enjoyed would be revoked. One such Chinese resident, writing under the moniker ‘A New Citizen of Malaya,’ described his elation at the news: “Hurrah! Three cheers for Great Britain! Long live the King! We are so happy we feel like bursting!,” *The Straits Times*, October 17, 1945.

<sup>385</sup> Iopine, “Malay Anxiety,” *The Straits Times*, October 30, 1945; Purcell, “Malayan Union,” 36-37.

<sup>386</sup> Amoroso, *Traditionalism*.

<sup>387</sup> J. Norman Parmer, “Constitutional Change in Malaya’s Plural Society,” *Far Eastern Survey* 26, 10 (1957): 146.

<sup>388</sup> For contemporary discussions on issues of citizenship, Malay privileges, and how various groups reacted to the proposed constitution, see: Virginia Thompson Adloff, “Opposition in Malaya,” *Far Eastern Survey* 16, 11 (1947): 130–131; P. T. Bauer, “Nationalism and Politics in Malaya,” *Foreign Affairs* 25, 3 (1947): 503-517;

almost two-thirds of Chinese in the territory were China-born and many were illiterate, the majority was effectively disenfranchised. This state of affairs affirmed that minorities were merely “tolerated guests in a country belonging to the Malays.”<sup>389</sup>

Barely six months had passed when the Emergency erupted. Remnants of the MPAJA remade themselves anew as the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA) and returned to armed struggle. The war heroes of yesteryear were now recast as bandits and terrorists. The professed aim of the MNLA was to defeat the British colonialists and their Malay elite allies and to establish a cross-communal and united ‘democratic’ socialist republic.<sup>390</sup> However, as during the occupation when the anti-Japanese resistance was perceived to be a primarily Chinese problem, the communist insurrection fomented a similar racial indictment.<sup>391</sup> “It was now the fashionable doctrine,” wrote Purcell at the time, “that all ills were due to the Chinese.”<sup>392</sup>

The British government initiated a counter-insurgency strategy which effectively turned Malaya into a totalitarian military state. The prevailing doctrine was “complete military victory before self-government,” and even though small steps towards the latter – for example the instatement of low-level democratic elections – continued apace, these were little more than “window-dressing.”<sup>393</sup> The Emergency was a war in all but name. Mass population control, arrest and detention without trial, the use of informants and surveillance, and violence against civilians were sanctioned. In the first five years of the war, 4,500 airstrikes were deployed including cluster bombing, and within the first eight years, 34,000 people were detained.<sup>394</sup>

At the centre of this British system of terror was the Special Branch of the Malayan police, with indiscriminate powers to coerce the civilian population and

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Max Seitelman, “Political Thought in Malaya,” *Far Eastern Survey* 16, 11 (1947): 128–130; and Hawkins, “Marking Time.”

<sup>389</sup> Bauer, “Nationalism and Politics,” 505.

<sup>390</sup> Karl Hack, “Screwing down the People: The Malayan Emergency, Decolonisation and Ethnicity,” in *Imperial Policy and Southeast Asian Nationalism, 1930-1957*, eds. Hans Antlöv and Stein Tønnesson (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 86.

<sup>391</sup> For an analysis of how anti-Chinese attitude influenced the counter-insurgency measures that were undertaken, see: Huw Bennett, “‘A very salutary effect’: The Counter-Terror Strategy in the Early Malayan Emergency, June 1948 to December 1949,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, 3 (2009): 415-444.

<sup>392</sup> Victor Purcell, *Malaya: Communist or Free?* (California: Stanford University Press, 1954), 17.

<sup>393</sup> Purcell, *Malaya: Communist or Free?*, 6.

<sup>394</sup> Mark Curtis, *Web of Deceit: Britain’s Real Role in the World* (London: Vintage, 2003), 334-345.

extract intelligence.<sup>395</sup> The intended effect was to make the Chinese “fear Government more than they fear the Communists.” The infamous Batang Kali massacre, which has been sensationalised as “Britain’s My Lai,” resulted from this “bashing the Chinese mentality.”<sup>396</sup> Mass deportations of Chinese squatters, who were believed to be the main source of communist support, were also enacted. There were an estimated 300,000 Chinese squatters, many dispossessed during the occupation; of these, 24,000 were eventually deported to China. However, the scale of this operation was unsustainable. As an alternative, a resettlement program was operationalised. Over one million people, representing one-seventh of the population, were forcibly relocated. More than half were interned in purpose-built settlement camps, behind barbed wire, under guard and subjected to curfew from sundown. Of these ‘new village’ residents, 86 percent were of Chinese extraction.<sup>397</sup>

The contradiction posed by a British police state quashing a local nationalist movement, while purportedly ushering in democracy, was not lost on contemporary observers. Purcell lamented that British efforts involved crude divide-and-rule tactics and the degradation of Malaya into a military zone where “there were no longer any civilians and the entire population were either soldiers or bandits.”<sup>398</sup> It is difficult to ignore the similarities of this time with conditions during the Japanese occupation. And yet, the Emergency presented Britain with the “greatest development project undertaken by any colonial government.” This was not merely a military undertaking, but one where the influence of the state was exerted in remaking Malayan society and in winning the ‘hearts and minds’ of the general public. The overarching motif, according to Harper, was to “recreate

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<sup>395</sup> This prompted Purcell to write, “The real rulers of Malaya were not General Templer or his troops, but the ‘Special Branch’ of the Malayan police,” Purcell, *Malaya: Communist or Free?*, 14.

<sup>396</sup> Kumar Ramakrishna, “‘Transmogrifying’ Malaya: The Impact of Sir Gerald Templer, 1952–54,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 32, 1 (2001): 82. The Batang Kali massacre involved the unlawful killing of 24 unarmed Chinese rubber plantation workers in December 1948. During this incident, their families were also subjected to simulated executions and women and children were rounded up. Attempts by descendants of Batang Kali victims to seek redress in British courts made the news sporadically throughout 2012; however, their request for an inquiry was quashed in a High Court ruling in December 2012; see: Owen Bowcott, “Batang Kali relatives edge closer to the truth about ‘Britain’s My Lai massacre,’” *The Guardian*, January 25, 2012; Owen Bowcott, “Batang Kali massacre: British soldiers admitted unlawful killings, court told,” *The Guardian*, May 5, 2012; Mark Townsend, “Revealed: how Britain tried to legitimise Batang Kali massacre,” *The Observer*, May 6, 2012; and Richard Norton-Taylor, “Relatives lose court case for inquiry in to 1948 Malaya ‘massacre,’” *The Guardian*, September 4, 2012.

<sup>397</sup> Kernal Singh Sandhu, “Introduction: Emergency Resettlement in Malaya,” in *Chinese New Villages in Malaya: A Community Study*, by Ray Nyce, ed. Shirle Gordon (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1973).

<sup>398</sup> Purcell, *Malaya: Communist or Free?*, 15.

community through loyalty and obligation to the state, articulating a multiracial Malayan identity.”<sup>399</sup>

The prescription to “integrate [the Chinese] into a democratically-minded Malayan population” was based on four principles: establishing security, providing social services, encouraging local responsibility and engendering a sense of national community.<sup>400</sup> The concept of a Malayan identity however did not sit comfortably with many Chinese. In the absence of an identifiable Malayan culture, many saw “making Malayan” as equating to “making Malay.”<sup>401</sup> There was however little alternative to forced domestication. Those deemed to be “uncooperative or too apathetic about resisting communism” were “given the alternatives of supporting the government or of going into detention.”<sup>402</sup>

In the task of resettling the Chinese and delivering ‘education for citizenship’ programs, the British found amenable allies in the newly-established Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), a communal organisation founded by pro-British Chinese elites.<sup>403</sup> Participation elevated the profile and prominence of the MCA, which began to use its size, wealth and clout to jockey for influence in Malayan politics. When the government tried to curb its reach, the MCA withdrew financial support for services in many new villages. The growing power of the MCA caused consternation among the Malay political elite, just as the provision of social services in the new villages generated resentment among deprived Malays.<sup>404</sup> Paradoxically, in promoting ‘national’ community, the new village program “condemned Malaya to communalism”<sup>405</sup> for quite literally, “the new village Chinese and the *kampung* Malays [were] fenced off from one another.”<sup>406</sup> Not only did the Emergency inadvertently endorse racial segregation, it left an unsettling legacy by conflating the Chinese collective with the communist enemy.

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<sup>399</sup> Harper, *End of Empire*, 8.

<sup>400</sup> Carnell, “Communalism and Communism,” 110; and John Kerry King, “Malaya’s Resettlement Problem,” *Far Eastern Survey* 23, 3 (1954): 36.

<sup>401</sup> Finkelstein, “Prospects for Self-Government,” 14.

<sup>402</sup> Carnell, “Communalism and Communism,” 110.

<sup>403</sup> The MCA was formed in 1949 in response to the deteriorating conditions under the Emergency. The British had encouraged its formation as a means of obtaining more cooperation from the Chinese to resolving the communist insurgency. For the Chinese elite who became its founders, the organisation was a means to uniting the Chinese and providing greater political leverage. See: Morrison, “Aspects of the Racial Problem in Malaya,” *Pacific Affairs*, 22(3): 239-253; and E.H.G. Dobby, “Resettlement Transforms Malaya: A Case-History of Relocating the Population of an Asian Plural Society,” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 1, 3 (1952): 163-189.

<sup>404</sup> King, “Malaya’s Resettlement Problem,” 38-39.

<sup>405</sup> Harper, *End of Empire*, 8.

<sup>406</sup> Dobby, “Resettlement Transforms Malaya,” 169.



Figure 12. Counter-insurgency operations during the Malayan Emergency.

Clockwise:

A British officer and his squad of Malay Police Field Force during a jungle patrol in the Temenggor area of northern Malaya. Source: MAL 40, Imperial War Museum.

Members of the Malay Regiment inspect equipment, supplies and documents captured in a raid on a communist terrorist jungle camp. Source: DM138, Imperial War Museum.

British troops taking communists prisoner in Malaya during the Emergency, 9 September 1952. Source: Jack Birns/Time & Life/Getty.

Police stand over bodies of slain communists, while wives try to identify them. Source: Jack Birns/Time & Life/Getty.

Collective memory of the Emergency continues to cast an uneasy pall over contemporary Malaysian society. Blackburn and Hack have noted the difficulty in rehabilitating MPAJA/MNLA guerrillas as national heroes due to their participation in the communist insurrection, while Patricia Lim has written of how perceptions of the guerrillas fall “into the uneasy space between heroic resistance fighters and anti-government terrorists.”<sup>407</sup> There remains a confused logic whereby war memory of the occupation has converged with that of the Emergency. During her fieldwork research, Lim found that her informants appeared to display “collective amnesia” and there was a palpable reluctance to remembering “sensitive subjects” for the sake of preserving racial harmony.<sup>408</sup> Although both assessments touch upon racial sensitivities, neither delve explicitly into why such memories invoke racial overtones. Elsewhere, Hack alludes to racial divisions; he posits that because the MNLA guerrillas comprised mostly Chinese, the majority of the Malay population rejected the insurrection.<sup>409</sup> It is noteworthy that the role of the Malay Regiment has warranted little mention.<sup>410</sup>

The Emergency is often invoked by the state to remind Malaysians of the heavy price paid for peace.<sup>411</sup> In official narratives, local security forces are given prominence. As recently as 2012, the Malaysian government rewarded ex-home guards and police personnel with monetary compensation. To mark this unprecedented recognition, a spate of media stories appeared, lauding their

<sup>407</sup> Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory*, 278-285; Patricia Lim Pui Huen, “War and Ambivalence: Monuments and Memorials in Johor,” 153.

<sup>408</sup> Lim, “War and Ambivalence,” 153, 155.

<sup>409</sup> Karl Hack, “‘Iron Claws on Malaya’: The Historiography of the Malayan Emergency,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 30, 1 (1999): 99-125.

<sup>410</sup> Although the Malay Regiment was open to all races, Chinese volunteers were conspicuously sparse; see: Carnell, “Communalism and Communism,” 110; R.W. Comer, *The Malayan Emergency in Retrospect: Organization of a Successful Counterinsurgency Effort* (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, 1972), 47. After 1952, some new villages successfully raised Chinese Home Guard units by making it compulsory for males between the ages of 18 to 55 to register for duty. The most successful was the Kinta Valley Home Guard force comprising 1,500 Chinese. Undoubtedly, the influence of the MCA and favourable changes in citizenship requirements helped mitigate Chinese reluctance in participating in the security forces. See: Judith Strauch, *Chinese Village Politics in the Malaysian State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 72; and Charles E. Shumaker, *The Formative Years of Malaysian Politics* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2010), 73.

<sup>411</sup> See for example: Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi, Foreword by Prime Minister of Malaysia to *The Malayan Emergency Revisited 1948-1960*, by Lt. Col. Mohd Azzam Mohd Hanif Ghows, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Kuala Lumpur: AMR Holding and Yayasan Pelajaran Islam, 2007). Notably, the online portals of various state apparatus, such as the *Polis DiRaja Malaysia* (Malaysian Royal Police), *Tentera Darat Malaysia* (Malaysian Armed Forces) and *Arkib Negara Malaysia* (Malaysian National Archives), include web pages dedicated to remembering *Darurat* (Emergency). The official line is that the communists perpetuated ‘killings, suffering and sabotage’ in an effort to destabilise the government. The quashing of the insurrection is credited for leading to ‘independence, peace and harmony’ and Malaysians are reminded to guard against similar threats in the present and the future.

patriotism and recounting communist atrocities, while ex-insurgents professed regret at being on the wrong side of history.<sup>412</sup> The social effects of the Emergency however, among them the possible ramifications of a primarily Malay local security force pitted against a primarily Chinese insurgent movement, remain elusive topics. Equally unarticulated is how this historical episode has reaffirmed perceptions of the Chinese as inherently subversive. Lim's informants' attitudes indicate that this narrative is tacitly understood though rarely expressed.

### May 13 Tragedy

Post-colonial Malaysia is a quasi-democracy characterised by consociationalism; a political construct in which power-sharing is determined by communal elites, and where civic activism is minimised to restrain extremism and suppress dissent.<sup>413</sup> The Alliance ruling coalition forged during the Emergency comprised UMNO and its junior partners, the MCA and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC).<sup>414</sup> While the protection of Malay privileges remained a mainstay of coalition politics, the next decades saw an increasing assertion of Malay political primacy. In particular, the racial riots of 1969, known locally as May 13, provided fresh impetus to enforcing Malay rights.

May 13 marked a culmination of simmering interracial tensions, brought on by political jostling to influence the future of the fledgling nation. There were prior clashes: on Pangkor island in May 1959, in Bukit Mertajam district in July 1964, in Singapore in July and September 1964, in Kuala Lumpur in early 1965, and in Penang in November 1967 and April 1969.<sup>415</sup> However, it was in the elections of 10 May 1969 that the situation erupted. The multiracial opposition parties Democratic Action Party (DAP) and Gerakan campaigned for an end to racial hegemony. Their respective election manifestoes were: "Towards a Malaysia for Malaysians" and "Equality, Justice and Equal Opportunities for All: Our Aim."<sup>416</sup> When the Alliance

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<sup>412</sup> For example these stories in *New Straits Times*: Nancy Nais and S.K. Thanusha Devi, "70,000 ex-cops apply for aid," March 23, 2012; V. Shuman, "Friendship forged in the jungle," March 24, 2012; R. Sittamparam, "When death was never far away," March 26, 2012; Kalavaani Karupiah, "Ex-home guard gets recognised," March 26, 2012.

<sup>413</sup> Amy L. Freedman, *Political Participation and Ethnic Minorities: Chinese Overseas in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the United States*, (London: Routledge, 2000); and Diane K. Mauzy, *Consociationalism and Coalition Politics in Malaysia*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1978).

<sup>414</sup> This alliance of communal political parties has persisted to the present in the form of the *Barisan Nasional* or National Front government. Despite the emergence of multiethnic parties such as the opposition DAP, political battles remain drawn along communal lines.

<sup>415</sup> Leon Comber, *13 May 1969: A Historical Survey of Sino-Malay Relations*, (Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1983), 72.

<sup>416</sup> Comber, *13 May*, 65, 67.



government was returned with a smaller majority than in previous elections, Malay elite dominance was threatened.

The racial riots in the capital between 13 and 19 May have been variously interpreted – as a spontaneous civil disturbance, an orchestrated *coup d'état*, a political insurrection instigated by communist and Chinese secret societies, even a maelstrom incited by British and American media.<sup>417</sup> An article in *Time* magazine described the chaos:

Malaysia's proud experiment in constructing a multiracial society exploded in the streets of Kuala Lumpur last week. Malay mobs, wearing white headbands signifying an alliance with death, and brandishing swords and daggers, surged into Chinese areas in the capital, burning, looting and killing. In retaliation, Chinese, sometimes aided by Indians, armed themselves with pistols and shotguns and struck at Malay kampongs...

By the time the four days of race war and civil strife had run their course, the General Hospital's morgue was so crowded that bodies were put into plastic bags and hung on ceiling hooks. Government officials, attempting to play down the extent of the disaster, insisted that the death toll was only 104. Western diplomatic sources put the toll closer to 600, with most of the victims Chinese.<sup>418</sup>

The source of the unrest and the extent of the damage remain contested: official figures record that 196 people – 25 Malays, 13 Indians and 143 Chinese – were killed and 439 wounded. A total of 9,143 people were arrested, 5,561 charged in court, while those on trial for murder and arson included 40 Malays and five Chinese. Reportedly, 6,000 people were made homeless while at least 753 buildings were destroyed or damaged. The official account of the riots blame the opposition parties for holding “noisy, racially provocative and intimidating ‘victory’ processions” over 11 and 12 May.<sup>419</sup> Chinese chauvinists reportedly insulted Malays by chanting: “*Kuala Lumpur sekarang Cina punya*” (Kuala Lumpur now belongs to the Chinese), “*Melayu balik kampung*” (Malays return to the villages) and “*Semua Melayu kasi habis*” (Finish off all Malays).<sup>420</sup> A Malay counter-demonstration, directed by the Selangor branch of UMNO, was held on 13 May. Some participants carried “*kris*es [Malay dagger] and *parangs* [machete]” in anticipation of the “need to defend themselves should they be attacked during the

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<sup>417</sup> Comber, 13 May, 63-71; National Operations Council (NOC), *The May 13 Tragedy: A Report*, (Kuala Lumpur: National Operations Council, 1969), 15-76; Kua Kia Soong, *May 13: Declassified Documents on the Malaysian Riots of 1969*, (Kuala Lumpur: Suaram, 2011), 43-88.

<sup>418</sup> Time, “The World: Race War in Malaysia,” May 23, 1969.

<sup>419</sup> NOC, *May 13*, 29.

<sup>420</sup> NOC, *May 13*, 30-31.

procession.”<sup>421</sup> Thereafter, clashes escalated, with reports of “Chinese and Indian hooligans” taunting and attacking Malays who then retaliated with violence. The federal government declared a state of emergency: military law was deployed, curfew was imposed and parliament suspended indefinitely.

A more recent account, based on declassified BHC and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) documents, rebuts the official version of events.<sup>422</sup> Kua Kia Soong argues that May 13 was not a spontaneous post-election riot. He posits that it was orchestrated by the Malay elite class to oust then-prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman on account of his support for the existing conciliatory ‘Alliance formula,’ and to engineer a transfer of power to his deputy, Tun Abdul Razak. The riots were to create conditions conducive to instating a more Malay-centric program. Kua cites a confidential report highlighting British anxiety over the Malaysian government’s assumption of authoritarian powers which, it was conjectured, amounted to Malay rule by decree. This same report also accused the Malaysian authorities of having “drawn a veil over the undeniable fact that in this case the Malays were the chief aggressors.”<sup>423</sup>

By the time parliament resumed in 1971, the emergency governing body chaired by Tun Abdul Razak had enacted a host of directives to cement Malay elite control, shore up Malay privileges and affirm Malay cultural primacy. The newly-introduced National Culture Policy endorsed “indigenous cultures and Islam as the mainstay of the national culture,” while the New Economic Policy (NEP) launched a plethora of race-based affirmative programs designed to uplift the socio-economic status of the Malay collective.<sup>424</sup> While the Malaysian economy at the time was dominated by foreign capital,<sup>425</sup> income inequality was “perceived in ethnic terms and attributed to the ‘ethnic other.’”<sup>426</sup> Consequently, one of the primary causes of the riots, it was reasoned, was the income gap between Malays and Chinese. The NEP was thus devised specifically to redress this imbalance.

That same year, the *Rukun Negara* (National Doctrine) was adopted as the nation’s guiding ideology; among its main tenets were “loyalty to the king and

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<sup>421</sup> NOC, *May 13*, 44.

<sup>422</sup> Kua, *May 13*.

<sup>423</sup> A.A. Duff, Acting High Commissioner, 28 May 1969, Confidential to FCO 2 June 1969, “Malaysia: Internal Situation – Civil Disturbances following General Elections,” FCO 24/485/1, File No. FW M1/9 (Part B); quoted in Kua, *May 13*, 72.

<sup>424</sup> Comber, *13 May*, 80.

<sup>425</sup> Lily Zubaidah Rahim, “Minorities and the States in Malaysia and Singapore: Provisions, Predicaments and Prospects,” Paper prepared for the Sub-commission on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, UN Working Group on Minorities, Ninth Sessions, 12-16 May 2003, E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.5/2003/WP.12, 4

<sup>426</sup> Edmund Terence Gomez and Jomo Kwame Sundaram, *Malaysia’s Political Economy: Politics, Patronage and Profits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 21.

country” and “upholding the constitution.” Each citizen, regardless of ethnicity, was to pledge allegiance to the Malay *agung* (supreme ruler) and to “respect and appreciate the letter, the spirit and the historical background of the Constitution.” The latter reiterated the sovereignty of the Malay rulers, Islam as the country’s official religion and Malay privileges.<sup>427</sup> Discussions about sensitive racial issues became a punishable offence via the Sedition Act.

Measures to consolidate Malay dominance and promote national unity were not restricted to the constitutional or economic spheres. Education was harnessed to restructure society. In 1969, *Bahasa Malaysia* (Malay language) was instated as the main medium of instruction in primary schools, and eventually extended across all levels of education. The attempts of Chinese and Indian communal leaders to have Mandarin and Tamil recognised as official languages – modelled after Singapore – were rejected. The fear that ‘national integration’ was a thinly disguised catchphrase for assimilation festered among minority groups.

The process of federalising education steadily eroded the independence of minority language schools; the only concession that could be wrought was the retention of vernacular primary schools. At the secondary level, schools which did not adopt *Bahasa Malaysia* and follow the state-sanctioned national curriculum lost their state funding. Communal schools which chose not to convert into ‘national-type’ schools were categorised as ‘independent’ and ostracised. The Unified Examination Certificate (UEC), a series of standardised tests at Chinese independent schools, became invalid as criteria for admission into Malaysian public universities. However, this qualification is recognised by foreign tertiary institutions in the United Kingdom, America, Australia, Taiwan and China.<sup>428</sup>

Education policy under the Second Malaysia Plan (1971-1975) extended the state’s social engineering programs beyond compulsory education. Quotas were established to increase Malay enrolment and restrict minority numbers in higher public education. While there were dissenting voices, pro-Malay policies met with little resistance and were “viewed as the inevitable, but necessary response to the divisive inter-ethnic antagonisms which exploded in May 1969.”<sup>429</sup> Malaysian anthropologist Shamsul Amri Baharuddin was among those called upon to develop the social sciences for the explicit purpose of fulfilling nation-building objectives. He recalls that following the riots, there was a concerted “public exercise in

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<sup>427</sup> Comber, 13 May, 81.

<sup>428</sup> For a detailed discussion on the trajectory of the development of the Malaysian education system after independence and its impact on Chinese schools, see: Kua, *Chinese Schools*, 47-110; and Tan and Santhiram, *Education of Ethnic Minorities*, 64-84.

<sup>429</sup> Jomo Kwame Sundaram, “Whither Malaysia’s New Economic Policy?,” *Pacific Affairs* 63, 4 (1991): 469.

'essentialising' ethnicities, such as 'Malayness,' 'Chineseness,' 'Indianness'" as part of a conscious effort to promote interethnic relations.<sup>430</sup>

In deploying a mix of state autocracy, and strategic social and economic engineering, the authorities effectively operationalised the lessons learnt while under colonial tutelage. By the 1980s, the nation had settled into an unprecedented period of relative calm; this reinforced the wisdom of pro-Malay affirmative action. Amidst the intoxicating atmosphere of sustained growth, the vision of a unified Malaysian nation seemed within grasp. There was little space to contemplate ghosts of the wartime past.

### Looking East

The 1980s saw the consolidation of the 'strongman of Malaysia' Mahathir Mohamad's rule. Mahathir remains the nation's longest serving-prime minister from 1981 until his resignation in 2003. He presided over a period of sustained economic growth which saw Malaysia transformed into a "Third World showcase model."<sup>431</sup> Prosperity fostered national confidence, and with it, a greater sense of national identity and integration. Despite these positive developments, Mahathir's legacy is a controversial one. Under his leadership, Malaysia became flushed with multimillion-dollar infrastructure projects, heavy industrialisation and vast privatisation of state assets. The underside however was less ideal; state patronage in fostering a *bumiputra* (sons of the soil) entrepreneurial class fomented money politics and crony capitalism.<sup>432</sup> While absolute poverty declined, intra-ethnic and urban-rural income gaps widened across all ethnic groups.<sup>433</sup> The primary beneficiaries were the Malay elite class and their politically well-connected Chinese and Indian capitalist counterparts.

Mahathir's rule also left its mark on the social landscape. Under his watch, Malaysia was declared an Islamic state and the government became both champion and guardian of *Islamic hadhari* (civilisational Islam), an ideology and practice which married Western economic modernity with Malay-Islamic culture.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, "Consuming Anthropology: The Social Sciences and Nation-Formation in Malaysia," in *Consuming Ethnicity and Nationalism: Asian Experiences*, ed. Yoshino Kosaku (London: Curzon, 1999), 147.

<sup>431</sup> Mohamed Ariff, "The Malaysian Economic Experience and its Relevance for the OIC Member Countries," *Islamic Economic Studies* 6,1 (1998): 2.

<sup>432</sup> Tunku Abdul Aziz, "Malaysia Incorporated: Ethics on Trial," *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 58, 4 (1999):19-25.

<sup>433</sup> Shireen Mardziah Hashim, *Income Inequality and Poverty in Malaysia* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).

<sup>434</sup> It should be noted that Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, Mahathir's successor, is credited for promoting the term 'Islamic hadhari'. However, Mahathir was the progenitor of this progressive brand of Malay-Islamic ideology. See: Mohd

This conflation of religious and development ideals formed the basis for institutionalising Islam within state apparatus.<sup>435</sup> Political dissent was curtailed and fundamental rights curbed. The most significant episode of human rights abuse during Mahathir's tenure was enacted during the 1987 *Ops Lalang* (Operation Weed) when more than 100 political opponents and civil activists were arrested.<sup>436</sup>

Mahathir instated the 'Look East' policy which saw the country reorient itself towards Japan for economic leadership. When this policy was announced in 1981, it was in tandem with the injunctive to 'Buy British Last.' This was a calculated manoeuvre to signal Malaysia's break from its colonial past and to assert its place as a regional player in Southeast Asia.<sup>437</sup> Malaysia's courtship of Japan had social ramifications. Malaysians were exhorted to emulate Japanese values such as discipline, hard work and loyalty.<sup>438</sup> Thousands of youths were sent to Japan on state scholarship and Japanese firms were offered incentives to establish operations in Malaysia; by 2006, there were 1,199 Japanese multinational corporations and joint venture companies. Mahathir also encouraged Japan to establish a regional trade bloc which would exclude 'white' Asia-Pacific countries such as Australia and New Zealand. The insensitivity was not lost on Malaysia's neighbours; some likened this proposed alliance to Japan's Co-Prosperity Sphere of the war era.<sup>439</sup>

During this time, Malaysian society was awash in "a one way flow of material culture and values from Japan."<sup>440</sup> Factory workers performed obligatory morning exercises at Japanese manufacturing plants, 'J-drama' (Japanese TV serials) and *anime* (Japanese animation) were beamed into Malaysian homes, while Japanese retail giants introduced Japanese cuisine, products and literature to the Malaysian public. While 'Nipponisation' of Malaya during the war had limited success, this modern-day Japanese 'invasion' saw consumption of Japanese

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Azizuddin Mohd Sani et. al., "Malaysia in Transition: A Comparative Analysis of Asian Values, Islam Hadhari and 1Malaysia," *Journal of Politics and Law* 2,3 (2009): 110-118.

<sup>435</sup> Gerhard Hoffstaedter, *Modern Muslim Identities: Negotiating Religion and Ethnicity in Malaysia* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2011).

<sup>436</sup> Bridget Welsh, "Malaysia and Globalization: Contradictory Currents," *Asian Perspective* 23, 4 (1999): 271.

<sup>437</sup> Stuart Drummond, "Mahathir's Malaysia," *The World Today* 39, 7/8 (1983): 304-311.

<sup>438</sup> For a critical insight into the success and limitations of this policy, see: Fumitaka Furuoka, "Malaysia-Japan Relations under the Mahathir Administration: Case Studies of the 'Look East' Policy and Japanese Investment in Malaysia," *Asian Survey* 47, 3 (2007): 505-519.

<sup>439</sup> This proposal received lukewarm response from several ASEAN nations, among them Indonesia and Singapore, and provoked a hostile reaction from the US; see: K.S. Jomo, ed., *Japan and Malaysian Development: In the Shadow of the Rising Sun* (London: Routledge, 1994), 10-12.

<sup>440</sup> Wendy A. Smith, "Japanese Cultural Images in Malaysia," 341.

culture became part of everyday life.<sup>441</sup> Academics have since debated whether this policy fostered subordination and represented a form of imperialism.<sup>442</sup> For those who had not forgotten or forgiven the war past, this cultural tsunami was a bitter pill. “I will never use Japanese things,” said Loh Sow Ying, “And I will never ever go to Japan for a holiday.”<sup>443</sup>

Ambivalence towards war memory was a familiar theme. The British had adopted a conciliatory attitude towards Japan which saw Chinese appeals for redress struck down. This was motivated in part by the hopes that an economically-viable Japan would serve as a potential development agent in British Malaya.<sup>444</sup> However, the ghosts of Chinese victimhood were never fully exorcised. In the early 1960s, the discovery of mass graves in Singapore revived Chinese demands for restitution. Then-premier Tunku Abdul Rahman, conscious of Japan’s significance as Malaysia’s second largest export market, chastised the Association of Chinese Chambers of Commerce (ACCC) for reopening the issue.<sup>445</sup> The renewed appeal for ‘blood debt’ was to replenish relief funds for surviving relatives of massacre victims, a demand the ACCC was at pains to differentiate from Japanese war reparations paid to Great Britain.<sup>446</sup> To defuse the situation, the Malaysian government eventually accepted a gift of M\$25 million from the Japanese government in September 1967. This was used towards the purchase of two ocean-going vessels from Japan. The Japanese also attempted to include a ‘no further claims’ clause into this goodwill payment agreement. However, the clause was not ratified in the face of ACCC’s threat to boycott Japanese goods. Nevertheless, the ACCC’s demand was thwarted and no civilians received any compensation. While this payment served to temporarily placate Chinese animus, there was no acknowledgement of war responsibility.<sup>447</sup> The rejection of war guilt has allowed Japan the right to repudiate redress, in effect breaking the link between possible restitution and recovered memory in the future. This is in marked contrast to cases involving resurrected memories of European Jews at the hands

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<sup>441</sup> Eriko Yamato et. al., “It’s Part of Our Lifestyle: Exploring Young Malaysians’ Experiences with Japanese Popular Culture,” *Keio Communication Review* 33 (2011): 199-22.

<sup>442</sup> For detailed discussions on the impact of the Look East Policy on Malaysia by various scholars, see: Jomo, *Japan and Malaysian Development*.

<sup>443</sup> Loh Sow Ying, interview by author, June 2, 2011.

<sup>444</sup> Kibata Yoichi, “Peacemaking and after: Anglo-Japanese relations and Japan’s re-entry into international society,” 105.

<sup>445</sup> Blackburn and Hack, *War and Memory*, 171.

<sup>446</sup> For details which led to the ACCC taking up the cause of reviving demands for reparations, see: Shu and Chua, *Malayan Chinese Resistance*, 86-88.

<sup>447</sup> Hara Fujio, *Mareishia, Shingaporu no Baisho Mondai* [Reparation Problem with Singapore and Malaysia], in *Senso Skinin Kenkyu* [The Report on Japan’s War Responsibility], No. 10, December 1995; quoted in Hayashi, “Massacres of Chinese,” 242.

of Nazi occupiers, or even those of Korean comfort women, where the recall of loss and suffering has resulted in advocacy for justice on behalf of the victims.<sup>448</sup>

In the late Seventies, there were further discoveries of mass graves in Negeri Sembilan. At the request of locals, the state Chinese Assembly appealed to the Japanese Embassy in Malaysia for funds to reinter the remains and erect a memorial at Jelulong. The Japanese sent a firm but courteous reply reiterating the terms of both the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the goodwill payment made to the Malaysian government in 1967. The reply also stressed that “the Japanese government has not allocated funds towards such appeals, and cannot meet the request.”<sup>449</sup> The appeal went unnoticed in both countries, and unlike prior controversies, there was no mention of ‘blood debt.’ Nevertheless, the lack of restitution remained a burning issue for some. In 1992, a survivor of the Kuala Pilah massacre demanded compensation from the Japanese on behalf of himself and 238 surviving relatives of victims.<sup>450</sup> As before, this appeal was thwarted. The Malaysian state’s apathy for war memory was amplified when, in a visit by Murayama Tomiichi to Kuala Lumpur in 1994, Mahathir publicly chided the Japanese premier to “stop apologising for wartime crimes committed about 50 years ago.”<sup>451</sup> This reinforced the state’s formal position of “benevolent amnesia” towards Japanese past-war transgressions.<sup>452</sup>

Thus, the evolving post-war conditions which saw a decolonised Malaya transformed into an independent nation state, and later a thriving industrialised country, was not conducive to preserving war memory. By repeatedly prioritising trade and foreign relations and, in the process, marginalising war memory of the occupation, the state has actively propagated forgetting. Such institutionalised forgetting, according to Paul Ricoeur, essentially represents an “amnestying pardon.” That is, in advancing forgetting, the state grants amnesty for past wrongs

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<sup>448</sup> See for example: Stone, “Genocide and Memory,” 102-122; and Rumi Sakamoto, “The Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery: A Legal and Feminist Approach as to the ‘Comfort Women’ Issue,” *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 3, 1 (2001): 49-58..

<sup>449</sup> Xiao Miaoyun and Yu Jinyi, “*Choujian Yulanglang Jinian Bei jianbao: Quanwen*” [Report on fundraising for building memorial at Jelulong: full report], 2 October 1979, 55.

<sup>450</sup> K.T. Arasu, “Malaysian Seeks Compensation from Japanese,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 22, 1992.

<sup>451</sup> *Straits Times*, “Stop WWII Apologies, Look to Future: Mahathir tells Japan,” August 24, 1994.

<sup>452</sup> The term ‘benevolent amnesia’ is borrowed from historian James Reilly’s depiction of a similar conciliatory stance on the part of China towards Japan between 1945 and 1982, which he also described as the ‘honeymoon phase’ in Sino-Japan relations. See: James Reilly, “Remembering History, Not Hatred: Collective Remembrance of China’s War of Resistance to Japan,” *Modern Asian Studies* 45, 2 (2011): 468-470.

and also enforces “commanded forgetting.”<sup>453</sup> Thus, postwar decades have seen Chinese war memory gradually lose its currency. Nevertheless, fragments of this subaltern memory persists, In the following segment, we examine which aspects of Chinese war memory have endured and why.

## Chinese Memory-Work

A community does not possess memory; it is the members within the group who engage in acts of remembering. What people remember and pass on to successive generations, what they choose to omit and therefore silence, reflects memory-work in practise. Returning again to Wang Gungwu’s recollections, he noted that despite being marooned in Malaya during the war, his parents had every intention of returning to China someday. They chose to submerge their Malayan experiences and embrace the larger Chinese collective memory of the Sino-Japanese War. This alerted him to the selectiveness of memory, where “one’s memory depended on the importance one placed on one’s past, and on what one thought the future would hold.”<sup>454</sup> Given that the upheavals which engulfed post-war Malaya indelibly affected the future prospects of the Chinese, how did individuals who experienced the occupation remember their past? To explore this question, we examine the recollections of four individuals who experienced the Japanese occupation. These testimonies were obtained through interviews between 2009 and 2012 with four elders, aged between 81 and 91 years old. During the occupation, the youngest among them was aged 11, the oldest aged 23.

Early attempts had been made through the researcher’s network of contacts to enquire after parents or grandparents who may be agreeable to being interviewed. When this appeal proved unsuccessful, an approach was made to the administrator of a nursing home on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, who reiterated the request to residents. Among the four narrators who, three are residents of the nursing home, while the fourth (Lim Lan Ying) was introduced through the researcher’s family connections. As none of the interviewees were community or political leaders, their narratives offer possible glimpses into how the war has come to be remembered among Chinese commoners. The decision to obtain testimonies through firsthand interviews – as opposed to referring to secondary sources, analysing published memoirs or resorting to the oral testimony collection within the Singapore archives – was not only influenced by the need to record war

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<sup>453</sup> For a discussion on institutionalised forgetting, see: Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History and Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellaur (London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 452-456.

<sup>454</sup> Wang, *Memories of War*, 14-15.



experiences, but to also ascertain if these experiences had been shared with others, especially the narrators' children or grandchildren. Only in this way, it was felt, would there be an opportunity to explore related issues of intergenerational transmission or conversely, evidence of possible memory suppression.

A microhistorical approach was adopted towards the testimonies provided, which advances that social actors should be appropriately situated as subjects, not objects, of history.<sup>455</sup> This approach advances that the individual is an active participant in his/her memory-making and will exercise agency in selecting, editing and transmitting memory. This perspective encourages "understand[ing] people... in the light of their own experience and their reactions to that experience."<sup>456</sup> Conduct of the interviews was directed by the researcher's training in the qualitative research method known as Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method with historian Tom Wengraf and sociologist Prue Chamberlayne in 2008. This method promotes obtaining a 'long narration' or 'whole story' using an open question without interruption to minimise researcher intervention, and revisiting 'particular incident narratives' or pivotal themes through follow-up questions afterwards. As such, the interviews were initiated with the question, "Can you tell me about your experiences during the war?" This allowed the interviewees to dictate the direction and content of their recollections. In studying the interviews, attention was paid to prominent themes within their recollections, in particular what had coalesced over time and continued to resonate in the present day, and what had been potentially omitted. Where possible, interviews were also conducted with their relatives to explore whether recollections of the war past had been relayed to them. To gain a composite impression of whether war memory transmission is prevalent within families, informal polling and interviews were also conducted with peers, acquaintances, friends and relatives. The majority indicated that parents and grandparents had not shared this aspect of their pasts with them. Among the 40 or so individuals whom the researcher spoke to, only two informants had some knowledge of their parent's experiences during the war.

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<sup>455</sup> John Brewer, "Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life," *Cultural and Social History* 7, 1 (2010): 87-109.

<sup>456</sup> Jim Sharpe, "History from Below," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 27.



Figure 13. Four narrators.  
Clockwise: Khoo Fong Peng, Loh Sow Ying, Ho Foong Sien and Lim Lan Ying.

### 'No Words' and 'Black Hearts'

Khoo Fong Peng remembered the occupation as a period of intense personal hardship.<sup>457</sup> His testimony was raw and unrehearsed. His narrative meandered often, to return time and again to two major critical points: the loss of his father and the bitterness of the remaining years of the occupation. Prior to the Japanese invasion, Khoo claimed there was no talk in the household about events in China even though his father had collected donations for the China Relief Fund. Khoo was anxious to paint his father as being apolitical and motivated only by humanitarian concerns. When the Japanese arrived in Tanjung Malim, they had asked about anti-Japanese residents in the village and Khoo's father was implicated. He recalled the moment that he was taken away:

All three brothers captured together! *Sook ching!* I saw my father, second uncle and third uncle taken together. The moment they were captured, I cried. I was hanging on to them, but [the Japanese soldiers] refused to let them go. The moment you were caught, there was no returning. I was just a child. My uncles, my father, my two uncles, all three brothers were caught. Once taken away, beheaded!

The remaining family members – Khoo, his stepmother and his six younger siblings – changed their family name and fled to Telok Anson, where his stepmother's parents lived. As the eldest son in the family, he had to "bear the burden of two families," toiling at odd jobs, from chopping firewood, trading in the black market to pulling a rickshaw in order to make ends meet. At home, he was ill-treated by his stepmother who "worked him like a dog." The exhaustion and deprivation sapped him; he felt he only had "half a human life left" in him. He lamented repeatedly about the responsibilities he had to shoulder, despite being "only a child." Throughout the hour-long interview, he used the following phrases, 'only a child,' 'still young' and 'just a kid,' no less than 10 times. Khoo's bitterness was yoked to his sense of loss – of his father and protector, and also of his childhood. Every time he mentioned his father, he never failed to say he was left all *alone*, that he cried *alone*. The isolating privation left an indelible scar. "During the war," he said, "I didn't even want to be human. I didn't want to be alive."

Throughout the interview, Khoo often paused and looked off into the distance. Once, after a lengthy interval, he whispered, "This isn't about me feeling sorry for my life." At another juncture, after another period of silence, he sighed, "When I talk about the Japanese, I have no words." Khoo seemed stuck in perpetual bewilderment; he struggled to articulate the intensity or immediacy of his recollections. The sense of desolation was palpable; the indescribability of his

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<sup>457</sup> Khoo Fong Peng, interview by author, June 2, 2011.

sorrow was halting. Whenever he was at a loss, he would fall back on repeating words such as 'bitter,' 'suffering' or 'pain,' as illustrated by this excerpt:

Three years and eight months. In the beginning *sook ching*. Later, [the Japanese] were losing the war. They couldn't get rid of everybody. Well, that was my feeling, my impression. But I was young, just a kid, didn't know much. So much suffering. So, till now, this pain, it still burns my mind. [Pause] Burns, burns. There is no way to forget it. That kind of pain, you can't find words for it.

When asked if he had spoken to his children about his experiences, Khoo became almost belligerent: "When I want to tell them, they say I'm too longwinded, I'm nagging. They don't like to hear about it." His attempts to share his recollections with his wife, who had lost two brothers during the war, were similarly thwarted: "She says it's too troublesome to listen to. Every time I started talking about it, they would say, that's old stuff, old shit, old... SHIT! As in defecate, that kind of shit!"<sup>458</sup> When asked if he had told his grandchildren, he became equally agitated: "When I want to tell them, they say those are old stories, old farts. Calling me 'old fart'! They don't want to hear it; they say they are sick of it. Old fart, old fart, *pff, pff, pff!*"

Throughout the interview, Khoo vacillated between bristly anger and mournful sorrow. However his spirits lifted when asked what it was like when the British returned. Khoo broke into a wide grin: "I was happy! Aaaah, so happy! Even though I hadn't eaten, I was overjoyed! When I saw them, the British, I was so happy, so happy, you cannot imagine..." Just as suddenly, Khoo dissolved into tears, mumbling, "My father, the three brothers, my grandfather, they took them away. Left me alone. So bitter. When I recall, just so bitter. I am lucky, two sons, twins, they said, 'Father, don't think any more about those times.' Really bitter..." Khoo seemed perpetually trapped in the traumatic events of those harrowing years. Even when his memory led him to that one moment of relief and joy, Khoo was unable to hold on to that moment; his unconsciousness circled back to where his story had begun, to the moment of profound loss.

Khoo's testimony illustrates the difficulties in articulating pain. His apparent lack of a 'language of pain' is reminiscent of Elaine Scarry's hypothesis regarding pain as a state anterior to language.<sup>459</sup> Scarry argues that pain destroys language and resists verbal objectification, and because it is inexpressible, it is also unsharable. Scarry even suggests that to hear of another's pain without

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<sup>458</sup> Khoo was punning on the phonetic similarity in Cantonese between the terms 'old stuff' (舊時; *Jyutping* gau6 si4) and 'old shit' (舊屎; *Jyutping* gau6 si2).

<sup>459</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

experiencing it is 'to have doubt' – to waver between "which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed."<sup>460</sup> This 'unsharability' intensifies the victim's isolation and generates apathy among non-sufferers.

Cathy Caruth, in an exploration of the relationship between trauma and memory, proposes that the violence of trauma collapses understanding at the moment it occurs; the victim does not comprehend his role in the event and thus, does not consciously 'record' that event in his psyche.<sup>461</sup> In essence, he is unable to serve as his own witness in that historical moment. Trauma is experienced belatedly when the memory of the event returns unbidden. At this juncture, the victim may be confronted by doubt and uncertainty as to the literalness of the experience. Khoo's apparent bewilderment, coupled with the 'fixedness' of his memories and his inability to fully articulate or convey his experience, bears the hallmarks of both pain and trauma.

Unlike Khoo, Loh Sow Ying's story is told in a fluid and almost chronological manner.<sup>462</sup> It is peppered with anecdotes and details such as dates and locations. It is obvious that Loh, in nurturing and revisiting her memories over the decades, had engaged in conscious memory-work and meaning-making. She had played the events over in her mind and rationalised why they occurred. Loh and her younger brother Yee Mei were detained following a raid on their home. The Japanese had wanted to capture their mother, Chan Ai Lin, an avowed communist who had been involved with the China Relief Fund. On how they were eventually released, she said:

In the end, the army doctor pleaded for the officer to release us. Why did they release us? You know, I am not pure Chinese, my father is Indian. The Japanese wanted to win over the Indians. At that time, there were many *chettiar* in the town, the moneylenders, they were all Indian. My father had done a lot of work for them. They came as a group to secure our release.

It is clear that unlike Khoo, Loh recognises the socio-political and racial undercurrents of the occupation. This is unsurprising, as Loh's mother and aunt were political activists who had regaled her with stories about the Soviet Union and China. To her, the British and Japanese were imperialists who "oppressed the people." Further, Loh's mixed parentage heightened her sense of racial identification. Her father and mother had been disowned by their families because

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<sup>460</sup> Scarry, *Body in Pain*, 4.

<sup>461</sup> Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1995).

<sup>462</sup> Loh Sow Ying, interview with author, June 2, 2011.

he was an Indian and she was Chinese. Her father, Sivarajah, was taken in by the Loh family; in gratitude, he had changed his name to Loh Sai Wah.

In Loh's retelling, her parent's union was a love match; she evoked the tenderness, respect and support they shared. She described how, initially, her mother's refusal to surrender herself to secure her release had lodged a "thorn in my heart." Her father later explained that Chan's surrender would have meant "many people will die." From that point onwards in her narrative, Loh's mother took on heroic proportions. She described how her mother had been arrested, imprisoned in Tapah jail, and later led through the village to the execution grounds. In fear, the villagers had barricaded themselves in their homes. As Chan was paraded past their closed doors, she chided them: "I am not a criminal, why do you hide? Today I die for country!" Loh however does not appear to have mulled over her mother's declaration of patriotism. It is unclear whether Chan's reference to country meant China or Malaya. This distinction it seems is unimportant for Loh; her mother is a martyr all the same.

The remaining war years were "gruesome" because "if people weren't being arrested, they were being killed." Loh particularly detested going to school because "the soldiers taught us, the soldiers who had killed my mother. How would you feel if you go to school and the people there are murderers? Every time Japanese language class came round I would cry." Shortly after the war, her father died from "illness and sorrow, sorrow because of my mother's death." She spat: "I hate the Japanese because they killed my mother. Till now I haven't gotten over it. If my mother didn't die, my father wouldn't have died. If my father didn't die, we would not have suffered." Unlike Khoo, Loh had developed a cogent narrative about her war experiences. Perhaps this is because she and her brother Yee Mei had cultivated shared memories. Together, they had nurtured a common language of pain. She described how years later, on the anniversary of her mother's death, they would scour the hilly area where her mother was reportedly executed in the hopes of finding her remains.

In a later interview, Loh claimed, "I didn't tell my daughters about these things. They're not interested. I don't know why."<sup>463</sup> She followed this with an curious statement: "None of them," she said, "are involved in anything political." However, her grandson had proven a willing receptacle; she told him about the war and also the communist insurrection. Loh's memories of the Emergency are shaped by her aunt's capture, detention and eventual deportation to China. As a result, her view of the British is dim. In describing her grandson, Loh said proudly, "He is politically conscious." She had taught him that the coalition government is

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<sup>463</sup> Loh Sow Ying, interview by author, March 26, 2012.

“bad” and the DAP opposition is “good.” As far as she is concerned, the *Barisan Nasional* (National Front) coalition which dominates Malaysian politics today follows from the postwar Alliance forged during the Emergency. While she did not say it aloud, the subtext was clear: the present coalition government were undeserving rulers because they had colluded with the colonisers.

Further, while she perceives her mother and aunt as heroes, she playfully referred to the communist indoctrination she received from them in negative terms – as “brainwash” and “poison.” Perhaps Loh is aware that revering communists is not conventional wisdom. Nevertheless, she seemed pleased that she in turn was able to “brainwash” her grandson to “be like us.” By ‘us,’ she meant herself and her brother Yee Mei, who once stood as an opposition party candidate for Tapah. It is unclear however whether she was referring to their professed rebellious streak or their political activism. Loh claimed that during the war, they were involved with the resistance, carrying donations from the villagers to the guerrillas without their father’s knowledge. Clearly, Loh’s memory of the war is overshadowed with political and racial overtones; there was an overt distinction of ‘us’ and ‘them,’ excepting that the ‘them’ was variable depending on context. During the occupation, the enemy had been the Japanese; after the war, the British, and more recently the coalition government.

At the end of the second interview, Loh seemed eager to prove the veracity of her story, relating how she had acquired a book which mentioned her mother. This, she said, was in her younger brother John Kee’s possession. She organised a meeting with him so it could be retrieved. Curiously, during that meeting, John Kee claimed that Loh didn’t tell him much about the war.<sup>464</sup> “Nobody brings it up,” he said, “she never told me that mother was a communist.” This was something he learned much later on. Unlike his sister, John Kee harbours no ill feelings towards the Japanese. He was very young when the raid occurred. All he remembers is that it was in the wee hours of the morning and that there was a Malay inspector with a silver-plated pistol. The soldiers had shot three of their dogs and taken away a sewing machine and blankets. These were details that Loh had omitted when she related her story; perhaps her detention had displaced the minutiae of the raid. John Kee remembers attending a Japanese school where his peers were always sharing stories about “whose father or mother had died, or grandparents, uncles and so on.”

Later, as a young adult, he had joined *Keretapi Tanah Melayu* (Malaysian Railway) as an engineer. In the 1970s, this had led him to training courses in Poland and Japan, where he visited the death camp at Auschwitz and the A-bomb

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<sup>464</sup> Loh John Kee, interview by author, March 27, 2012.

site in Nagasaki. These visits sparked his interest in the Second World War. He engaged in self study and amassed a collection of books as a result. At the meeting, he brought the book Loh had spoken about. Chan Ai Lin's fate is recorded among 8,500 others. Chan's patriotism remains ambiguous as her name is included within the section titled *Malaiya huaqiao xunnan* which translates literally as "Malayan Overseas Chinese martyrs."<sup>465</sup> In using the term *huaqiao* (Overseas Chinese) rather than *huaren* (ethnic Chinese), the dead were ostensibly identified as patriots of China.<sup>466</sup> John Kee also proffered a gift from his own collection, a reprinted edition of *The Japanese Occupation 1942-1945: A Pictorial Record of Singapore after the War*. His scholarly interest appears to have provided him with a wider perspective of the war. As such, unlike Loh, his memory is unsullied by familial tragedy or personal animosity.

John Kee's benign attitude about the occupation was strikingly similar to Ho Foong Sien's. Ho is a long-time friend of Loh's and her family too were residents of Tapah. She was 18 years old when the occupation began. Her father was a Justice of the Peace and a committee member for the local chapter of the China Relief Fund.<sup>467</sup> Despite this, her narrative diverged markedly from that of Loh's. When asked about her father, she said, "He hated the resistance" before adding "the British were very good to him." According to Ho, her father had been very ill when the Japanese arrived, and died shortly after. Unlike Loh, Ho harboured no hostility towards the Japanese. She volunteered that her son drove a Japanese-made car and had business dealings with Japanese people. Despite spending more than two hours with Ho on two separate occasions, it was difficult to extrapolate any real sense of what life had been like for her family during the occupation. It was as if that period had been wiped from her memory.

According to Ho, she was involved in fundraising activities for the China Relief Fund. She remembered making flower bouquets for sale. "Our whole family was involved in anti-Japanese activities," she said, "[Loh] Sow Ying's mother was a committee member. My mother was her deputy. We were always coming and going from Sow Ying's house." When war began, Ho's father had assured the family that "these soldiers are just passing through. Once they pass through, it will be alright." However, when the troops arrived, a Japanese woman married to a local Chinese resident had pointed her father out to them. This description matches the local informants Loh had described. Ho's father was arrested and interrogated

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<sup>465</sup> Shu and Chua, *Malayan Chinese Resistance*, 968.

<sup>466</sup> It should be noted the Chinese title to this 1984 bilingual publication uses the term *huaren* (ethnic Chinese) instead of *huaqiao* (Overseas Chinese) and reads as 'Xinma huaren kangri shiliao' which translates literally as 'Singapore-Malayan Chinese Resistance History.'

<sup>467</sup> Ho Foong Sien, interview by author, June 2, 2011 and March 26, 2012.



with several others but managed to negotiate his own release. Shortly after, he fell ill and passed away. Ho's retelling was matter of fact in tone and short on details. There was no recounting of abuse, nor a hint of deprivation described. Instead, Ho spoke at length about her family's prominence, her grandfather's visits to Malaya before the war, her father's trips back to Zhongshan, and how her mother and First Mother, her father's first wife, had gotten along very well.

陳新彝	陳圖生	陳碧成	陳嘉昌	陳綿有	陳養金	陳端春	陳鳳英	陳鳳喜	陳微瑞	陳爾鎮	陳德石	陳德心	陳德秀	陳德俊	陳德亮	陳德發	陳德照	陳德興	陳錦春	陳錦高	陳錦發	陳德初	陳潮昌	陳潮坤	陳潮泉
男	男	男	男	男	男	男	女	女	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男
一九四二	二五	三	二	二	三	四	二	二	二	二	二	二	二	二	二	二	二	二	二	二	二	二	二	二	二
赤溪	潮安	泉州																							
1942, 5,	1942, 2, 27	1942, 2, 7	1942, 2, 28																						
古來	振林山	新山	裕廊																						
屠殺	屠殺	失蹤	父子三人	拘殺	拘殺	拘殺	殘殺	檢證	拘殺	屠殺	拘殺	檢證	檢證	檢證	屠殺	檢證	失蹤	檢證	檢證	屠殺	拘殺	檢證	屠殺	檢證	拘殺
陳榮泉	陳榮凱	陳榮關	陳萬于	陳萬王	陳萬杰	陳萬祥	陳傳光	陳傳興	陳傳聲	陳經池	陳經華	陳聞吉	陳楊成	陳發成	陳經祿	陳慎修	陳頌唐	陳嫩梯	陳幹章	陳幹輔	陳毓峰	陳源泉	陳源泉	陳溢漢	陳愛蓮
男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	男	女	男	男	男	男	男	男	女
一九四二	五九	三〇	五四				二五	一四	二〇	五七					四〇	三九	二三	二二	五二	三六	二九	二七	三六	三六	
丹絨																									

Figure 14. Chan Ai Lin, a Malayan Overseas Chinese martyr.

The entry states that Chan is from Xinhui district. She died aged 36 on 10 April 1942 in Tapah, Perak. Her death is recorded as “arrest killing.” Loh had bracketed her name and written ‘mother’ alongside the entry.

Source: Shu Yun-Tsiao and Chua Ser-Koon, eds., *Malayan Chinese Resistance to Japan 1937-1945 – Selected Source Materials*, 997.

Ho's story raised many questions. If her family had been involved in anti-Japanese activities, why had they escaped persecution? If her father had been detained and interrogated, why was there no mention of ill treatment? The family had vacated their home and moved into a dormitory on a plantation they owned; had they been forced out or did they try to lay low? If her family had escaped harassment, had her father secured their safety by collaborating with the Japanese? Despite much prodding, Ho's answers did not result in further clarity. She returned repeatedly to describing her family's wealth, prominence and events before the war. Changing tack, she was asked if life had been uneventful following her father's passing. Ho replied, "It was rather peaceful," before digressing to how a migrant family from Foochow was hired to manage the plantation following her father's death though she did do any rubber-tapping herself.

It is uncertain whether Ho was being deliberately ambiguous. Perhaps she had made a conscious decision to not dwell on the past or perhaps the occupation truly was an unremarkable period in her life. It is curious that despite living in the same village as Loh, her reminiscences are so remarkably different. When asked whether she had shared stories about the war years with her children or grandchildren, she enthused: "I did! I did! I told them, we came to Malaya and now we have become Malaysian citizens." When asked what she had told them, she digressed to how her grandson had graduated in England, married a Westerner, and now lived there. She was concerned that he was so far away, that she would not be around for too much longer, that he had always been pampered and didn't even know how to cook. When asked whether she had passed on any culinary skills, she shrugged, "I don't know how myself. We always had servants."

Like Ho, Lim Lan Ying was from a well-to-do family. They had owned an estate which supplied wood to the family's undertaker business. She too seemed disinclined to recall her wartime past. When asked about events during the occupation, she said with a wave of her hand, "I don't remember."<sup>468</sup> When queried further, she answered, "The sirens were sounding, and we were hiding under the bridge... The first night, because the planes came the sirens sounded, so where were we were supposed to run to?" When prodded for details, disorderly fragments emerged: "I think I was married then... At that time, I had one pair of pants with a drawstring, and when we ran, we didn't want to leave it, and we hid under the bridge." The couple had fled the centre of the capital for the outskirts, where they rented a room in a wooden house. "At that time, we wore a lot of black clothes," she said, "And we we cut our hair, to look like boys." When asked why, she said, "Because they would come to arrest people. They made people squat in a row, and

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<sup>468</sup> Lim Lan Ying, interview by author, April 29, 2009.

they would point to the girls, to take them away, to rape them.” Whether Lim had witnessed or had heard about such incidents is unclear. Like Ho, Lim’s recollections are vague. Perhaps like Khoo, what she had experienced or witnessed defied description. All she would volunteer was that the Japanese were cruel. “They had black hearts,” she sighed, “very black hearts.” Lim’s eldest son confirmed that his parents “rarely spoke about [the war]” to their children, “Father only really spoke to mother about it.”<sup>469</sup> There was however a family story about several great-uncles disappearing, perhaps they had been abducted for forced labour, but no one knows for certain if this truly happened or where the story originated from.

The four elderly narrators had very different tales to tell. While Khoo and Loh described their experiences in animated and vivid ways, Ho and Lim displayed reticence. Khoo’s grief was tinged by an overwhelming sense of isolation as if the terrible events of the occupation had been visited only upon him. He had wanted to share his story with his family, to seek solace and empathy. Perhaps his wife and children had rebuffed him out of caring, because they assumed that dwelling on the past would cause more anguish. Or perhaps Khoo’s sorrowful past was a burden they could not or did not want to share.

Similarly, Loh feels intensely about her war experiences but unlike Khoo, had built a coherent narrative around them. Her mother was a martyr and she herself had supported the war effort. She was resentful that events had taken a turn in ways which invalidated the sacrifice of both her mother and her aunt. So in sharing her experiences with her grandson she wanted him to understand who the real ‘villains’ were. In her mind, apart from the Japanese during the occupation, it was the postwar coalition government which emerged and persists till today. Perhaps this narrative is her way of coming to terms with her past, to comfort herself that the losses she suffered were not in vain. Loh’s experience has utility and value. Her suffering, her family’s sacrifice, and the part they played in the resistance speaks to her heightened sense of identification as Chinese. This is what she wants to transmit to her descendants.

While Ho claimed she had shared her experience of the war years with her children and grandchildren, she was focussed on emphasising that they were Malaysians. She appeared more intent on sharing a familial narrative of success and resilience. Her memories of the occupation appear to have been sanitised. Perhaps for Ho, stories about hardship are an unnecessary burden she does not wish to impose upon her descendants. Likewise with Lim; as her immediate family does not appear to have suffered persecution, perhaps she sees little value in

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<sup>469</sup> Leong Keng Sun, interview by author, June 3, 2014.

remembering or transmitting the war past. Their collective stories suggest that many chose not to actively propagate war memory; among those who did or tried, their attempts were often met with disinterest or rejection.

#### Safe Memories, Dangerous Pasts

In speaking with various Malaysian Chinese of the postwar generation, few claimed that their forebears had spoken about the war. Even when they showed keen interest, their parents or grandparents offered little. Margaret Li for example knows that her grandfather was a reservist with the Federated Malayan States Volunteer Forces (FMSVF).<sup>470</sup> The family believes that he was involved with resistance activities during the war. Li's grandmother was from Shanghai. When the Sino-Japanese War erupted, along with her four children including Li's mother, she had sought refuge in Ipoh with extended family members. On several occasions, when Li asked her mother about the war, she had replied, "I don't know why you're interested, I don't remember." Over the years, because of Li's persistence, her mother shared glimpses: of scavenging for stray rice grains that had fallen off Japanese army trucks, of hiding the family bicycle in a mining pool and of the constant diet of sweet potatoes. Perhaps these were 'safe' memories as they conform to commonplace stories of hardship.

The phenomenon of postwar silence within families is not unusual. In working with descendants of Holocaust victims, Dan Bar-On noted that many victims chose to remain silent. He posits that experiences beyond 'normal' societal or cultural norms are often unexpressed because they are difficult to articulate and difficult for others to accept. The undiscussability of such experiences infuses silences with ambiguity; "we may feel something, but as yet have no words to say what it is."<sup>471</sup>

Bar-On suggests that when atrocities are committed by an authoritarian regime with the participation of collaborators, a pseudo-discourse of legitimacy emerges. In the aftermath, in order to cope with the tears in the social fabric, an unwritten social contract or silencing structure is established, erecting boundaries between what is discussable and what is not. Ho, Lim and Li's reticence is perhaps indicative of the existence of such a structure. What they witnessed or experienced was commonplace within the context of the occupation, what more could they add to that?

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<sup>470</sup> Pseudonym, interview by author, February 19, 2015.

<sup>471</sup> Bar-On, *The Indescribable and the Undiscussable*, 130.

Loh Lee Tyng is a mother of two in her late forties. She too wanted to know about her family's wartime past.<sup>472</sup> She recalls asking her grandmother about the occupation but Loh sensed that she was afraid and didn't want to talk. She would only speak about the war in "simple terms" – that grandfather was captured and worked on the Thai-Burma Railway but returned; that the family had fled to the surrounding jungles near Ipoh; that they were in hiding during the war and food was hard to come by. It was only much later that Loh learned that some of their kinsfolk were MPAJA guerrillas. During the Emergency, her father severed ties with these distant relatives. When they left messages for him, hidden under a stone or tied with a string, in the vicinity of his home, at his doorstep, he would burn or throw these away without reading them. After the Emergency was well over, "even then, my father was still so afraid, afraid that people would think he had family members that were communists." Loh believes that fear is the primary reason why many of the war generation refuse to share their memories:

I think, because the Chinese suffered a lot. Many were migrants, they had to work hard, and then the war happened. They needed to survive, and then many got involved with the communists, and they were bullied by the Japanese, and you know, they tortured people. Those kinds of stories make them have fear, the fear of being killed. Life is most important, right? So they have a lot of fear. To avoid it, they stopped talking about it. Even when you ask, they won't talk because for you to not know is to be safe. The more you know the more unsafe. I think this is how they protect the next generation. They don't want to tell us.

It is possible that this culture of silence, emanating from the war years and conflated with events during the Emergency, has seeped into the unconscious psyche of postwar generations. This has shaped some Chinese' perceptions of where they stand in Malaysian society and also their behaviour. Further, war memory, or more accurately the silences, invokes apprehension about the fragility of Malay-Chinese relations. As Loh explains:

So when you look at us, the next generation, whatever we can avoid, we avoid. We don't want to have bad things happen again, to have fighting. So if you ask me, are the Chinese still afraid? Of course, they are! My mother's generation especially are still very afraid. They have a certain kind of mindset. They are so afraid that their lives would be disrupted. Their hearts are always in their mouth; afraid of the Japanese, afraid of these people and that people, afraid that the killing will spread to them, afraid to leave the hills. So this fear in the next generation... Everything, don't get involved too much.

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<sup>472</sup> Loh Lee Tyng, interview by author, March 29, 2012. She is not related to Loh Sow Ying.

Politics, don't get involved too much; a lot of things, sensitive, sensitive, sensitive, because of the fear.

That is why when [Chinese] do things, we are very careful, we are very cautious. When everything is peaceful, it is very easy to get along. But if there is trouble, of course, just like anybody, [the Malays] will of course side with their own race. So in the same way, of course the Chinese will also group together. [Malay and Chinese] have very good relations, but it is not tight.

Given a fostered culture of silence, general ambivalence towards the wartime past becomes understandable. This ambivalence is not entirely born of callous apathy; it is the product of cultivated indifference. However, Blackburn and Hack have noted that Chinese war memory is not entirely absent; that the Chinese continue “to write their own histories... and to commemorate their own wartime past.”<sup>473</sup> Further, within specifically “Chinese spaces, languages and cultures,” they assert that Chinese war memory has “flourished.”<sup>474</sup> How should one account for the apparent disconnect between an observed culture of silence and evidence of flourishing war memory? Perhaps it would be more accurate to suggest that the average Chinese does not actively nurture war memory; those who do, remember the dead. And this is why, despite the lack of state sponsorship, Chinese war memory persists. To elucidate this assertion, within the next segment, we explore the contexts in which Chinese individuals and the community remember the war.

## Remembering the Dead, Misremembering the War

In 1984, a memorial was unveiled at Kuala Pilah Chinese Cemetery to commemorate the victims of the Parit Tinggi massacre. The *raison d'être* for this memorial was practical. The original site of the mass grave was located on Malay *kampung* land and it was thought that if this plot was redeveloped, the grave would be disturbed. Xiao Wen Hu was the chairman of the committee which coordinated the exhumation at the initial site and subsequent reinterment at the cemetery. He had personal reasons for being involved.

Xiao is a survivor of the massacre.<sup>475</sup> He was seven years old when Japanese soldiers arrived at his village on that fateful day. Xiao sustained five bayonet wounds but was among 30 survivors who lived to bear witness to this event. Like many displaced, he eked out a living on the streets and was sold into

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<sup>473</sup> Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory*, 257.

<sup>474</sup> Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory*, 341.

<sup>475</sup> Xiao's story and an account of how the Kuala Pilah memorial came to be is detailed in Qiu, *Rizhishiqi*, 76-89, 90-93.

child labour before being adopted by an Indonesian Chinese family. When he reached adulthood, Xiao returned to Malaya. Every year on Qing Ming, the annual day for honouring ancestors, Xiao visited the mass grave at Parit Tinggi. There he met other survivors and relatives of the victims. They became increasingly worried that if the site was developed they would no longer be able to perform the annual rites. With the support of the local Chinese Assembly, they located a suitable site to reinter the remains and raised funds for a memorial.

The importance of being able to worship at the graves of ancestors on Qing Ming is rooted in tradition. According to Chinese beliefs, those who died ‘bad’ deaths, for example through suicide or murder, are destined to wander aimlessly as ‘hungry ghosts’ or ‘beggar spirits’ if they are forgotten by their descendants.<sup>476</sup> If unappeased, these spirits wreak havoc upon the prospects of living relatives. To counter this, rituals must be performed to ease their way in the underworld. In Malaysia, while Buddhist rites, Taoist rituals, Confucian teachings and local pagan customs have melded into a unique Chinese religion, such cultural beliefs remain prevalent.<sup>477</sup>

In 1982, exhumations began. Hired labourers set to work with *cangkul* (hoe) and baskets, while volunteers, including Xiao, sifted through the earth with their bare hands. (See: Figure 16.) The gathered remains – tibia, femur and rib bones in recycled cardboard boxes, skulls in gunny sacks and plastic pails – were transported to a temporary tomb, even as construction on a permanent memorial continued apace on the site. (See: Figure 17.) Two years later, the memorial was completed. To mark the occasion, survivors, relatives, the Chinese media and representatives of various local Chinese organisations turned out *en masse*. (See: Figure 18.) Fruits, a roast pig, ‘hell money’ and incense were offered while Buddhist monks chanted prayers. This was clearly a communal affair but for some also a private one. Survivors like Xiao had fulfilled their filial obligation in sparing the spirits of their ancestors from ‘homelessness.’ They had restored the displaced dead to their proper position as “ancestral ghosts.”<sup>478</sup>

The main inscription on the monolith, in Chinese characters, states that this is a memorial for Chinese compatriots. A plaque in the Malay language states

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<sup>476</sup> For discussions on the consequences of ‘bad deaths’ or ‘bad burials,’ and the part played by ancestral worship in mitigating the wrath or displeasure of the dead, see: Myron L. Cohen, “Soul and Salvation: Conflicting Themes in Chinese Popular Religion,” in *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, edited by James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski (Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 180-202; also Stevan Harrell, “The Concept of Soul in Chinese Folk Religion,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 38, 3 (1979): 519–528.

<sup>477</sup> Tan Chee Beng, “Chinese Religion in Malaysia: A General View,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 42, 2 (1983): 217–252.

<sup>478</sup> Cohen, “Soul and Salvation,” 189.

rather simply: "To remember those lost in the incident of Parit Tinggi, Kuala Pilah on 16<sup>th</sup> March 1942." Above the Malay inscription, in Chinese, there is a similar though more explicit message: that those killed in this atrocity during the Pacific War included Chinese men, women, the elderly and children. Another smaller sign reiterates why this memorial was built, so that members of the community can continue to pay their respects. On annual visits on Qing Ming, local resident Simon Lim noted that locals continue to perform supplications at the site. (See: Figure 19.) These acts of ritual performance testify to the community's enduring efforts in remembering their dead.

More accurately, the memorial at Kuala Pilah should be recognised as a memorial shrine or altar. This is because such shrines serve as "generic marker(s) for unmarked graves."<sup>479</sup> These are typical landmarks in Chinese cemeteries; they do not specifically commemorate the war dead. As such, the primary purpose of memorial shrines is not the commemoration of war *per se* but a symbol of collective remembrance of the unnamed dead. While the memorial does serve to remember victims of a war atrocity, the primary impetus for its construction is in deference to cultural norm. That it also perpetuates war memory is, in some ways, serendipitous.

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<sup>479</sup> Terry Abraham and Priscilla Wegards, "Urns, bones and burners: overseas Chinese cemeteries," *Australasian Historical Archaeology* 21 (2003): 63.



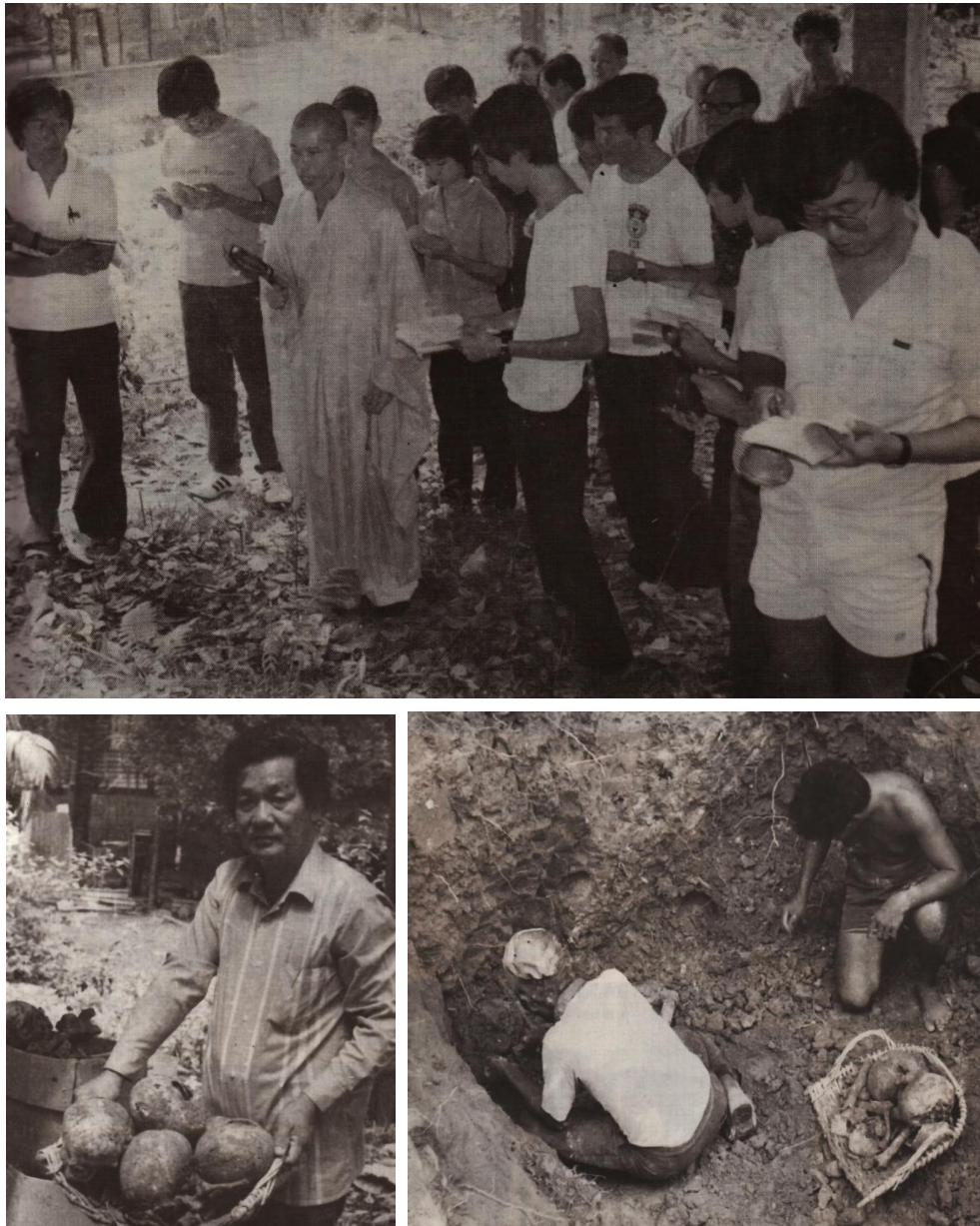


Figure 15. Exhumation at Parit Tinggi.

Clockwise:

A monk leads prayers for the deceased before exhumation works begin.

Hired labourers disinter remains at the mass grave.

Xiao Wen Hu was among the volunteers involved in the exhumation.

Source: Negeri Sembilan Chinese Assembly Hall.





Figure 16. The exhumed remains at a temporary tomb awaiting burial.  
Source: Negeri Sembilan Chinese Assembly Hall.

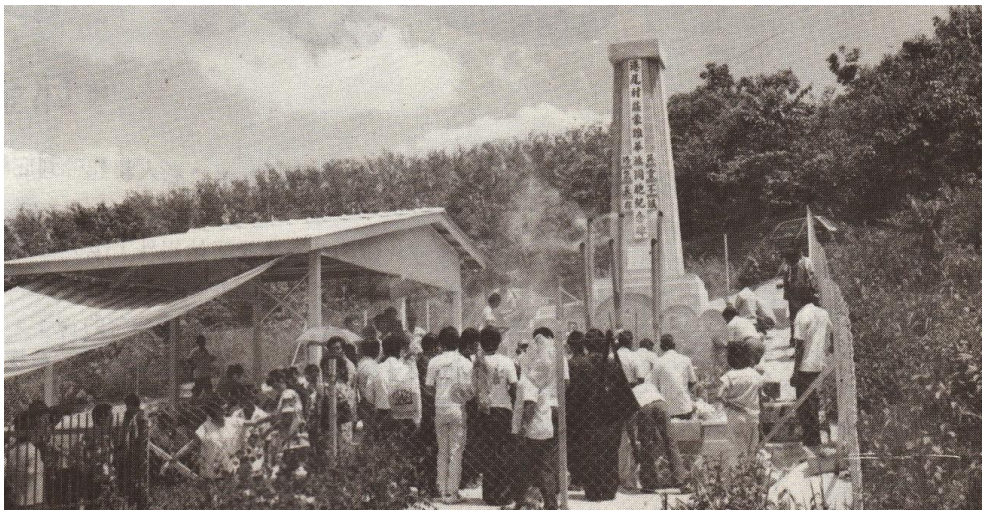


Figure 17. Dedication of the Kuala Pilah memorial, 10 August 1984.  
Source: Negeri Sembilan Chinese Assembly Hall.



Figure 18. Kuala Pilah memorial on Qing Ming, 2004. Source: Simon Lim.

The distinction between war memorials and memorial shrines can be observed at other Chinese cemeteries in the country. The Heritage Park in Kuala Lumpur is an ancient burial site and encompasses several Chinese dialect association cemeteries. The Kwong Tong or Cantonese cemetery is host to a Kuomintang cenotaph erected in 1947 to honour the Chinese who repatriated to China to join the anti-Japanese resistance cause. (See: Figure 20.) Its design does not include an offering urn at its base and ancestral worship is not performed here. It is strictly speaking a war memorial; it glorifies sacrifice and memorialises a specific conflict.

Within the Hokkien section of the cemetery, there is 'The Rebuilt Memorial to Malayan Victims of the Japanese Occupation.' (See: Figure 21.) This structure, constructed in 2006, replaced the original 1945 mass grave site known as the 'Tomb of War Victims of the Compatriots of the Republic of China.' On inspection, this memorial shrine appears to receive frequent visitors; remnants of joss sticks were evident. Unlike the Kuala Pilah memorial however, it has been appropriated by various Chinese organisations to project a nationalist message. Consequently, the dead, previously 'compatriots of China,' have been transmuted into 'Malayan victims.' This metamorphosis evokes the "social, political and cultural afterlives" of human remains, where the symbolic value of the dead is (re)inscribed with socio-political and cultural meanings.<sup>480</sup> A plaque, replicated in Chinese, Malay, English and Japanese languages, provides an evocative account of Japanese "brutal Fascist rule" resulting in a "reign of terror" and the "massacre of civilians." Further, the memorial pays homage to "members of the Anti-Japanese Army" who, "in their valiant efforts to safeguard their homeland," sacrificed their "flesh and blood" and "wrote a glorious page in the history of Malaysia." The obvious intent of this memorial is to reinsert Chinese war experience into the national historiography. However, this reinterpretation of the past is somewhat disingenuous. In claiming that the victims were Malayan is to rewrite history, given that the Chinese were then a migrant group. Arguably, in transforming what is ostensibly a shrine into a quasi-war memorial which propagates half-truths promotes 'misremembering' of the Chinese war past.

As we have seen, expressions of Chinese war memory within private and communal spheres are varied. These range from selective forgetting to active commemoration of the dead. It is doubtful as to whether the manipulation of

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<sup>480</sup> Exhumations inevitably lead to fraught contests of meaning-making and memory-building; the latter is intrinsically linked to the present, where the past is mediated through existing political and cultural struggles within contemporary society. See: Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postcolonial Change*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 7.



selective aspects of the Chinese war past, such as that observed at the Hokkien cemetery, should be considered evidence of 'flourishing' Chinese war memory. In the next chapter, we continue our exploration into which aspects of Chinese war memory are actively perpetuated. We examine multiple sites of memory to discern how selective aspects of Chinese war memory have been harnessed to challenge or accommodate state-sponsored dominant narratives. We also scrutinise whether the Chinese war past holds any resonance for contemporary Malaysian Chinese.



Figure 19. Kuomintang cenotaph, Kwong Tong cemetery, Kuala Lumpur, 2012.



Figure 20. The Rebuilt Memorial to Malayan Victims of the Japanese Occupation, Hokkien cemetery, Kuala Lumpur, 2012.



## Chapter 4

### Sites of Memory

In this chapter, we examine several sites of memory which evoke contestations of war memory in Malaysia. By 'sites of memory,' we reference French historian Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* as manifestations of a community's willed injunctions to remember, to record and to transmit for posterity.<sup>481</sup> These manifestations, when inscribed with symbolic significance, transmute into cultural repositories. In this way, they form the "bedrock of a community's symbolic repertoire."<sup>482</sup> This repertoire in turn informs and shapes a community's sense of collective identity and belonging. Sites of memory can take multiple forms: they can be tangible and physical, such as monuments and institutions; or they may be functional in that they serve to preserve and communicate experiences, such as veterans' associations, or to teach and instruct, such as testimonies and textbooks; while symbolic sites invoke acts of ritual epitomised by commemoration events. While these multiple sites of memory collectively fulfill a commemorative function, they are not merely historical, nor entirely memorial, but "self-referential signs;" that is, they are open to interpretation and reinterpretation in an ongoing process of meaning-making.<sup>483</sup> While Nora's conception focussed primarily on national sites, our exploration of varied sites of memory in Malaysia encompasses the communal. This widens the analysis to include the plethora of symbolic motifs which constitute the memory-nation of this diverse national polity.

Malaysia has been described as a "nation-in-the-making" rather than a nation-state.<sup>484</sup> It is a relatively 'young' nation where the concept of a Malaysian historical identity remains a work in progress. And like many nations with a postcolonial legacy, where the past is not "a univocal and uncontested common history but competing memories in action," such competing memories jointly cohabit within the national consciousness, challenging the hegemony of the state in shaping national history. In focussing on transmutable aspects inherent in Malaysian sites of memory, it will become clear that, as Malaysian historian Abdul

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<sup>481</sup> It is noted that *lieux de mémoire* has been translated variously as 'realms' or 'sites' of memory; here, the more oft-used term 'sites of memory' has been employed; see: Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989).

<sup>482</sup> Nancy Wood, "Memory's Remains: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *History and Memory* 6, no. 1 (1994): 124.

<sup>483</sup> Nora, "Between Memory and History," 22-24.

<sup>484</sup> Leo Suryadinata, ed. *Ethnic Chinese as Southeast Asians*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1997), 5.

Ghapa Harun asserts, the “struggle over the manufacture of and control of popular memory” is, in reality, “a struggle to define identity.”<sup>485</sup>

## National Sites of Memory

Malaysian national history takes the 15<sup>th</sup> century Melaka Sultanate as its starting point. This is “presented as a golden age of Malay culture and achievement” which is “interrupted by European colonisation.”<sup>486</sup> Within this context, the Japanese occupation is differentiated from European conquest and reframed as a catalyst for Malay national awakening. Thus, the tone of national war memory has been revised to support the cause of Malay nationalism. In this revision, counter-narratives eschew perceived Eurocentric dictates; the term ‘colonisation’ for example has been abandoned in favour of ‘interference.’<sup>487</sup> This perspective re-imagines the British colonial era as a product of collaboration, resulting from ‘invitations’ extended to the British to act as ‘advisors’ at the behest of the Malay Sultanate.<sup>488</sup>

The apparent malleability of national historiography has spawned popular debates among historians, members of the public and politicians.<sup>489</sup> Challenges however to the state-sponsored narrative are often rebuked as ‘racist’ or ‘anti-nationalist.’<sup>490</sup> The national narrative yokes Malay primacy to ideations of history and nationalism. Conversely, Malay cultural archetypes permeate notions of Malaysian nationalism and identity. We examine the following national sites of

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<sup>485</sup> Abdul Ghapa Harun, “Pendidikan Sejarah Sebagai Dasar Awam” [History Education as Public Policy], paper presented at Reclaiming Our History seminar, November 19, 2011, (Kuala Lumpur: Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall); quoted in Helen Ting, “The Battle Over Memory of the Nation: Whose National History?”, in *Controversial History Education in Asian Contexts*, edited by Mark Baildon et. al. (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 54.

<sup>486</sup> Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory*, 262-263.

<sup>487</sup> See for example contemporary secondary school history textbooks, which refer to British colonisation of Malaya as *campur tangan* (interference) as opposed to *penjajahan* (colonialism); see: Masariah binti Mispari et. al., *Sejarah Tingkatan 2 Buku Teks* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2003).

<sup>488</sup> For such viewpoints, see: G. Manimaran, “Aziz Bari: ‘Secara teknikal tidak, pada hakikat British jajah kita’” [Aziz Bari: ‘Technically speaking, the British did not colonise us’], *The Malaysian Insider*, September 6, 2011; and Martin Carvalho and Rashvinjeet S. Bedi, “Dr M: Don’t re-invent our history,” *The Star*, September 13, 2011.

<sup>489</sup> See: Albangi, “Profesor menjadi bodoh kerana politik” [Professor made stupid by politics], *Albangi’s Blog*, September 11, 2011; Malaysiakini, “Merdeka Day: Have we been celebrating a lie?,” September 11, 2011; and Malaysiakini, “Malaysia was colonised, admits Muhyiddin,” October 5, 2011.

<sup>490</sup> See: G. Manimaran, “Bukan dijajah: Pemimpin PAS dakwa Prof. Zainal hina bangsa sendiri” [Not colonised: PAS Leaders accuse Prof. Zainal of disrespecting his own race], *Malaysian Insider*, September 10, 2011; and Zakiah Koya, “History Textbooks Biased, Say Writers,” *The Sun*, December 13, 2010.



memory – the National War Memorial, *Hari Pahlawan* (Warriors' Day), *Muzium Negara* (National Museum) and history textbooks – to contemplate how the meanings inscribed upon such sites have developed to support increasing assertions of Malay supremacy.

#### National War Memorial

Malaysia's National War Memorial is located in the heart of the capital, near the Houses of Parliament. The site comprises the *Tugu Negara* (National Monument), surrounding gardens and the Kuala Lumpur Cenotaph. Prior to the unveiling of the *Tugu Negara* in 1966, annual Remembrance Day commemorations were conducted at the colonial-era cenotaph. The cenotaph was erected by the British to commemorate "our glorious dead" of the First World War, and later inscribed to include the fallen of the Second World War and the Malayan Emergency. Since the site was redeveloped, the main attraction has been the *Tugu Negara*, an imposing sculpture designed by Felix de Weldon, the architect behind the Iwo Jima Marine Corps War Memorial in Arlington. (See: Figure 22.)

In promoting the site to potential visitors, Tourism Malaysia, part of the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism, prioritises the *Tugu Negara* and omits mention of the cenotaph, thus minimising the British colonial era. What this sculpture depicts is not entirely clear. According to Blackburn and Hack, it represents "five Malay warriors standing over two slain communist fighters."<sup>491</sup> The inscription at the base reads, "Dedicated to the heroic fighters in the cause of peace and freedom. May the blessing of Allah be upon them." The reference to Allah suggests that the triumphant warriors are Muslim, ergo Malay. According to Tourism Malaysia however the seven figures represent "courage, leadership, sacrifice, strength, suffering, unity and vigilance."<sup>492</sup> This revised interpretation ignores the original intent of the monument.<sup>493</sup> It also glosses over obvious visual inconsistencies. For example, the five victorious figures are attired in a different uniform (modelled on Malayan security forces) from the two prostrate at their feet. The vanquished sport five-peaked caps and puttee leggings, reminiscent of that worn by communist guerillas.

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<sup>491</sup> Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory*, 255.

<sup>492</sup> Tourism Malaysia, "National Monument Kuala Lumpur," <http://www.tourism.gov.my/>.

<sup>493</sup> For a reference on the brief sent to Weldon, see: Blackburn and Hack, *War Memory*, 238.



Figure 21. Tugu Negara, 2014. Source: CEphoto, Uwe Aranas / CC-BY-SA-3.0.

The anomalies appear to have been disregarded in favour of a unifying message. This is an ironic development, given that guerrillas tried to destroy the monument in 1975. It was also deemed sufficiently contentious to be included as a talking point during the 1989 Phuket Peace Talks between the MCP and the Malaysian government. During the talks, the MCP proposed an alternative monument depicting united Malay, Chinese and Indian efforts in overcoming colonialism. Reportedly, the Malaysian representatives conceded to MCP contribution to the anti-colonial cause but could not agree to a replacement.<sup>494</sup> Is the current reinterpretation a concessionary gesture towards the MCP? The motive behind the revision is open to speculation as proceedings of the peace accords remain classified.

As an icon among the nation-state's repertoire of symbols, the *Tugu Negara* supports the founding myth of the nation as one based upon overcoming communism. This narrative is inherently divisive as the communist insurgency is often treated as an ethnic rather than an ideological struggle. This is exacerbated by obfuscation of the communist insurrection within official discourse, including the omission of non-Chinese communist leaders from national historiography.<sup>495</sup> As a result, sentiments such as that of the previous Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad – in declaring the communist guerillas to be “almost 100 percent Chinese” – are reinforced.<sup>496</sup> Obfuscation compounds perceptions of the Chinese as a subversive Other.

#### Muzium Negara (National Museum)

The National Museum of Malaysia houses exhibits on two floors within four permanent galleries. These galleries cover different epochs within Malaysian history, laid out in broad chronological strokes: Early History, the Malay Kingdoms, the Colonial Era, and Malaysia Today. Within the gallery titled ‘Colonial Era,’ the visitor is rushed through 300 years of colonisation by the Portuguese and the Dutch through brief accounts of resistance on the part of Malay Sultans. The British are given more space; though this period is referred to alternately as ‘occupation,’ ‘interference’ and ‘administration’ and not as ‘colonisation.’ Within this gallery, several sections are dedicated to developing a cohesive narrative of Malay resistance. One exhibit is titled ‘Warriors’ and lists a roll call of Malay ruling elite

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<sup>494</sup> Chin Peng, *My Side of History* (Singapore: Media Masters, 2003), 490.

<sup>495</sup> On Malay-Muslim leaders in the MCP, see: Wong, *From Pacific War to Merdeka*.

<sup>496</sup> Mahathir Mohamad, *The Challenge* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk, 1986), 160. On public perceptions of communism as a Chinese problem, see also: Wong Wing On, “The ‘Monumental’ Debate,” *Malaysiakini*, December 23, 2006, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/61365>.

recast as “freedom fighters.” Weaved incongruously into this narrative are exhibits touting Malaya’s progression in a variety of economic activities: tin mining, coffee, gambier and pepper cultivation.

Seemingly out of chronological order and situated between a display on pepper cultivation and the aforementioned ‘Warriors’ exhibit is a single exhibit on the Japanese occupation. (See: Figure 23.) Inside the glass display are a Japanese army uniform and helmet, three swords, a dictionary and a siren. Nearby, a ‘Japanese Army bicycle 1941’ is mounted on a wall. The display text is in the Malay language, and unlike the other exhibits, there is no English language translation. The description is brief, outlining the invasion of Malaya and the eventual surrender of the Japanese to the Allied Forces. The last paragraph reads:

During Japanese Army rule, the population of *Tanah Melayu* (Malay lands) experienced suffering, for example there was shortage of food. Apart from that, they faced punishment and strict regulations from Japanese Army rule. Even though this was so, Japanese success in defeating British troops made the Malays realise that a country from the East could defeat the West, and that the British were not all powerful.

With regards to the objects, the helmet, Japanese dictionary and siren are labelled but the context in which they were used is not explained. A description is provided for the ‘samurai sword’ though this is erroneously labelled, given that Japanese military swords are known as *gunto*, and samurais were outlawed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Curiously, unlike the rest of the display, the caption relating to the sword is described in both English and Malay. It reads:

This samurai sword symbolises the bravery and chivalry of Japanese Army in the [sic] World War II (1941-1945). Every Japanese army officer was provided with a samurai sword. This sword was feared by the locals as it was used for beheading.

This lone exhibit serves as a visual metaphor for the place of the Japanese occupation within the nation’s historiography. Clearly, the occupation has left a contradictory and unsettling legacy that does not easily conform to the narrative of Malay anti-colonial resistance. While general deprivation and suffering are mentioned, visitors are offered only a glimpse of the terror inspired by the occupation, as embodied by the ‘samurai sword’ and in its description.



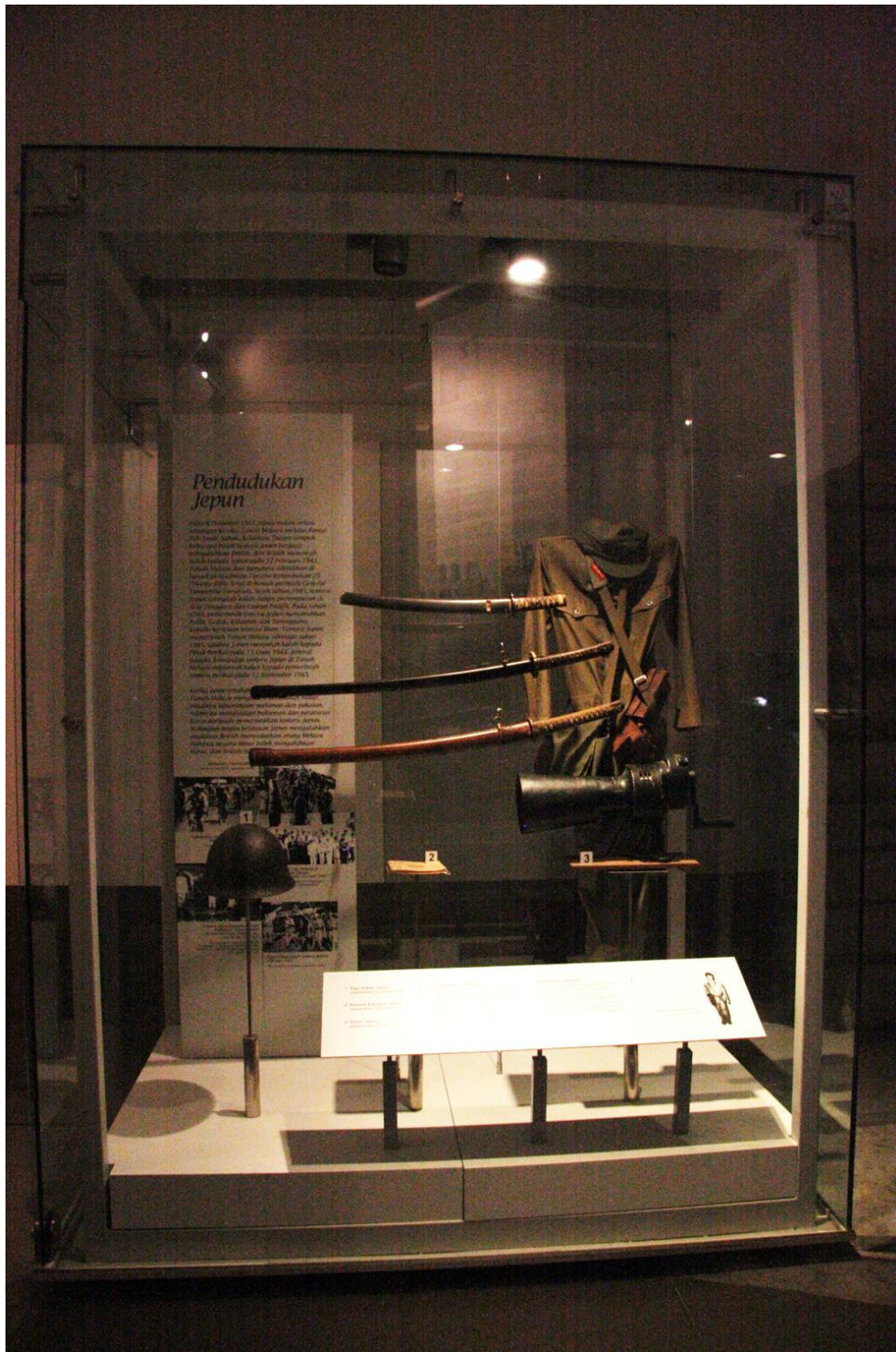


Figure 22. Japanese occupation exhibit at Muzium Negara, 2012.

The overall tone of this exhibit is positive and corresponds to customary accounts in other Malaysian museums, which credit the occupation for the “emergence of a new political awareness and a new perspective among Malaysians” which “led them, especially the Malays, to fight for their political independence.”<sup>497</sup> That the occupation occurred in *Tanah Melayu*, as opposed to Malaya, and given that other ethnic groups’ experiences are omitted from the description, one is left in little doubt about the primary message: *Tanah Melayu* belonged to the Malays, ergo only the Malays experienced a national awakening.

#### Hari Pahlawan (Warriors’ Day)

The annual *Hari Pahlawan* traces its origins to 1958 and grew out of public celebration of the Malay Regiment. Previously, national commemorations of the war dead took place on Remembrance Day at the Kuala Lumpur Cenotaph every November. These followed an established pattern of rituals common in many Commonwealth countries, among them the bugle call of *The Last Post* and *The Rouse*, the laying of wreaths at the foot of the monument, and the observation of a minute of silence. There were however local adaptations, among them the recitation of *Doa Selamat* (Prayer for Safety).

After commemorations were relocated to *Tugu Negara*, it was superseded by *Hari Pahlawan*, conducted every 31 July. The focus shifted to remembering the war dead of the Malayan Emergency. The practise of laying wreaths at the *Tugu Negara* ceased in 2010 following the issuance of a *fatwa* which decreed that the commemoration rituals were contrary to Islamic law.<sup>498</sup> Following this, the annual ceremony was moved again, to Merdeka Square.

Over the years, this event has transformed into a spectacle of military prowess, pomp and ceremony rather than a sombre reflection on loss. (See: Figure 24.) The day’s program typically includes a parade of troops and veterans from the police and armed forces, the king’s inspection of a guard-of-honour, a 21-gun salute and *silat* (Malay martial art) demonstrations. There is also a segment dedicated to the reenactment of selected historical episodes involving the armed

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<sup>497</sup> Abu Talib Ahmad, “Museums and the Japanese Occupation of Malaya,” in *Reflections on Southeast Asian History since 1945*, eds. Richard Mason and Abu Talib Ahmad (Penang: Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2006), 40. Abu examined how the Japanese occupation was portrayed in four museums: Alor Setar Museum, Penang State Museum, Museum of National History in Kuala Lumpur and War Museum Kota Bharu.

<sup>498</sup> *Fatwa* refers to the issuance of an interpretation of Islamic law by a qualified *mufti* or religious leader. See: Adib Zalkapli, “Malaysia sambut Hari Pahlawan ikut *fatwa Sabtu ini*” [This Saturday, Malaysia celebrates Warrior Day in Accordance with Fatwa], *The Malaysian Insider*, July 29, 2010.





Figure 23. Scenes from Hari Pahlawan, 2012 and 2013.

From top: A reenactment of the Malayan Emergency, source: [wowberita.org](http://wowberita.org); *Silat* (Malay traditional martial arts) demonstration by Special Forces commandos, source: New Straits Times; 'Bloodied Lahad Datu' pantomime, source: Malaysian Air Force.

forces. These segments are not historically-accurate recreations; they serve as symbolic representations of past events. In 2012, this segment depicted the defeat of the communists during the Malayan Emergency. In 2013, this portion of the program drew its inspiration from the recent clash between Malaysian forces and the Royal Sulu Army in Sabah state, and was evocatively titled *Lahad Datu Berdarah* (Bloodied Lahad Datu).<sup>499</sup> These pantomime segments are crowd pleasers, highly entertaining and involve military hardware, pyrotechnics and blank ammunition. The action is usually accompanied by an emotive soundtrack and stirring voiceover narration. Through such displays, *Hari Pahlawan* has come to resemble a celebration of military valour rather than a commemoration of past war heroes. The distinctly Malay/Muslim overtones, evinced by the recitation of Muslim prayers, *silat* demonstrations and the participation of Malay royalty, serve to augment the narrative of Malay triumph in preserving national sovereignty against enemies of the state – both within (communists/Chinese?) and without (foreign/Sulu invaders).

### History Textbooks

In recent decades, public debate over the politics of national history within Malaysian history education has surfaced. Historian Helen Ting observes that previous history textbook editions presented a more objective and inclusive version of history, but since the racial riots of 1969, there has been a trending assertion of Malay political primacy within the text.<sup>500</sup> Controversies about history textbooks are not unique to Malaysia. The content of Japanese history textbooks has long been a source of contention between Japan and its neighbours, especially China and South Korea.<sup>501</sup> Recently in Hong Kong, a civil group called Scholarism protested the government's plans, prompted by Beijing, to introduce new history textbooks as part of a new national education curriculum. These debates attest to the significance of textbooks in shaping national culture, especially when textbooks are "among the first books most people encounter; and in many places, along with religious texts, almost the only books they encounter."<sup>502</sup>

In Malaysia, the national history curriculum is subjected to fulfilling nation-building agendas. The state has become arbiter of the past by dictating curriculum

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<sup>499</sup> For a description of the proceedings of the 2013 celebration, see: "King attends Warriors' Day programme," *New Straits Times*, July 31, 2013.

<sup>500</sup> Ting, "Battle over Memory of the Nation."

<sup>501</sup> Jean-Louis Margolin, "Japanese History Textbooks and the Asia-Pacific War: Apportioning Blame."

<sup>502</sup> The Economist, "Textbooks Round the World: It Ain't Necessarily So," October 13, 2012.



and “simultaneously legitimising the textbook’s version of history.”<sup>503</sup> Public officials tasked with educational policy are incentivised to present a view of history that is unproblematic out of a need to “create a useable past that leaves little room for ambiguity or debate.”<sup>504</sup> This has led to the promulgation of hegemonic national narratives within history textbooks, while alternative or minority histories which are antithetical are marginalised.

However, espousing a narrow version of history can inadvertently spawn quandaries. For example, one of the key assumptions about the Malaysian nation rests upon the narrative that the country “should be and is mono-racial to begin with, and that changes to such a situation happen only with drastic outside intervention.” This ‘outside intervention’ encompasses not only foreign colonisers but also migrants. The narrative of mono-racialism is difficult to maintain when threaded through centuries of historical accounting. Inconsistent use of the term *rakyat* (citizenry) – at times, referring only to only Malays; at other times, including minorities – introduces slippages and contradictions. Therefore, instead of engendering a sense shared history, the textbooks “present the opportunity to read from marginalised positions and to rethink the nation.”<sup>505</sup> To elucidate these contradictions, we briefly outline the state of contemporary history education in Malaysia. We also examine how such contradictions obfuscate history of the Japanese occupation of Malaya.

Compulsory history curriculum is taught at the secondary school level to Form 1 to 5 students between the ages of 13 and 17. The history textbooks in current use were introduced between 2002 and 2004 and are published by *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka*, a government body responsible for the printing and distribution of textbooks. No alternative texts are allowed. The latest editions introduced several precedents: all the authors are of Malay ethnicity; authorship was extended to include teachers (previous authors were historians); and the term ‘*ketuanan Melayu*’ (Malay supremacy) was inserted into the history lexicon. In terms of content, the emphasis on Islam increased substantially; this topic now represents five out of 10 chapters within the Form 5 history textbook. Of the entire history syllabus, 80 percent or 465 pages reference Malays, 16 pages include the Chinese, eight pages pertain to Indians, and no pages are dedicated to mentioning

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<sup>503</sup> Kumaran Rajandran, “Us and Them: The Portrayal of Malaysians and British in Malaysian History Textbooks,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 48, no. 3 (2013): 313.

<sup>504</sup> Mark Basildon et. al., “Introduction: Controversy, History and History Education in Asia,” 4-5.

<sup>505</sup> Sandra Khor Manickam, “Textbooks and Nation Construction in Malaysia,” *Asia-Pacific Forum* 28 (2005): 85-87.

the *Orang Asli* or indigenous tribes.<sup>506</sup> As such, the text does not reflect the multiracial demographics of the country where minorities such as the Chinese represent 24.6 percent, the Indians 7.3 percent and the *Orang Asli* 12.6 percent of the population.

This marginalisation of minorities from the text is heightened by a narrative that promotes a 'Malay-versus-non-Malay' perspective through use of terms such as '*pendatang asing*' (foreign migrants) and '*orang asing*' (foreigners) for Chinese and Indian minorities. While this distinction is accurate from a historical perspective, the inclusion of highly subjective commentary introduces a racial slant. In a section explaining the importation of Indian labour to Malaya, the concluding paragraph, emphasised in bold red lettering, reads:

In short, the development and prosperity of *Tanah Melayu* successfully attracted the interest of immigrants to come here and this situation has continued to the present day. We should be proud that our country has a concentration of foreign migrants due to its wealth and prosperity. On the other hand, local society should be more industrious, display more initiative and be prepared to develop the national wealth, especially those without huge capital. If not, the foreigners who are always on the lookout for opportunities will fill the gap, and take over our role, as has happened today.<sup>507</sup>

In 2010, public outcry erupted in response to a decree that history would be a compulsory pass subject in the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) examinations.<sup>508</sup> Educators, concerned parents and several civil society organisations launched the 'Reclaiming our Truly Malaysian History' campaign, petitioning the government to review the current syllabus so that students would not be "force-fed the diktats of the Education Ministry and regurgitating the input just to pass their SPM."<sup>509</sup> The controversy raised accusations of "nationalist revisionism" in service to political agendas, resulting in "half-truths and factual errors," the imposition of "value judgements" and the marginalisation of minority contributions towards nation-building within the text.<sup>510</sup> In response, Perkasa, a Malay rights non-government organisation, rebutted with the charge that "non-Malays don't understand Malaysia's history." Perkasa council member Ramlah Adam, co-author of several

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<sup>506</sup> CPI, "Reclaiming Our Truly Malaysian History," Centre for Policy Initiatives, May 19, 2011.

<sup>507</sup> Nik Hassan Shuhaimi bin Nik Abdul Rahman et. al., *Sejarah Tingkatan 4: Buku Teks* [Form 4 History: Text Book], (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2010), 255.

<sup>508</sup> Malaysian equivalent of GCE Ordinary Level.

<sup>509</sup> CPI, "Reclaiming Our Truly Malaysian History."

<sup>510</sup> Ranjit Singh Malhi, "Factual Errors in History Books," *The Star*, December 20, 2010.

history textbooks and deputy chair of the education panel appointed to write the history curriculum, disavowed allegations of racial bias in the syllabus. Ramlah asserted that “the important thing is that we must maintain racial harmony and patriotism.” She argued against including “negative issues,” saying, “What do you want to be put in? [sic] About how the contributions of the non-Malays are in the form of the Malayan Communist Party?”<sup>511</sup>

Given that Malaysian history education eschews ‘negative’ aspects of the past, how has this position shaped interpretations of the Japanese occupation in history textbooks? The overarching lesson to be gleaned from this historical epoch, it seems, is to be vigilant against foreign duplicity. The singular chapter dedicated to the occupation is laden with subjective admonitions and is misleading by way of historical inaccuracies and weak contextualisation. The occupation is introduced as “a very important historical event in our country’s history” because it “roused the spirit of nationalism among the masses.” The Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia is due to “American actions” which “resulted in the Japanese military government attacking Southeast Asia to free Japan from the embargo.”

Prior to the invasion, students are told, the Japanese utilised the slogan ‘Asia for the Asians’ to placate the populace and engender support. This was successful as “the arrival of Japanese troops did not feel like new rulers replacing the British.” The authors then digress to a discussion on propaganda, adding: “This event serves as lesson to us that a good slogan is necessary in achieving a mission. However, as responsible citizens, we should be careful of foreign propaganda.”<sup>512</sup> In a sidebar, the slogan ‘Asia for the Asians’ is reiterated as a talking point for discussion. This is situated alongside a map outlining the extent of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. The slogan is explained thus: “Asian countries are for Asians and should not be colonised by Western powers. As evidence, the Japanese did not invade Thailand because it was not colonised by the West.” The contradictions presented by the inclusion of China and Korea (neither of which were colonised by the West) within the Japanese sphere of influence is not addressed.<sup>513</sup> Rather haphazardly, this graphic also erroneously includes Australia and New Zealand. (See: Figure 25.)

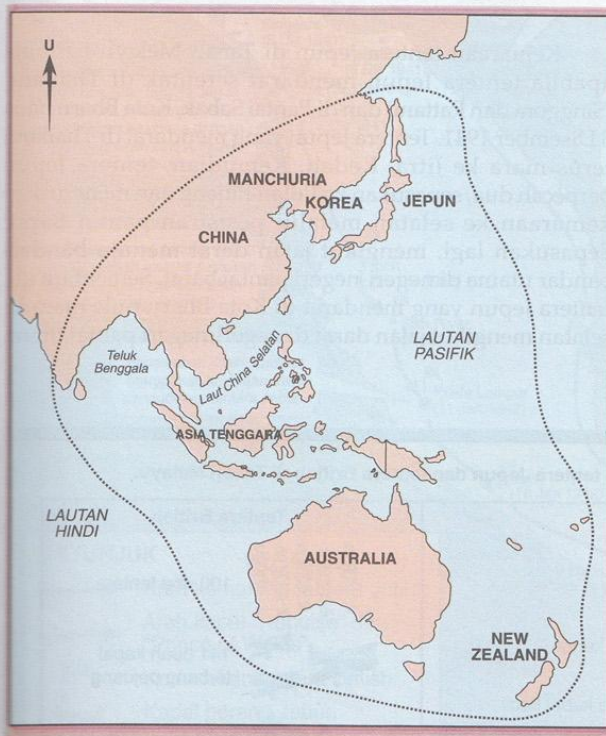
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<sup>511</sup> Shazwan Mustafa Kamal, “Non-Malays don’t understand Malaysia’s history, says Perkasa,” *The Malaysian Insider*, April 10, 2011.

<sup>512</sup> Ramlah binti Adam et.al., *Sejarah Tingkatan 3: Buku Teks* [Form 3 History: Textbook] (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka), 3-5.

<sup>513</sup> Early Japanese designs for ‘Greater East Asia’ encompassed India and Australasia. The Co-Prosperity Sphere which eventuated was limited to territories seized between 1942 and 1945 which did not include Australia or New Zealand; see: Fisher, “The Expansion of Japan:” 179.

Sebelum menyerang Tanah Melayu, pihak Jepun telah menggunakan propaganda untuk mempengaruhi penduduk tempatan di negara kita dengan slogan-slogan seperti **"Asia Untuk Orang Asia"** dan **"Semangat Asia"**. Slogan-slogan ini jelas berunsur antipenjajah Barat dan menonjolkan imej Jepun sebagai pembela negara-negara Timur. Begitu juga dengan rancangan **"Kawasan Kesemakmuran Bersama Asia Timur Raya"** oleh pihak Jepun. Strategi ini berkesan sehingga kehadiran tentera Jepun tidak begitu dirasakan sebagai penjajah baru menggantikan British. Peristiwa ini memberi iktibar kepada kita bahawa slogan yang baik perlu dalam melaksanakan sesuatu misi. Walaupun begitu sebagai rakyat yang bertanggungjawab, kita sepatutnya lebih berhati-hati terhadap propaganda dari luar.



Peta 1.2 Kawasan Kesemakmuran Bersama Asia Timur Raya. Zon ini meliputi kawasan dari Manchuria hingga ke Australia dan kawasan dari Lautan Pasifik hingga ke Teluk Benggala.



#### Takrif Kata

##### **"Asia untuk Orang Asia"**

Negara Asia adalah untuk orang Asia dan tidak wajar dijajah oleh kuasa Barat. Sebagai buktinya, Jepun tidak menyerang Thailand kerana tidak dijajah oleh Barat.

##### **"Semangat Asia"**

Negara-negara Asia mempunyai kekuatan dan jati diri yang tersendiri untuk menghadapi sesuatu cabaran.



#### Pustaka Ilmu

##### **"Kawasan Kesemakmuran Bersama Asia Timur Raya"**

Rancangan Jepun untuk mewujudkan zon ekonomi yang makmur yang diketuai olehnya.

Figure 24. Asia for Asians: Depiction of Japan's Co-Prosperity Sphere in Malaysian history textbook. Source: Ramlah binti Adam et. al., *Sejarah Tingkatan 3: Buku Teks* [Form 3 History: Textbook], 5.

The British defence of Malaya is given short shrift. Students are told that “British troops actually did not defend *Tanah Melayu* heartily, except for Singapore. Their attention was on defending Britain from the Axis powers in Europe. Instead, it was the Malay Regiment under the leadership of Leftenant Adnan who fought to the death to defend *Tanah Melayu*.”<sup>514</sup> Adnan bin Saidi’s heroism in battle is above reproach; however the text appears to infer he acted unilaterally rather than under British direction. The inclusion of Adnan within the narrative of anti-Japanese resistance is precarious. As historian Abu Talib Ahmad has noted: “[Adnan’s] place in Malay nationalism is problematic as his struggle against the Japanese [was] in defence of a colonial possession.”<sup>515</sup> Other anti-Japanese resistance activities are briefly summarised. Mention of the MPAJA is truncated to three bullet points: it was established by the MCP; it cooperated with the British for financial aid, military training and weapons; and it employed guerrilla tactics.

In the section ‘The Reaction of the Local Population,’ the Malay inhabitants, readers are told, were “treated well” by the Japanese. The Malays are portrayed as having initially welcomed the occupiers, though their support soon waned as “the Japanese slogans were a deception only to further their interest. *Tanah Melayu* was not granted independence as promised.” The Indians were also treated well because “the Japanese needed their cooperation to drive the British out of India.” On the plight of the Chinese collective, there is no mention of the *sook ching* massacres. Chinese experience of the war is reduced to one paragraph:

Chinese reaction was influenced by the Sino-Japanese War of 1937. Many were involved in anti-Japanese activities... As a result, when the Japanese colonised *Tanah Melayu* the Chinese were not only treated harshly but were also killed. However, there were some Chinese who supported the Japanese, primarily to protect their business and save their own lives.<sup>516</sup>

The text glosses over issues of collaboration. Readers are told that the Japanese received support from the Malay and Indian communities, but this support was garnered through deception. The harsh treatment of the Chinese was justified because they were anti-Japanese. And when the Chinese colluded with the Japanese, they did so out of self-interest. In the conclusion, readers are told that the occupation “brought suffering to all aspects of life for the inhabitants of our country.” The authors reiterate that the public had initially been roused by Japanese propaganda but this had been a ruse. Nevertheless, “the spirit of

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<sup>514</sup> Ramlah, *Sejarah Tingkatan 3*, 10-11.

<sup>515</sup> Abu, “Museums,” 42.

<sup>516</sup> Ramlah, *Sejarah Tingkatan 3*, 22-24.

nationalism spread among the people, though these sentiments were directed towards their original respective countries.” By emphasising that each ethnic group’s sense of nationalism was oriented towards their “original respective countries,” this narrative extirpates the participation of minority groups in resisting colonisation. It also reinforces the Malay-Muslim provenance paradigm threaded throughout the syllabus. Malaysia is thus reaffirmed as *Tanah Melayu*, its Malay-Muslim inhabitants are *bumiputra* (sons of the soil) and *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay supremacy) is “merely an expression of Malay rights befitting its original ownership of Malaya.”<sup>517</sup> The nub of this chapter is contained within the last sentence: “The Japanese Occupation teaches us that we should reject all forms of colonisation, be it from the West or the East.”<sup>518</sup>

The underlying contradictions within the history curriculum have led to “an incoherent construction of the ideal Malaysian nation with Malayness at its base.”<sup>519</sup> As such, non-Malays have difficulty identifying with this historical representation.<sup>520</sup> More worryingly, this difficulty often translates into indifference, with many students having a dim view of history as a subject of study.<sup>521</sup> Deborah Yip, a 15-year-old Malaysian Chinese student, admitted disliking history studies. “This history is not about us,” she said, “it doesn’t include us.”<sup>522</sup> Thus, while the state endeavours to harness history in developing a shared national identity, the mono-racial interpretation is proving counteractive.

Paradoxically, this state of affairs has allowed counter-narratives to emerge. In the next segment, we examine how the Chinese political elite have adapted and leveraged Chinese war memory to develop a nationalist narrative. Selective memory-work is a delicate process; there is a fine line between reviving war memory and rehabilitating aspects deemed sufficiently appropriate for possible reinsertion into national historiography.

## Chinese Sites of Memory

Malaysian Chinese war memory has been subjected to multiple revisions which define and redefine the community’s place within the nation state, indicating a process of memory-work which “continually figures and refigures the past as a method for present purposes, particularly with contemporary society and cultural

<sup>517</sup> Ting, “The Battle Over Memory,” 50.

<sup>518</sup> Ramlah, *Sejarah Tingkatan 3*, 38.

<sup>519</sup> Manickam, “Textbooks and Nation Construction,” 87.

<sup>520</sup> Ting, “The Battle Over Memory,” 53.

<sup>521</sup> Khoo Kay Kim, “Recent Malaysian Historiography,” 260.

<sup>522</sup> Deborah Yip, private correspondence, March 25, 2011.

struggles.”<sup>523</sup> Evidence of such memory-work has been particularly conspicuous over the last few decades, with the refurbishment of the Penang Anti-War/War Memorial, the construction of the 9-1 Martyrs Memorial, the erection of the Monument to Malayan Heroes, and the emergence of published accounts of the war. The following exploration of these various sites of memory probe how Chinese war memory has evolved over time.

#### Penang Anti-War/War Memorial

This memorial was erected in 1946 by the Penang branch of the China Relief Fund. In the aftermath of the occupation, the remains of approximately 800 Chinese victims were excavated and reinterred here. The main structure is a 45-foot obelisk inscribed with the message “Penang Overseas Chinese war victims, compatriots and *nanqiao ji gong*.” The term *nanqiao ji gong* refers to Overseas Chinese who volunteered on the Burma Road supply route to southern China between 1937 and 1938. There is no mention of how the victims interred met their fate. Rather, prominence is given to describing the Luguo Bridge Incident of 1937 which sparked the Second Sino-Japanese War. Clearly, this memorial was intended to commemorate *tongbao* or Chinese compatriots.<sup>524</sup> In this final resting place, the victims’ remains were inscribed as symbolic representations of the Chinese fallen, not in Penang or even Malaya alone, but as martyrs in the war of resistance against Japan.

In 1951, during the Malayan Emergency, the symbolism of this memorial was repurposed. It was officially unveiled on Remembrance Day, with local Chinese community leaders rededicating the site as a Chinese Anti-War Memorial. This deemphasised its previous incarnation as a tribute to Overseas Chinese victims and martyrs. Why did the Chinese elite do so? It is likely that they were at pains to throw distance between the peace-loving segments of the community from the insurgents who were plaguing the territory. It is also plausible that this ceremony was choreographed to signal to the colonial government that the Chinese community was prepared to integrate into wider Malayan society.

After a lapse of 60 years, it was announced in October 2011 that this memorial site would be refurbished.<sup>525</sup> Surprisingly, the memorial’s trustees, in a press interview, again referred to the site as the ‘Penang Overseas Chinese Anti-Japanese War Memorial.’ It was further revealed that the restoration would include new additions to the site, among them a life-sized sculpture depicting *nanqiao ji*

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<sup>523</sup> Fujitani, White and Yoneyama, eds, *Perilous Memories*, 1-2.

<sup>524</sup> The term *tongbao* translates literally as ‘same womb.’

<sup>525</sup> Hafiz Marzuki, “RM400,000 Facelift for Penang Anti-Japanese War Memorial,” *The Star*, October 23, 2011.

*gong* pushing a truck up a slope along the Burma Road. (See: Figure 26.) On Remembrance Day that year, the renovated site was unveiled amidst much fanfare. The ceremony was attended by Chinese community leaders, opposition party officials and members of the public. There were no representatives from the ruling coalition government present. Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng, also Secretary-General of the opposition DAP, officiated at the proceedings, declaring the site as a “symbol of peace and harmony throughout Malaysia.”<sup>526</sup> No public outcry or objections were reported. Why was it ‘safe’ in 2011 to revert the war dead to Overseas Chinese martyrs? Perhaps the lack of reaction reflects the socio-political milieu of Penang; it is statistically a Chinese state and an opposition party stronghold. Or perhaps the rehabilitation of war memory was initiated with an eye to promoting tourism, especially to Chinese visitors from the mainland.<sup>527</sup>

In an interesting turn of events, a year later, the Penang branch of the National Front coalition government contributed towards further upgrades to the site. Was this an attempt to reach out to potential Chinese voters before the next election scheduled in six month’s time? In delivering the donation to the memorial’s trustees, the chairman of the Penang National Front expressed his hope that the memorial would teach younger generations about “the sacrifices of our elders and veterans.”<sup>528</sup> Implicit within this message was a reinterpretation of the war dead as Malayan/Malaysian patriots. The duality of the Penang war dead as Overseas Chinese martyrs and also national patriots epitomises the ambiguities of Chinese war memory.

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<sup>526</sup> Hafiz Marzuki, “New Additions Unveiled at War Memorial after RM400,000 Facelift,” *The Star*, November 12, 2011.

<sup>527</sup> China represents a substantial market for Malaysian tourism. Between 2010 and 2014, the number of Chinese visitors grew by an average of at least 8 percent annually. If we discount the fall of approximately 10 percent in 2014 due to the after-effects of the MH370 tragedy; average growth is 12 percent annually. Currently, China ranks among the top three country-of-origin visitors to Malaysia and contributes 0.4 percent of the country’s gross domestic product. See: “Facts and Figures,” Corporate Tourism Malaysia website; and See Kit Tang, “This country tops China’s favorite travel hotspots,” *CNBC*, April 22, 2014.

<sup>528</sup> For press reports on this donation, see: *New Straits Times*, “Penang BN Gives RM30,000 for War Memorial,” November 9, 2012; and Han Kar Kay, “New Look for War Memorial,” *The Star*, November 28, 2012.





Figure 25. Penang Anti-War/War Memorial, 2014.  
Source: CEphoto, Uwe Aranas / CC-BY-SA-3.0.

### 9-1 Martyrs Memorial

In November 2002, the remains of 18 MPAJA guerrillas were excavated from a mass grave at Sungai Tua, Batu Caves, in Selangor state. The victims are referred to as '9-1 martyrs' in local Chinese parlance, casualties of an ambush by a Japanese army battalion on 1 September 1942. A contingent of Chinese press, Chinese association members and Quek Jin Teck, secretary-general of the Malaysian Chinese Cultural Society, arrived at the site bearing 18 ceramic urns. These were adorned with lion heads as befitting the memorialisation of valiant warriors. The land on which the mass grave was located had been slated for development. As a result, the remains were to be reinterred.

However, there was no trace of human remains or any material remnants. In a symbolic gesture, handfuls of earth were gathered instead and placed inside the urns. These were placed onto hearses and ceremoniously driven to Nilai Memorial Park, a Chinese cemetery in Negeri Sembilan state which borders the outskirts of the capital. At Nilai, the urns were buried in a ceremony attended by a gathering of about 100 Chinese community leaders and politicians. The reason for the relocation, Deputy Minister Tan Chai Ho from the Ministry of Home Affairs explained, was "to let the younger generation know that the 18 martyrs were heroes. Their sacrifices showed they were patriots who fought for the country.

Such nationalistic attitude should be emulated.”<sup>529</sup> To that end, it was announced that a permanent memorial would also be erected and the site was named Peace Memorial Park.

A year later, in December 2003, the completed memorial was unveiled at a ceremony attended by press members, Chinese political and community leaders, veterans and relatives. Of the 100 former MPAJA and MCP veterans, many had returned from Hong Kong and China for the event. The alternative press presented the event as a commemoration of fallen heroes in the “Resist Japan-Defend Malaya War of Resistance.”<sup>530</sup> In borrowing the term ‘War of Resistance’ but prefacing it with ‘resist Japan-defend Malaya,’ the emphasis was clear: these were Malayan/Malaysian martyrs. Their sacrifice was not limited to the Second Sino-Japanese War cause; they were also Malaysian patriots. The public was reminded that MPAJA fighters had once been hunted as communist terrorists and that this same “Chinese resistance was aided and supported by the British and the Allies,” further, that “the resistance was actually quite multiethnic.”<sup>531</sup>

In the mainstream press, the event was reported as a nostalgic reunion of former resistance fighters.<sup>532</sup> There was no mention of the postwar communist insurrection or the deportation of communists during the Malayan Emergency. Instead, the visiting veterans were described as having ‘moved’ to China in 1948. What was clearly an event to commemorate MPAJA guerrillas was transmuted into a universal anti-war message, reminiscent of that propagated by Chinese leaders in 1951 at the Penang Anti-War Memorial. Donald Lim, a minister within the coalition government, was quoted as saying, “We are a peace-loving nation and the idea behind this memorial is more of an anti-war stance.” This statement is curious; what did the minister mean by ‘more of,’ as opposed to? Arguably, Lim’s statement belies the uneasiness of some Chinese political leaders in publicly acknowledging MPAJA guerrillas. By stating that the memorial reflected a yearning for continued peace and harmony, Lim neutralised the true motive behind the event. Regardless, the commemoration attracted little public attention, remaining a largely communal affair.

Almost a decade since its construction, there is still no signage to explain the significance of the memorial. A passing visitor was asked if he knew what this site represented. “I don’t know,” he shrugged, “I don’t read Chinese.” An elderly

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<sup>529</sup> Martin Liu, “Tribute to War Martyrs,” *Asiawind*, December 14, 2002.

<sup>530</sup> James Wong Wing On, “Remembering the Martyrs,” *Malaysiakini*, December 12, 2003.

<sup>531</sup> Wong Wing On, “War Museum to Commemorate Fallen Heroes,” *Malaysiakini*, December 5, 2003.

<sup>532</sup> New Straits Times, “Emotional trip for ex-members of anti-Japanese force,” December 8, 2003.

woman standing nearby overheard the conversation and volunteered, “It’s for resistance fighters killed during the war.” Did she know anything about their story? “I’m not sure,” she replied, “I think they were communists.” The polished stone slabs at the front of the memorial, staged in such a way as to suggest that they were meant to be etched with something – perhaps the names of the 18 who perished, perhaps the circumstances of their martyrdom – were devoid of engravings. From this researcher’s observation, the memorial appears to be an unfinished project. (See: Figure 27.)



Figure 26. 9-1 Martyrs Memorial, 2012.



### Monument to Malayan Heroes

A possible reason as to why the 9-1 Martyrs Memorial is incomplete lies in events which occurred after it was unveiled. In tandem with the commemoration of the 9-1 martyrs, a campaign was launched by the 'Working Committee for the Promotion of Patriotism' to raise funds for an anti-Japanese war museum and a monument to honour the "broad anti-fascist united front" comprising Allied soldiers and local resistance.<sup>533</sup> Ostensibly, this monument, to be sited directly opposing the 9-1 Martyrs Memorial, was to recognise Malayan heroes of all ethnicities. This time however, the campaign attracted a hailstorm of criticism.

The Information Minister, Zainuddin Madin, decried the plans as a "monument for communists" and called for its demolition.<sup>534</sup> This was followed by reports that Negeri Sembilan Chief Minister Mohammad Hassan had issued the instruction; though this was later retracted via a statement to the state Chinese Assembly Hall.<sup>535</sup> Opposition political leader Lim Kit Siang released an open letter deriding Zainuddin's allegation that all anti-Japanese fighters were communists.<sup>536</sup> In the furore, there were calls for Zainuddin to step down. A retired Malay army officer wrote to the *New Straits Times* broadsheet asking, "How do you justify building monuments to commemorate those who fought the Japanese when there is proof that a large number of them actually committed all kinds of atrocities against the people of this country under the communist banner?"<sup>537</sup>

Quek Jin Teck, who had been involved in developing the site, insisted that the memorial would honour all Malaysians regardless of whether they were Chinese, Indians or Malays. He lamented that "unfortunately, [the detractors] have wrongly lumped all Chinese together as communist." Professor Khoo Kay Kim, a Malaysian Chinese historian, joined the fray by commenting that "many anti-Japanese fighters were Kuomintang loyalists who opposed communism." Relatives of Kuomintang supporters were equally upset that this memorial would associate the nationalists with communists. T.H. Tan, whose grandparents were Kuomintang loyalists and killed by the communists for being traitors asked, "Our grandparents hated the communists, how can we, their children, now honour their killers?"<sup>538</sup>

This controversy reveals the complexities of Chinese war memory in Malaysia and elucidates how simplifying myths of Chinese resistance remain

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<sup>533</sup> Wong, "War Museum."

<sup>534</sup> Malaysiakini, "MB: Demolish 'communist' monument," December 20, 2006.

<sup>535</sup> Wong Wing On, "The 'Monumental' Debate," *Malaysiakini*, December 23, 2006.

<sup>536</sup> Lim Kit Siang, "Media Statement," *DAP Malaysia*, December 22, 2006.

<sup>537</sup> Mohd Idris Hassan, "This is definitely not appropriate," Letters, *New Straits Times*, December 28, 2006.

<sup>538</sup> Baradan Kuppusamy, "Malaysian Chinese Rage at Memorial's Communist Label," *South China Morning Post*, December 22, 2006.

prevalent. The term 'anti-Japanese resistance' conjures the MPAJA by default, and by extension the communists, and in a further irrational leap, the conflation of insurrectionists with Chinese. This debacle also highlights that communal commemorations, such as that at the Penang and 9-1 Martyrs memorials, are tolerated when they evoke a Chinese war past that is distinctly communal. It is only when attempts are made to insert the Chinese war past into the national narrative that Chinese war memory is perceived as threatening.

Despite the fracas, the new monument was unveiled officially in September 2007. Beneath the obelisk, the message "monument in memory of Malayan heroes in the resistant [sic] movement against Japanese invasion 1941-1945" is repeated in five languages – English, Malay, Tamil, Chinese and Japanese. (See: Figure 28.) This time however, the ceremony received less fanfare. About 350 people attended, comprising Chinese community leaders, veterans from Malaysia, Singapore and China, and a representative of the MCA. Curiously, Zhan Gujing, a political attaché from the Embassy of the PRC in Malaysia, led the commemoration proceedings.<sup>539</sup> There was no coverage in the mainstream press and if there were any dissenting voices, they were silent.

Today, these two monuments form the centrepiece of the Peace Memorial Gardens in Nilai Memorial Park. Despite exhortations from Chinese politicians that school trips should be organised so that the young can "learn about the sacrifices made by those who fought for the country," the site receives few public visitors.<sup>540</sup> It is not included on any publicised tourist itinerary and plans to build a museum on the grounds appear to have been postponed, if not abandoned. During a visit on *Qing Ming* in 2012, even though the cemetery was swarming with people, the site was eerily desolate. Few stopped to contemplate the 50-foot tall obelisk in their midst. Even though it is intended to honour heroes of the Japanese occupation, the memorial has failed to resonate with the wider Malaysian public, Chinese or otherwise.

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<sup>539</sup> Wong Wing On, "Controversial WWII monument unveiled," *Malaysiakini*, September 3, 2007, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/18015>.

<sup>540</sup> The Star, "Pay Tribute to War Heroes," August 24, 2009.



Figure 27. Monument in Memory of Malayan Heroes, 2012.

### Epic Stories, Patriots and Pretenders

The last few decades have seen a spate of published titles which revisits the nation's war past, including accounts memorialising Chinese war experience. To what may we attribute this fresh impetus in resurrecting war memory? It is likely that changing socio-political conditions were conducive, among them: the formal surrender of the MCP in 1989, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war in 1995, and the resignation of Mahathir in 2003 followed by a burst of civil liberalisation. Further, with each passing decade, the imminent departure of the war generation has been evermore acutely felt. As the war passes from living memory, there is growing incentive to record for posterity. In the preface to the 1984 bilingual volume *Malayan Chinese Resistance to Japan 1937-1945*, Chua Ser Koon writes that the hefty tome was published so "that we can learn from the bitter past."<sup>541</sup> The 1988 publication of *Rizhishiqi senzhou huazu mengnan shiliao*, sparked by the discovery of multiple mass graves, is espoused as a reminder to "contemporary society to be anti-war."<sup>542</sup> As the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war approached, two previously published texts on the MPAJA and the AJU were reissued.<sup>543</sup>

More works have been published in the new millennium. These are typically memoirs by former resistance guerrillas or new perspectives or (re)interpretations of the war past. Shan Ru Hong's memoir is dedicated to the resistance movement "which eventually drove the Japanese out and achieved independence for our country."<sup>544</sup> Lin Yan's account includes not only his exploits but also documents the "epic stories" of sacrifice by "unnamed revolutionary martyrs and veterans," among them non-Chinese guerrillas such as Abdul Manan, a MCP Malay cadre who was captured by the British authorities and hung at Pudu Jail. Despite moving to China, then Hong Kong, and now settled in Australia, Lin professes to an "insoluble bond with Malaya."<sup>545</sup> Wu Zhincao's memoir contains a section titled 'Japanese military imperialism is still burning' warning of the dangers of resurgent Japanese right-wing elements.<sup>546</sup> These memoirs present a similar

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<sup>541</sup> Shu and Chua, eds., *Malayan Chinese Resistance*, iii.

<sup>542</sup> Ng Hei Maw, "Preface," *Rizhishiqi*, 6.

<sup>543</sup> Singapore-Malaysia Overseas Chinese Friendship Association, *Malaiya renmin kangri jun* [Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army] (Hong Kong: Witness Publishing, 1992); and Chen Jian, *Malaiya huaren de kangri yundong* [Malayan Chinese People's Anti-Japanese Movement] (Hong Kong: Witness Publishing, 1992).

<sup>544</sup> Shan Ru Hong, *The War in the South: the Story of Negeri Sembilan's Guerillas* (Bangkok: Mental Health Publishing, 2003), 10.

<sup>545</sup> Lin Yan, *Rainbow: An Epic Story of Heroic Fighters for Independence* (Labis: Huai Lie Enterprise, 2013).

<sup>546</sup> Wu Zhichao, *Riben de qinlue zhanzheng yu wo: yi ge lao bao ren de hui yi lu* [Japan's War of Aggression and I: Memoir of an Old Journalist] (Kuala Lumpur: Selangor and Kuala Lumpur Chinese Assembly, 2006.)

narrative: that the resistance was multi-ethnic in composition and motivated by nationalist fervour, and is unified in its view of the the insurrectionists as patriots.

In 2004, Agnes Khoo, a Malaysian Chinese academic currently at Leeds University, published an oral history on women in the Malayan anti-colonial struggle, as a result of ethnographic fieldwork over five years at the 'peace' and 'friendship' villages of southern Thailand which serve as safe havens for exiled communists. While describing herself as belonging to the "apolitical generation of the 1980s," she nevertheless felt compelled to uncover "the silenced and severely censured" history of the insurrection movement. This desire emerged out of having endured years of rote-learning "dull, lifeless official history" for the "purpose of passing exams" which she felt "were [not] even remotely related to me." The stories of these women, both Chinese and non-Chinese, not only made history "come to life" for her, but she realised that their experiences "formed a central part of my country's history."<sup>547</sup> The resulting collection of female voices reveals that the resistance movement was influential on multiple social fronts. It not only schooled a generation of colonised subjects in political activism, it also introduced gender equality ideals.

Another academic treatise, *Rehearsal for War*, reinserts the resistance movement into Malaysian historiography. The MCP guerrillas are portrayed as nationalists whose primary objective of freedom from colonial rule was diverted by the Japanese occupation. The postwar resumption of the struggle, culminating in the Emergency, is thus presented as an inevitable conflict.<sup>548</sup> Meanwhile, *Patriots & Pretenders* is promoted as a "people's history" and covers the broad swathe of political activism, from communism to trade unionism, which emerged after the war. Readers are exhorted to contemplate who were the "true patriots" who fought for liberation and who were the "pretenders who could accept compromised independence under the tutelage of their colonial masters and under Emergency conditions."<sup>549</sup> This monograph pays tribute to "the contributions of the patriotic class forces in all the ethnic communities to independence and nation-building."<sup>550</sup> Thus, it repositions what is customarily perceived as an ethnically-derived contest as a class struggle.

Efforts to rehabilitate more nuanced and complex versions of the war past have led some, like James Wong, to specifically eschew a Chinese-centric representation of the resistance. His published collection of interviews with exiled-

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<sup>547</sup> Khoo, "Introduction," *Life as the River Flows*.

<sup>548</sup> Ban and Yap, *Rehearsal for War*.

<sup>549</sup> Mohd Nasir Hashim, Foreword to *Patriots & Pretenders: The Malayan Peoples' Independence Struggle*, by Kua Kia Soong (Petaling Jaya: Suaram Komunikasi, 2011), x.

<sup>550</sup> Kua, *Patriots & Pretenders*, 2.



MCP members is confined to its Malay leaders, among them Abdullah CD, Rashid Maidin and Abu Samah.<sup>551</sup> Wong, a former opposition member of parliament and current columnist with the alternative news portal *Malaysiakini*, actively champions the inclusion of MCP and other left-leaning activists within the country's national historiography.<sup>552</sup> That their histories are "taboo," according to Wong, allows for UMNO Malay elites to usurp the mantle of nationalists for themselves. In contrast to those "true nationalists," he derides the present coalition government as "neo-colonial agents" and "quislings."<sup>553</sup>

Why have these counter-narratives failed to substantially engage the public imagination? Firstly, most of these titles, especially memoirs written by Chinese authors, are not widely distributed.<sup>554</sup> Secondly, because many of these authors are of Chinese ethnicity, the narratives are perceived to be communal in nature. Thirdly, the audience for such counter-narratives tends to hail primarily from the urban, middle class; that is, they are drawn from the same pool that are more inclined towards civic activism and who already display a questioning attitude towards the government. For the wider masses, the "ethnic card" remains a potent tool towards inciting division.<sup>555</sup> And because of the conflation of history with politics, contests over national history tend to be filtered through the lens of interracial relations. Thus, alternative – albeit more inclusive – historical narratives are perceived as challenging to the dominant narrative and therefore potentially subversive, unpatriotic or even racist. Consequently, the official version of history continues to dominate general public consciousness.

Having compared the divergent narratives promoted by state-sponsored sites of memory with that perpetuated by the Chinese communal elite, as well as recent published works which deviate from official narratives, do these competing narratives influence contemporary Malaysian Chinese' perceptions of the war past? Does war memory resonate with those who are at least one or two generations removed? We explore these questions in the following segment.

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<sup>551</sup> Wong, *From Pacific War to Merdeka*.

<sup>552</sup> See articles and blog entries by James Wong Wing On: "Malaysia never defeated the communists," *Malaysiakini*, March 1, 2002; "History must also be fair to non-Umno Malays," Clare Street blog, July 20, 2006; and "A Merdeka salute to martyr S.A. Ganapathy!," 29 August 2006.

<sup>553</sup> James Wong Wing On, interview by author, June 3, 2011.

<sup>554</sup> A search for these titles at popular local bookshops was unsuccessful. Only an abridged Malay language version of *Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army*, originally published by Hong Kong publisher Witness Publishing, was available from MPH bookstore.

<sup>555</sup> Alasdair Bowie, "Civil Society and Democratization in Malaysia," in *Growth & Governance in Asia*, ed. Yoichiro Sato (Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies), 198-199.

## Focus Groups

Since this research began in 2009, informal polling was conducted with Malaysian Chinese peers, relatives, friends and acquaintances to ascertain interest in and knowledge of the Japanese occupation. Of the 40 or so individuals, aged between 35 and 50, polled in this manner, none had heard of the term *sook ching*. Given this surprising finding, focus group sessions were conducted to delve into the relevance and resonance of this historical epoch to the postwar set in a more structured manner. Two sessions were convened; the first in Kuala Lumpur in March 2012, the second in London in May 2012. Participants in the first session comprised primarily of peers and acquaintances. Although 10 participants were expected, only six attended. As this sample size was small, the decision was made to repeat the exercise. For the second session, a request for Malaysian Chinese volunteers was forwarded to the administrator of a Malaysian students association at a higher education institution in London. Only four participants took part in the second session. Among the participants, there were seven women and three men with a median age of 33 years. (See: Figure 29 for demographics.) Among the participants, there were four students, a lawyer, a mathematician, two sales personnel and two employed in management positions. As such, they are representative of the typical middle-class, urban Malaysian Chinese. Although the final sample size was small, the outcomes of the sessions offered possible insights into contemporary Malaysian Chinese perspectives about the war past.

The procedure for these sessions was informed by focus group methodology developed by sociologist Jenny Kitzinger.<sup>556</sup> The participants were presented with a selection of terms relating to the Japanese occupation. These were read aloud but their significance or meaning was not clarified beforehand. Participants were advised that there was no right or wrong answer, and were asked to share whatever thoughts sprang to mind through a free-association exercise. They were also encouraged to discuss and debate freely. The sessions were structured to allow the participants to highlight issues that were important to them, to discuss among themselves, and to enable the facilitator to observe group intercommunication and behaviours. These sessions were recorded on film to allow for the transcribing of simultaneous responses. The discussions were conducted in the English language, though occasionally some participants also used Malay or Chinese word substitutions to emphasise a point.

When shown the term ‘Yamashita,’ few participants from either session reacted. One participant ventured a guess, “Japanese, right?” Another asked: “A

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<sup>556</sup> Jenny Kitzinger, “Qualitative Research: Introducing Focus Groups,” *BMJ* 311 (1995): 299-302.

general, known as the ‘tiger’ or something like that?” None of the respondents raised the Japanese occupation as a follow-on response. In both sessions, the facilitator was also asked to clarify further. When told that Yamashita had led the invasion of Malaya, one participant opined that the “Japanese had been very cruel” and had even “bayoneted babies.” In the first session, this led to general statements about the hardships endured during the war. One participant ventured that “only the Chinese suffered.” Several within the group then described atrocities they had heard about. However, these statements were couched in general terms; none indicated that family members had direct experience of Japanese ill-treatment. When shown the word ‘*sook ching*,’ none of the participants recognised it. One person responded with “I’ve never heard of this word.” Another asked, “Is that a girl’s name?” When it was explained that *sook ching* refers to a series of Chinese massacres, the participants in both sessions appeared in part incredulous, in part ambivalent. This term elicited questions but surprisingly little dialogue.

The focus group participants were also issued a questionnaire. They were asked to rate how knowledgeable they thought they were on the history of the occupation on a scale of 1 being ‘not at all’ to 10 being ‘very knowledgeable.’ Seven rated themselves between 5 and 6, that is, ‘somewhat knowledgeable,’ while two rated themselves a low 2. Only one participant scored himself 10; this was also the same individual who believed that only the Chinese had suffered during the occupation. In another question on how important they thought it was to know the history of the occupation, seven chose between 5 and 6, that is, ‘somewhat important,’ while three chose ratings above 8, that is, towards the higher end of ‘very important.’ When asked to identify their main source of information about the Japanese occupation, six out of 10 cited their secondary school history textbooks, and four indicated their parents and/or relatives. This latter result confirms that their families did not discuss the war past.

The display of general ambivalence among the participants towards their community and the nation’s past is compounded by a lack of curiosity. Few had engaged in any self-initiated study on the topic. This is perhaps unsurprising; Malaysians are predisposed to “reading reluctance” with the average Malaysian reading between two to eight books a year.<sup>557</sup> This apparent combination of ambivalence and lack of curiosity was emphasised a month later, when one of the participants sent the following email:

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<sup>557</sup> See: S. Inderjit, “Reading Trends and Improving Reading Skills among Students in Malaysia,” *International Journal of Research In Social Sciences* 3,5 (2014): 70-81; and Ambigapathy Pandian, “Literacy in Postcolonial Malaysia,” *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 40, 5 (1997): 402-404. Also: “Booking into Reading Habit,” *New Straits Times*, March 2, 2008; and “Malaysians Reading More, But Still Not Enough,” *Malaysian Digest*, July 20, 2011.

Gender	Age	Written and Spoken Languages			Chinese Dialect (s)	Chinese Education	Education	Lived/ Studied Abroad	Registered Voter	Voted in Election	Political Party Member
F	36	Chinese	Malay	English	Cantonese	Yes	Tertiary	No	Yes	Yes	No
F	49		Malay	English	Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese	No	Postgrad	USA, UK	Yes	Yes	No
M	40		Malay	English	Cantonese	No	Tertiary	No	No	No	No
M	40	Chinese	Malay	English	Cantonese	Yes	Tertiary	Australia	Yes	No	No
F	38	Chinese	Malay	English	Cantonese	Yes	Secondary	No	Yes	Yes	No
F	38		Malay	English	N/A	No	Postgrad	UK	Yes	No	No
F	20	Chinese	Malay	English	Hokkien	Yes	Tertiary	UK	N/A	N/A	No
M	20	Chinese	Malay	English	Foochow, Cantonese	Yes	Tertiary	UK	N/A	N/A	No
F	20	Chinese	Malay	English	Hokkien, Hakka, Teochew	Yes	Tertiary	UK	N/A	N/A	No
F	25		Malay	English	Cantonese	No	Tertiary	UK	No	No	No

Figure 28. Focus groups demographics.

History Channel documentary on Japanese in Malaya. I am actually watching it now on telly. The Rising Sun over Malaya. Interviews with the survivors [are] so sad. To hear them tell how their families are murdered before their eyes. This docu is quite disturbing. Never knew that Malaya was known as Malai. We never learnt that in school. So difficult to watch this but so hard to change the channel at the same time.<sup>558</sup>

This was followed by another email the next day, including an online link to the documentary *Sook Ching Massacre*:

Here's the docu on the sook ching massacre from the History Channel. So far I have only watched *The Rising Sun over Malaya* and not the *Sook Ching Massacre*. Was never something real to me until I watched the program. Am sure there are plenty of horror stories. Do I want to know them? I don't think so.<sup>559</sup>

What stood out from the focus group discussions was not the lack of knowledge, or even ambivalence, about the war past, but how history has become a politically-charged issue. In both sessions, the discussion drifted towards how national history, as propounded within history textbooks, was “one-sided” or “biased.” The participants appeared eager to point to their lack of knowledge as evidence of marginalisation of minority histories from the text. Many shared the view that Malaysian history education had little to with learning, and everything to do with putting non-Malays in their place. This led to discussions on how the state of political affairs in Malaysia was inherently racist. One participant even used the term ‘apartheid.’

In the first session, the participants also raised the topic of the government's current program of ‘1Malaysia’ and how this initiative encouraged Chinese to perceive themselves as Malaysian first, rather than Chinese. Most agreed that the program represented politically-motivated whitewashing and was insincere. A debate ensued as to whether ‘Malaysian Chinese’ or ‘Chinese Malaysian’ was the more appropriate term, with one participant throwing her hands in the air and declaring, “I’m confused!” Despite displaying intense political opinions, all the participants professed disgust for politics. When asked if any were members of a political party, one participant said, “Hell, no!” Another strenuously objected to the term ‘*mahua*’ as shorthand for Malaysian Chinese, citing that this conjured association with the MCA who had “sold out the Chinese.”

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<sup>558</sup> Wang Huey Yi, personal correspondence, April 12, 2012.

<sup>559</sup> Wang Huey Yi, personal correspondence, April 13, 2012.

In the second session conducted in London, the discussion digressed towards whether the participants felt more Malaysian or Chinese while abroad. “When I’m away, I feel more Malaysian,” said one, “When I’m at home, I’m more Chinese. I mean, they are always telling us we’re Chinese, right?” In both sessions, discussions about history inadvertently strayed into an exchange about the duality of Malaysian Chinese identities. Their acute sense of being a minority Other and their perception of history as a political tool, it seemed, had resulted in general apathy towards the historical past. Most appeared more concerned with the present and wary about where the future might lead.

## Chinese War Memory: Which Chinese?

In demonstrating that there are a plethora of Malaysian Chinese attitudes towards the war past, what does it really mean when one speaks of Chinese war memory in Malaysia? The absolutism conjured by the term ‘Chinese community’ can be misleading because the collective is not homogenous but is distinguished through multiple, and sometimes overlapping, subgroups. At the broadest level, there are *fangyanqun* or dialect groupings, for example Hokkien, Cantonese or Hainanese Chinese. There are political groupings; the most prominent being the MCA and DAP.<sup>560</sup> There are national-level communal associations such as the *Huazong* (Federation of Chinese Associations Malaysia), the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ACCCIM) and the *Dong Jiao Zong* (United Chinese Schools Committee of Malaysia). At the state-level, there are *Huatang* (Chinese assemblies), as well as clan associations based on kinship, locality or dialect, such as the *Kwantung Hui Kuan* (Guangdong Clan Association) in Perak and *Tay Koon Oh Kongs*i (Tay Koon Oh Clan) in Penang, or by cultural heritage such as the *Peranakan* (descendants of Straits Chinese).<sup>561</sup> In total, there are more than 7,000 Chinese communal organisations in Malaysia.<sup>562</sup>

Among these various groups and subgroups, there is a socially and politically-prominent minority. While this group represents only 10 percent of the total, they form the core of an influential urban elite class. They are usually English- or Malay-educated, civic rather than communally-minded, and they identify most

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<sup>560</sup> The DAP is non-communal and membership is open to all races, though its members are predominantly Chinese.

<sup>561</sup> For a comprehensive insight on multiple Malaysian Chinese subgroups, see: Tan Chee Beng, “Socio-Cultural Diversities and Identities,” 37-70.

<sup>562</sup> Rita Sim, *Unmistakably Chinese, Genuinely Malaysian* (Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Strategic Engagement, 2012), 18-19.

closely with the aspirations of Malaysian nationhood.<sup>563</sup> In many respects, this class is not dissimilar to the 'King's Chinese' of the colonial years, established settlers who performed the intermediary task of social and political brokers between the British administration and their fellow Chinese.<sup>564</sup> The MCA's founder and first president, Tan Cheng Lock, hailed from this group. By forming an alliance with UMNO, MCA ensured that Chinese interests were represented at the negotiations for independence from the British. However, while the party continues its power-sharing role within the coalition government, it has begun to lose its relevance as the middleman between the Malay elite and the Chinese community at large. Further, its stature as defender of Chinese interests (its monthly newsletter is titled *The Guardian*) has been eroded by popular conceptions of the MCA as the 'running dog' of UMNO.<sup>565</sup> MCA's tenuous position is reflected in its need to remain relevant to its Chinese constituents while maintaining solidarity with the coalition government. Consequently, the party has traditionally avoided highlighting aspects of Chinese war memory which may prove problematic. At recent commemoration activities, party representatives could be seen downplaying the link between the resistance movement and communism, while emphasising Chinese sacrifice towards independence.<sup>566</sup>

The community's 'heartland' for active commemoration and perpetuation of Chinese war memory lies in Chinese civic networks which are rooted in traditional associations. For example, the Rebuilt Memorial to Malayan Victims at the Hokkien cemetery in Kuala Lumpur was a collaborative effort by Selangor and Federal Territory Hainan Association, Federation of Hokkien Associations of Malaysia, Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, Malaysian Chinese Cultural Society and the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall. Such organisations actively sponsor the propagation of Chinese perspectives on the occupation. As an example, the account of Chinese war experience in Negeri Sembilan was produced by that state's Chinese Assembly Hall, while *Malaiya kangri shengli 60 nian* (Malayan Anti-

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<sup>563</sup> Sim, *Unmistakably Chinese*, 34-37.

<sup>564</sup> On the historical and socio-cultural background of this intermediary class, see: J.R. Clammer, *The Ambiguity of Identity: Ethnicity Maintenance and Change among the Straits Chinese Community in Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1979); and Patricia Ann Hardwick, "Neither Fish nor Fowl: Constructing Peranakan Identity in Colonial and Post-Colonial Singapore," *Folklore Forum* 38,1 (2008): 36-55.

<sup>565</sup> Early MCA leaders defended Chinese right to citizenship in independent Malaya and negotiated a review of Malay privileges 15 years after independence. However, after the racial riots of 1969, MCA adopted a more conciliatory tone. See: Heng Pek Koon, "Chinese Responses to Malay Hegemony," *Southeast Asian Studies* 34, 3 (1996): 32-55.

<sup>566</sup> MCA, "Nilai Monument – Learn the difference between resistance against Japanese and CPM," January 19, 2007.

Japanese Victory 60 Years) was written using records of the *Jinian ri ju shiqi xunnan tongbao gong wei hui sanji* (Working Committee for Remembrance of the Martyrs of the Japanese Occupation).<sup>567</sup> Wu Zhichao's memoir *Riben de qinlue zhanzheng yu wo* (Japan's War of Aggression and I) in 2006, and the reprint of *Dazhan yu nan qiao* (Second World War and the South Seas Overseas Chinese) in 2007, were published by the Selangor and Kuala Lumpur Chinese Assembly Hall.<sup>568</sup> Chen Chong's memoir *Tongnian de shizi gang* (Cross Harbour Childhood) was published by the Kluang Chinese Association in 2008.

The hand of eminent communal elites can be seen in recent efforts to 'nationalise' Chinese war memory. The construction of the 9-1 Martyrs Memorial was coordinated by the Anti-Japanese Martyr Memorial Committee, led by the prominent Chinese activist Quek Jin Teck, who also headed the committee which successfully brought the Batang Kali massacre victims' appeals before British courts. According to his son, Quek was an avid self-taught historian who felt "strongly against any marginalisation or removal of Malayan Chinese contribution toward nation building."<sup>569</sup> The task of raising funds for the 9-1 memorial fell to the Working Committee for the Promotion of Patriotism, chaired by philanthropist and social activist Tan Kai Hee. He was once Secretary-General of the now-defunct Labour Party of Malaya during the Fifties, and was imprisoned for his left-leaning views. Apart from his prominent position in the ACCCIM, Tan is also a strong proponent for Sino-Malaysia relations. He is founder of the Malaysia-China Friendship Association, advisor to the Yunnan Provincial Government Advisory Mission for Economic and Social Development, Honorary President of the Sino-Malaysia Chambers of Commerce and council member of the Malaysia-China Business Council. Collectively, these community organisations and communal elites represent the vanguard in perpetuating Chinese war memory in Malaysia. Their approach emphasises flexibility and duality, where a war past that conjures historical links with China is not incongruous with a national anti-colonial narrative. Viewed in this light, the participation of PRC representatives at local Chinese war commemoration events is not unusual.

Indeed, there has been a notable shift towards rehabilitating war memory and invoking shared war experiences with the mainland. In 2005, for example, a

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<sup>567</sup> Loke Pooi Choon, *Malaiya kangri shengli 60 nian* [Malayan Anti-Japanese Victory 60 Years] (Kuala Lumpur: LUJEC, 2006).

<sup>568</sup> China Relief Fund, *Dazhan yu nan qiao* [Second World War and the South Seas Overseas Chinese] (Kuala Lumpur: Selangor-Kuala Lumpur Chinese Assembly Hall), 2007.

<sup>569</sup> Quek Ngee Meng, "Demise of the Action Committee Condemning the Batang Kali Massacre Chairman, Quek Jin Teck," Condemning Batang Kali Massacre blog, January 22, 2010.



ceremony was organised by *Huazong* and held at the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall in Kuala Lumpur. This event commemorated the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of victory by the 'Resist Japan, Defend Malaya' movement in defence of the Malaysian *tanahair* (homeland). (See: Figure 30.) Despite the nod towards localised war memory, there was, in some respects, a distinctly China-centric tone to the proceedings. In his speech, the Chinese Ambassador Wang Chungui recounted how Japanese militarists had invaded China and extended their "claws into Malaya."<sup>570</sup> While praising the resistance movement in Malaya, Wang did not neglect to acknowledge Malayan Overseas Chinese contribution to the War of Resistance on the mainland. Entertainment was provided by the Shanghai Huangpu Troupe which recited a poem, 'Remembering the Blood and Tears.' A resolution was also passed to condemn Japan for its failure in acknowledging war guilt, continued visits by successive Japanese premiers to Yasukuni Shrine, and the distortion of history within Japanese textbooks. Further, the assembly called upon the Malaysian government to promote "patriotic education to the younger generation" and to be vigilant against the rise of Japanese militarism.<sup>571</sup> While local media representatives appear to have been absent, Chinese media included the event within its reportage on global Chinese commemorations of the War of Resistance.<sup>572</sup>

More recently in 2014, the Malaysian Association of China Students Alumni organised a touring photo exhibition in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan. According to Ma Huang Bin, president of the alumni association, the aim of the exhibition was to educate Malaysian youth about the history of the Japanese occupation. The exhibits on display were collated from sources in China, Taiwan and the Sun Yat Sen Memorial Hall in Penang. The launch was timed to coincide with the anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre. This, Ma suggested, was befitting as China and Malaysia shared "common experiences" of the war. Ma stressed the importance of the exhibition's anti-war message, "especially when there is growing current racial and religious intolerance" in Malaysia.<sup>573</sup> It is curious as to how a one-sided exhibition focussing on Chinese war experiences promotes interracial

<sup>570</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China to Malaysia, "*Malaixiya hua tuan jinian kangri wei ma shengli 60 zhounian*" [60th Anniversary of Malaysian Chinese Community Resist Japan-Defend Malaya Victory Commemoration], September 29, 2005.

<sup>571</sup> Sina News, "*Malaixiya huaren jinian kangri wei ma shengli 60 zhounian*" [60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Malaysian Chinese Commemoration of Resist Japan Defend Malaya Victory], September 28, 2005.

<sup>572</sup> Liu Yuan, "*Shijie gedi huaren huaqiao jinian kangzhan shengli 60 zhounian*" [Worldwide Chinese and Overseas Chinese to Commemorate Victory of War of Resistance on 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary], *Xinhua News*, August 15, 2005.

<sup>573</sup> Sin Chew, "*Jinian shengli 69 zhounian-kangri tupian zhan xia yue juxing*" [Commemorating 69<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Victory of Anti-Japanese resistance exhibition to be held next month], November 19, 2014.

harmony. Was this exhibition merely a reminder of the general ills of war, or was it meant to legitimise Chinese sacrifice within the context of Malayan resistance?

As we have seen, contestations of war memory in Malaysia are inherently complex. Apart from obvious divergences between a Malay-centric national narrative and minority counter-narratives, there are differing motivations behind war remembrance within the Chinese community itself. Among survivors and relatives of victims, war memory evokes personal tragedies and invokes cultural injunctions to remember the dead. For many others who survived the war, the past is best left in the past. Hence, a cultivated culture of silence appears to have led to ignorance and ambivalence among many of the postwar generations. Chinese war memory holds little conscious resonance for them. Its absence is symbolic, rather than keenly felt, where marginalisation of the Chinese war past within national historiography is perceived as symptomatic of a wider discourse on socio-political discrimination. Arguably, the burden of Chinese war memory, even when unarticulated, is experienced subliminally; it serves to fix the Chinese in their place as a separate Other. As a result, few are incentivised to discover the war past. This indifference is reflective of a wider apathy towards national history in general.

And yet, certain aspects of Chinese war memory have their use-value. For communal elites and community organisations, the narrative of Chinese sacrifice and resistance can be adapted to support the claim of Chinese contribution towards Malaysian independence, and hence, of legitimacy and belonging. Further, stoking memory of Chinese war resistance resurrects historical links with China. The Malaysian government appears to recognise the potential benefits of the 'resinicisation' of Chinese war memory to bilateral relations with the PRC. It was noted for example that the exhibition highlighted earlier was jointly launched by Tan Kai Hee, Secretary-General of the Malaysia-China Friendship Association, and Wee Ka Siong, a minister from the Prime Minister's Department. Four months prior, the Malaysian premier had embarked on an official six-day tour of China, during which he met President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang and the National People's Congress chairman Zhang Dejiang.<sup>574</sup> Among the outcomes of this visit was the upgrading of relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership. Will this pivot towards China, if it endures, gradually lead to recognition of Chinese participation in the country's anti-colonial struggle? While this remains to be seen, and as Sino-Malaysia ties strengthen, all signs point to a softening of the state's stance. In the meantime, the Malaysian Chinese remain largely a people with an ambiguous past. In the next chapter, we examine how this has shaped Malaysian Chinese negotiations between histories and identities.

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<sup>574</sup> Errol Oh and Tho Xin Yi, "Najib hails meaningful and successful China visit," *The Star*, June 2, 2014.



Figure 29. Commemoration of the 60th anniversary victory.

Clockwise: Wang Chungui, PRC Ambassador to Malaysia; performance by the Shanghai Huangpu Troupe; Ong Tee Keat, MCA deputy president (left) and Ambassador Wang (right). Source: Xinhuanet.

## Chapter 5

### Between Histories and Identities

When Ho Foong Sien shared her war experiences with her children and grandchildren, she told them, “We came to Malaya and now we have become Malaysian citizens.” Her statement underscores how remembrance and representation of the war past have become interwoven with issues of identity. Unsurprisingly, the discourse on history and its capacity to shape national identity has become a conspicuous preoccupation of local academe, the state and the public at large. At stake are issues of how *sejarah awam* or ‘public history’ is taught and propagated, (re)presented in museums and heritage sites, and harnessed to “foster a spirit of love for the country.”<sup>575</sup> At the core of this undertaking is the challenge to define Malaysian identity; a loaded term that has become entangled with the overlapping issues of citizenship rights, racial status, social unity and more recently, religious diversity. The multiethnic character of Malaysian society continues to be perceived as a “time bomb” inherited from the colonial past.<sup>576</sup> As such, the making of Malaysians out of the country’s multiracial constituents has been the august mission of the state towards sealing this potential fault line. To promote national unity, the state’s current 1Malaysia program aims to forge a nation whereby “every Malaysian perceives himself or herself as Malaysian first and by race, religion, geographical region or socio-economic background second.”<sup>577</sup> To achieve this, Prime Minister Najib Razak outlined that gradual shifts would be required, from “tolerance to total acceptance and eventually to celebrate diversity.”<sup>578</sup>

The emphasis on inculcating a Malaysian identity, especially among the ethnic Chinese, has become more salient in light of China’s increasing influence within the region. This is in part a result of China’s soft power policies which aim to “instil a sense of unity among Chinese nationals domestically and among the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia” by deploying culture as a diplomatic tool with

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<sup>575</sup> Kurniawati Kamarudin, “*Meletakkan Sejarah Sebagai Asas Dasar Awam Negara*” [Placing History as the Foundation for National Public Policy], *Bernama*, December 16, 2013.

<sup>576</sup> David Camroux, “State Responses to Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia: Accommodation, Co-Option, and Confrontation,” *Asian Survey* 36, 9 (1996): 853.

<sup>577</sup> PEMANDU, *Government Transformation Program*, (Kuala Lumpur: Prime Minister’s Department, 2010), 11.

<sup>578</sup> The Economist, “Najib Razak: In his own words,” March 20, 2010. Despite the program’s professed intention, there is scepticism among Malaysians. See: Malaysian Civil Liberties Movement, “I Would Say That The 1Malaysia Initiative Is” Survey, [December 26, 2010 - Current].

which “to exaggerate kin, ethnicity and national bonds between the Motherland and the diaspora.”<sup>579</sup> China’s *Huaqiao shiwu* (Overseas Chinese Affairs Office) promotes “long distance nationalism” globally by encouraging “dual anchored identity” and advocating “dual allegiance.”<sup>580</sup>

Official discourse in China celebrates the Overseas Chinese as ethnic and cultural extensions of the Chinese nation-state and as co-drivers of China’s modernisation.<sup>581</sup> Some cynics view this factoring of China’s ‘lost children’ abroad into China’s development objectives as a thinly-veiled attempt at exploiting the Overseas Chinese for capitalist knowledge and self-interest.<sup>582</sup> Given the cultural, economic and political underpinnings of China’s outreach program, the result is that any discussion regards Malaysian Chinese identity inevitably invokes the perception of the Overseas Chinese as imaginary relations to their mainland brethren. This has sparked fears of cultural resinicisation and the awakening of latent Chinese ethnonationalism in Southeast Asian nations with sizeable Chinese minorities.<sup>583</sup> However, circumscribing Malaysian Chinese identity in such simplistic terms obscures the pluralities of Chinese identities adapted to local socio-political contexts and the wider forces of Chinese transnationalism.<sup>584</sup>

This chapter explores the complexities embedded within the process of contemporary Malaysian Chinese identity construction, arguing that the past – in the form of historical and ancestral legacies – continues to exert its influence, no matter how faint it may be. China’s ascendancy complicates this process further. For some, China’s ubiquitous influence has encouraged reassessment of their sense of self and worth to the nation, sharpening their disgruntlement at feeling consistently like second-class Malaysian citizens.<sup>585</sup> For others, China’s looming shadow portends potential changes for the minority Chinese collective. “We will feel much safer,” Jadryn Loo, a Malaysian Chinese, told Jonathan Kent of the BBC News, “And we will feel much [more] important when China emerges as a

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<sup>579</sup> Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt, “China’s Soft Power Diplomacy in Southeast Asia,” *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 26 (2008), 41-42.

<sup>580</sup> James Jiann Hua To, “Hand-in-Hand, Heart-to-Heart: Qiaowu and the Overseas Chinese,” (PhD diss., University of Canterbury, 2009), 9.

<sup>581</sup> Barabantseva, *Overseas Chinese*, 99-107.

<sup>582</sup> Ien Ang, “No Longer Chinese? Residual Chineseness after the Rise of China,” in *Diasporic Chineseness after the Rise of China*, eds. Julia Kuehn, Kam Louie and David M. Pomfret, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 29.

<sup>583</sup> Lee Kam Hing, “Seeking Identity in Wawasan 2020.”

<sup>584</sup> See: Wang Gungwu, “The Study of Chinese Identities in Southeast Asia;” Charles Hirschman, “Chinese Identities in Southeast Asia: Alternative Perspectives;” and Yow Cheun Hoe, “Weakening Ties with the Ancestral Homeland in China: The Case Studies of Contemporary Singapore and Malaysian Chinese,” *Modern Asian Studies* 39, 3 (2005): 559-597.

<sup>585</sup> Jennifer Pak, “Will China’s rise shape Malaysian Chinese community?,” *BBC News*, December 30, 2011.

superpower.”<sup>586</sup> At face value, statements such as Loo’s suggest belligerence. Another reading intimates hope that the Malaysian state will acknowledge the potential value of the ethnic Chinese in bilateral relations. Such wishful aspirations however are not without risks; closer ties potentially expose the Chinese minority to resentment and spill-over effects resulting from competition with the Chinese economy.<sup>587</sup> In fact, to avert aspersions and debunk notions that ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia are disloyal when they invest in or conduct business with China, Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew felt it necessary to warn Southeast Asian Chinese that “our fundamental loyalties are to our home country, not to China.”<sup>588</sup> China’s government too is sensitive to underlying and historical interracial antagonism in the region. Its official foreign policy is choreographed to project benevolent ascendancy and to emphasise the benefits of ethnic and cultural affiliations.<sup>589</sup> In 2009, prior to an official state visit by the Malaysian premier to China, Ambassador Liu Jian characterised the Malaysian Chinese as a “unique bridge” between the two nations.<sup>590</sup>

In the following sections, we investigate how Malaysian Chinese have come to terms with a multiplicity of self-identifications and examine the efficacy of Malaysian national history and the concept of *bangsa Malaysia* (Malaysian race) in fostering a sense of common national identity. We also explore how some individuals have been motivated to trace their familial history as a means of seeking identification; some, confronted with ever-present reminders of a looming China, have been made aware of their Chineseness; while others have chosen to downplay their ethnicity and embrace their Malaysianness.

## Making Malaysian Chinese

Chinese diaspora identity is a complex matrix of overlapping factors; nationalism, communalism, culture and class all exert their influence.<sup>591</sup> Historian Fujio Hara’s study, based on Chinese socio-political practices and activities in Malaya between 1945 and 1957, concludes that the Chinese converted from a “China-oriented

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<sup>586</sup> Jonathan Kent, “Chinese Diaspora: Malaysia,” *BBC News*, 3 March 2005.

<sup>587</sup> Schmidt, “China’s Soft Power,” 44-45; and Michael Jacobsen, “Living in the Shadow of Mainland China: On Delineating Social and Political Constraints among Southeast Asian Chinese Entrepreneurs,” *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 25 (2007): 31.

<sup>588</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, “The Loyalty of Overseas Chinese Belongs Overseas,” *New York Times*, November 23, 1993.

<sup>589</sup> David L. Shambaugh, “China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order,” *International Security* 29, 3 (Winter 2004/05): 64-99.

<sup>590</sup> Sin Chew, “Chinese Malaysians a Valuable Asset,” May 21, 2009.

<sup>591</sup> Wang Gungwu, “The Study of Chinese Identities,” 1-22;

identity consciousness” to a “Malaysian identity consciousness” within that timeframe.<sup>592</sup> Arguably, this narrow modelling of identity provides a limited perspective. Exploring Malaysian Chinese identities in an age of globalisation is less straightforward. Diaspora identities have become markedly multilayered and heterogeneous, creolised and hybridised, arising from conflictive and collaborative co-existence with other ethnic cultures.<sup>593</sup>

Anthropologist Sharon Carstens’ study on the Malaysian Chinese utilises the concept of “strategic positioning” to explain how the practise of ‘layering’ identities is inherently flexible.<sup>594</sup> Carstens posits that identity construction is negotiated on multiple levels: an unconscious level informed by habitus, a partly-conscious-and-unconscious level conforming to cultural norms, and a conscious level where individuals select which cultural ideas they wish to identify with. Selectiveness presupposes agency and choice; this perspective is reminiscent of philosopher Charles Taylor’s depiction of identity as a process which involves discovery and self-creation.<sup>595</sup> The hypothesis that individuals select cultural ideas they identify with also evokes comparisons with studies on multiracial identity. Sociologist Jennifer Jones for example found that among mixed race individuals, there was a choice to ‘opt out’ or ‘switch’ identities when confronted with problematic contexts which discouraged collectivisation.<sup>596</sup> Carstens found that ‘switching’ is common practise among Malaysian Chinese; that is, they are adept at identifying themselves in different ways depending upon the arena of expression. Her study produced several observations: Most Malaysian Chinese were conscious that their ethnicity is a signifier of marginalisation; most engage in transnational cultural practises through engagement and interaction with media discourses originating from Greater China (China, Taiwan and Hong Kong); many are protective of what they perceive as cultural symbols of their Chineseness; but for some, being Malaysian Chinese also meant feeling ‘like they belong nowhere’.<sup>597</sup>

Often, the sentiments of unbelonging or rootlessness were most pronounced when interacting with other diasporic Chinese outside of Malaysia. Further, encounters with mainland Chinese often accentuated their sense of difference and heightened their identities as Malaysians. These inter-cultural

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<sup>592</sup> Fujio Hara, *Malayan Chinese and China: Conversion in Identity Consciousness 1945-1957*, (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003).

<sup>593</sup> For example: Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West*, (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>594</sup> Carstens, *Histories, Cultures, Identities*.

<sup>595</sup> Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

<sup>596</sup> Jennifer A. Jones, “Who Are We? Producing Group Identity through Everyday Practices of Conflict and Discourse,” *Sociological Perspectives* 54, 2 (2011): 139–162.

<sup>597</sup> Carstens, *Histories, Cultures, Identities*, 199-232.

exchanges sometimes results in a feeling of invalidation, even confusion. For example, Samanthi Si related an encounter with “mainland Chinese aunties” on a visit to Shenzhen:

One of them said, ‘Oh, so you are third-generation Chinese.’ What she was really saying was we are not really Chinese. And she went on to say, ‘Wow, this is quite interesting, I didn’t realise that third generation Chinese can be quite pretty as well.’ I was like, ‘What?’ I don’t think there was a compliment in there at all! Basically her mentality was, people who had migrated out of China were not Chinese anymore. But we identify ourselves quite strongly as Chinese. And the second part was that, she actually thought we would look different, so, erm, that was quite interesting.<sup>598</sup>

Cat Yap had a similar experience with a friend from Beijing. She was chastised for not being able to speak Mandarin, and then excused on the grounds of being ‘Malay.’ “I’m Chinese, I’m not Malay!,” she remarked, “I hold a Malaysian passport, I have a Chinese name, my ancestry is Chinese, so I’m really conflicted.”<sup>599</sup> Such encounters challenge individuals’ self-identification as ethnically Chinese but also highlight that there is a hierarchy of Chineseness depending on whether one is home or abroad. At home, they were constantly reminded of their Chineseness; when away from home, however, they were not viewed as authentically Chinese. The practise of shifting and switching along a spectrum of identities involves constant refining and redefining: Chinese but not from China, Malaysian but not Malay, speaks a Chinese dialect but not necessarily Mandarin. This adaptive process reflects how Malaysian Chinese identities are perpetually in motion.

Among the current generation, self-identifying as both Malaysian and Chinese is innate. As the comedian Douglas Lim describes: “Saying I’m proud to be Malaysian is like saying I have a nose; I mean it’s there.”<sup>600</sup> A similar sentiment was expressed by Rita Sim: “I am Chinese, that cannot be denied, but I am also Malaysian.”<sup>601</sup> Such professions suggest that Malaysian Chinese have assimilated the duality of being both Malaysian and yet ethnically Chinese. Why then has it remained a preoccupation of the state to school ethnic Chinese in being Malaysians? And why has national history been elected as a core subject to do so? To answer these questions, we explore discourses surrounding the promulgation of a state-sponsored national history.

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<sup>598</sup> Samanthi Si, focus group discussion, May 24, 2012.

<sup>599</sup> Cat Yap, focus group discussion, May 24, 2012.

<sup>600</sup> Gary Liew, “Future Expressions: 6 Artists Reflect on the Future of Malaysia,” Seeing Eye Films, June 16, 2014.

<sup>601</sup> Rita Sim, interview by author, March 24, 2012.



## A National History for a National Identity

The perceived importance of history as a vehicle for inculcating national identity was evident at the recent national History Summit conferences. While the 2012 event focused on 'Ethnicity and National Identity in History,' the 2013 session pondered 'History as the Foundation for National Public Policy.' Within the discourse of national identity vis-à-vis national history, there are two distinct schools of thought. The first, which can be loosely termed *sejarah inklusif* (inclusive history), advocates a version of history which mirrors the social realities of a plural population to complement the state's professed objective towards developing a multiracial nation-state.<sup>602</sup> The other can be loosely termed *sejarah asli* (original history) which foregrounds the narrative of indigenous – that is, Malay – civilisation within the wider scholarship of *alam Melayu* (Malay world). Proponents of this latter approach champion an understanding of Malaysian history which requires that citizens, Malays and non-Malays alike, assimilate the terms and meanings of *bangsa pribumi* (indigenous race) and *tanahair* (homeland).<sup>603</sup> This approach is purportedly apolitical and liberates the practise of history from the influence of state political objectives. Detractors however suggest that this approach, based on Malay claims of indigeneity, is contentious given that most Malays "can trace an ancestor from beyond the peninsula within three generations."<sup>604</sup>

The presence of ongoing debate concerning Malaysian historiography suggests reflexivity; however, whether this is the inevitable progression of maturing scholarship is unclear. This is because the impetus for examining how and what version of Malaysian history should be propagated appears to be driven by the need to respond to growing challenges to the political status quo. To illustrate, Tan Sri Omar Hashim, Chairman of the Malaysian Historical Society, has criticised unsanctioned historical counter-narratives which deviate from official sources, denouncing them as 'unscholarly' and 'factually wrong,' arguing that the situation "would get out of hand if unethical writers were using wrong facts and wrong approaches."<sup>605</sup> In similar vein, former Prime Minister Tun Musa Hitam, has stressed the need for formulating a 'vision of history' that would address "social

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<sup>602</sup> See for example: Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, "*Sejarah untuk Semua: Antara Fakta, Tafsiran dan Pandangan Umum*" [History for All: Between Facts, Interpretations and General Views], Keynote Speech at History Summit 2013, December 16-17, 2013, Kuala Lumpur: Wisma Sejarah; and Helen Ting, "History Teaching: Education for Patriotic Citizenship and National Unity," paper presented at the same conference.

<sup>603</sup> A. Murad Merican, "*Sejarah Negara Rentasi Buku Teks*" (National History Transcends Textbooks), *Utusan Malaysia*, January 21, 2014.

<sup>604</sup> Geoff Wade, "Origins and Evolution of Ethnocracy," 31.

<sup>605</sup> Alimuddin Mohd.Dom, "*Keetnik, Identiti Bangsa dalam Sejarah*" [Ethnicity, National Identity in History], *Utusan Malaysia*, July 2, 2012.

chasms and engender tolerance between various community groups.” To that end, he proposed “a shared history comprising positive aspects of the past” as “the main foundation for the continued development of Malaysia as a nation-state.”<sup>606</sup> Such comments support the conviction that national history, when carefully constructed and purposefully steered, will foster a sense of shared national identity. However what the state approves as ‘factually right’ or ‘positive’ subjects history to the risk of obfuscation.

Can indoctrinating Malaysian citizens with an approved version of state history infuse them with nationalism? Will this transmute into a shared sense of national identity, and by extension, foster national unity? Malaysian social anthropologist Shamsul Amri Baharuddin has examined these questions at length and makes the distinction that while Malaysia is an established body-politic, it remains a work in progress in terms of truly being a nation. Shamsul draws upon Benedict Anderson’s seminal conception of nationalism as an imagined community; he argues that to nurture nationalism in a postcolonial and plural society such as Malaysia requires fostering a *bangsa idaman* (idealised community) to supplant ethnically-defined identities. He believes that the concept of *bangsa Malaysia* (Malaysian race), as mooted by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad during his tenure, is a step in this direction. However, he points out that the marginalisation of minorities within the national historiography provides little foundation on which to build this idealised community.<sup>607</sup>

While Shamsul did not dwell on how shared history may engender community, his supposition undoubtedly relies upon the capacity of history to promote a sense of common identification. Borrowing from cultural theory, we may expand upon Shamsul’s rumination. According to Stuart Hall, identity is a process of self-narrativisation which draws upon shared societal characteristics within history, language or culture. As such, identification is a fluid process of becoming rather than being. Identity hinges not upon where ‘we come from’ or ‘who we are,’ but ‘who we might become.’<sup>608</sup> As such, a historical narrative which allows space for the reimagining of the self within the nation can promote a sense of identification. It is the fulcrum upon which the levers of national identity and cultural belonging hinge.

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<sup>606</sup> Berita Harian, “*Pengajian Sejarah Awam Lahir Tenaga Terlatih*” [Public History Education for Trained Manpower], December 18, 2013.

<sup>607</sup> See: Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, “In Search of ‘Bangsa Malaysia:’ Politics of Identity in Multiethnic Malaysia.” *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Sciences* 27 (1995): 57-68.

<sup>608</sup> Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, 4th ed., eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 2000).

Currently, the realisation of a nationally-defined idealised community is made difficult by an “ethnically-cleansed” version of state history where “the cultural aspects are entirely Malay and it is as if half the country has disappeared.”<sup>609</sup> The lack of substantive non-Malay representation denies non-Malays a narrative with which to identify or belong to; there is no thread with which the non-Malay self may ‘suture into the story.’ “Malaysian history,” according to the opposition politician Tony Pua, “eliminate(s) the influences of any races other than Malays in the founding or building of the country.”<sup>610</sup> Pua is not alone in his assessment. Some Malaysians, aghast at the mono-racial version of history perpetuated by the state, have reacted by rejecting history as a serious subject altogether.

At a forum for young people aged 15 to 20 conducted by *Kempen Sejarah Malaysia Sebenar* (Campaign for a Truly Malaysian History), Jason Wee, a Malaysian Chinese student, confessed that he found “the constant repetition of rhetoric that comes off so blatantly as propaganda makes [history] hard to digest.”<sup>611</sup> Elliot Tan, another participant, shared a similar view. “History is not meant to teach patriotism,” he opined, “Patriotism will happen naturally if one is happy with his or her country. Trying to force a person to love something only sows discontent.”<sup>612</sup> While many recognise that history is a valuable social engineering tool, few can ignore the transparent politicisation. “History education must have an objective,” admitted Associate Professor Azmi Sharom, “What it must not have is an agenda.”<sup>613</sup> However, academia and politics are inextricably entwined in Malaysia, with many academics practising self-censorship in order to stay on (politically-approved) message.<sup>614</sup> Those with divergent opinions run the risk of censure or worse. In September 2014, Professor Azmi was arrested for publicly expressing his opinion on Selangor state politics. He faces a fine, a jail term of up to three years, or both if found guilty.

In urging reform to Malaysian history education, the organisers of the Campaign for a Truly Malaysian History emphasised the importance of national history as a vehicle to “validate our identities and origins” and “foster a sense of

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<sup>609</sup> Wade, “Origins and Evolution of Ethnocracy,” 36.

<sup>610</sup> Jennifer Pak, “Multi-Racial Malaysia Caught at Economic Crossroads,” *BBC News*, September 13, 2011.

<sup>611</sup> Jason Wee, “When SPM History Isn’t History,” *LoyarBurok*, January 29, 2014.

<sup>612</sup> David B.C. Tan, “Malaysian History Textbooks Too Narrow, Say Our Youths,” *HomeFrontier*, August 10, 2011.

<sup>613</sup> Azmi Sharom, “History Lessons Must Be Objective,” *The Star*, December 29, 2011.

<sup>614</sup> Sheridan Mahavera, “Our Varsities Neutered and Muted, say Academics,” *The Malaysian Insider*, July 4, 2014.

belonging.”<sup>615</sup> The phraseology is revealing, suggesting that Malaysian history, as currently propagated, has left some Malaysians feeling invalidated, uncertain about their identity and origin and perhaps, most detrimental of all, devoid of a sense of belonging. For Malaysian Chinese who feel politically marginalised and culturally disenfranchised, this has promoted the need to explore what it means to be both Chinese and Malaysian outside of the national historical narrative. As Jo Kukathas, a doyen of Malaysian theatre and social activist, explains: “The government creates fictions of who we are as a nation. They provide state narratives of identity and belonging. It’s not the truth... So artists, as well as citizens, have to provide alternative narratives – alternative fictions if you like.”<sup>616</sup> Among the alternative narratives which have proven particularly potent is that of an idealised *bangsa Malaysia*. In the next segment, we explore how, in the current socio-political climate, this narrative remains more fiction than fact.

## The Promise of Bangsa Malaysia

Borrowing from international relations theory, political scientist Allan Collins has framed Malaysia’s precarious inter-ethnic relations as a “security dilemma.” The dilemma arises from actions which, while aimed at heightening security, may paradoxically lead to an escalation of hostilities. Collins identifies the issue of identity as the primary source of mutual suspicion and fear, where “the dynamics of the dilemma begin to operate when the continuation of identity from one generation to another is threatened.”<sup>617</sup> In Collins’ view, Malaysia’s acculturation policy, encapsulated within the concept of *bangsa Malaysia*, circumvents this dilemma by providing the opportunity to share in a common Malaysian identity, yet maintaining separate ethnic identities. He further notes that while the project of *bangsa Malaysia* is state-led, it is not a clear case of state-sponsored social engineering but a response to societal changes. He reasons that after more than half a century of affirmative policies in favour of the Malay majority, divisions within the population are now more keenly felt on the basis of class differences than ethnicity.<sup>618</sup>

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<sup>615</sup> KemSMS, *Kenyataan Akhbar KemSMS berkenaan Gesaan Reformasi Pendidikan Sejarah* [Press Statement from Campaign for a Truly Malaysian History for History Education Reform], January 19, 2012.

<sup>616</sup> Kong Wai Yeng, “Future Expressions: 6 Artists Reflect on the Future of Malaysia,” *Time Out Malaysia*, August 27, 2014.

<sup>617</sup> Alan Collins, “The Ethnic Security Dilemma: Evidence from Malaysia,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 20, 3 (1998): 264.

<sup>618</sup> Pro-Malay programs include: admission quotas at higher education institutions, discounted cars and homes, ownership of public-listed companies and ring-fenced government infrastructure and supply contracts.

Collins' reasoning that the Malay and Chinese poor have more in common, while the wealthy Malay and Chinese classes identify more readily with each other, may perhaps be a little optimistic. Collins does not appear to have weighed the lingering inter-ethnic antagonism that affirmative policies have produced. Neglect and exclusion from the benefits of Malay-only affirmative programs have led to poverty stagnation among Indian and Chinese underclasses. Indians are overrepresented among the hard-core poor with the lowest per capita income.<sup>619</sup> Among the Chinese, one in five continues to reside in ageing new village settlements which suffer from poor infrastructure.<sup>620</sup> Further, while affirmative policies have ameliorated persistent poverty among Malays, they have also ensconced the practise of cronyism and corruption between the state and a capitalist elite class.<sup>621</sup> As a result, the wealth of many Malay and Chinese 'tycoons' is often perceived as ill gotten. In many Chinese eyes, the Malay elite have prospered by virtue of their ethnicity, while the Chinese elite have enriched themselves at the expense of 'selling out' the Chinese. Conversely, to many Malays, Chinese cronies of the state have benefited unduly at the expense of the masses.<sup>622</sup> Despite the social veneer of congenial coexistence, enduring interracial suspicions and distrust remain pernicious obstacles to genuine unity.

## Malaysians or Chinese First?

Malaysian politics perpetuates a zero-sum game ideology of power-sharing and cultural legitimacy where Malay backwardness is linked to the "effrontery of

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<sup>619</sup> Brendan Pereira, "KL's Urban Strife Bares Poverty Cuts Across Race," *Straits Times*, March 23, 2001; Partiban S. Gopal, et.al., "Indian Urban Poverty in Malaysia," *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2011): 32-48.

<sup>620</sup> Heng Pek Koon, "The New Economic Policy and the Chinese in Peninsular Malaysia," *The Developing Economies* XXXV-3 (1997): 262-292; "Revisiting Our Roots: New Villages," *MCA: The Guardian*, August 2007; Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies (CMCS), "The Chinese New Villages in Malaysia: Impact of Demographic Changes and Response Strategies," March 25, 2011.

<sup>621</sup> Malaysia ranks 53 behind Rwanda and Mauritius on the Corruption Perception Index 2013 and third behind Russia and Hong Kong in the Crony-Capitalism Index 2014; see: Transparency International, "Corruption Perception Index 2013" and *The Economist*, "Planet Plutocrat," March 15, 2014.

<sup>622</sup> For popular views, see: Rozhan Othman, "The Cow Dung and the Flies," *The Malaysian Insider*, June 9, 2014; DAP Seputeh, "Teresa Kok: 'Onederful' Malaysia," January 27, 2014; Christopher Fernandez, "Greedy and Ruthless," *The Malaysian Chronicle*, February 13, 2014; and Malaysian Business, "To Be or Not to Be a Crony," June 26, 2014. For scholarly and opposing perspectives on the links between affirmative action and crony-capitalism, see: Gomez and Jomo, *Malaysia's Political Economy*; Jomo, "Whither Malaysia's New Economic Policy?," and Mariathi Norhashim, "Smart Partnership or Cronyism?," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 25, no. 8 (2005): 31-48.

'immigrants' enjoying fruits they do not deserve in a place to which they do not belong."<sup>623</sup> Implicit within this ideology is tacit acceptance of Malay hegemony as a necessary condition in managing interethnic tensions. A shared *bangsa Malaysia* identity offers a possible pathway towards transcending ethnonationalism. However, whether Malaysians are truly prepared to embark on this collective journey is debateable. The real challenge lies not only in affecting attitudinal change among the Chinese and other minorities, but also the Malay segment of the population.

In a nationwide poll conducted in 2006, 52 percent of Chinese respondents identified themselves as 'Malaysians first' rather than 'Chinese first.' In contrast, only 35 percent of Malay respondents saw themselves as Malaysians first.<sup>624</sup> When the poll was repeated in 2011, 55 percent of Chinese, compared to 26 percent of Malay respondents, viewed themselves as Malaysians first.<sup>625</sup> The results indicate that a growing number of Malaysian Chinese prioritise national identity over that of ethnicity. However, the poll results indicate that a growing majority of Malays increasingly identify as Muslims first, rather than as Malaysians or even Malays. Despite the encouraging outcomes from Chinese respondents, why does the perception that the Chinese are not substantially integrated into Malaysian society continue to persist?

The perceived intractability of the Chinese stems from several popular narratives. The preservation of Chinese language schools and cultural practices is held up as proof of Chinese intransigence towards integration. Chinese political agitation is equated with 'ultra' Chinese attitudes of ingratitude, subversion or avariciousness.<sup>626</sup> Such depictions are compounded by the characterisation of the country as a house (*rumah*) where minorities are guests (*tetamu*) at the sufferance of the Malay master of the house (*tuan rumah*).<sup>627</sup> The contradiction in being exhorted to be Malaysian first yet merely tolerated as co-inhabitants has caused

<sup>623</sup> Yao Souchou, "Tasting the Night: Food, Ethnic Transaction, and the Pleasure of Chineseness in Malaysia," eds. Michael W. Charney, Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Tong Chee Kiong, *Chinese Migrants Abroad: Cultural, Educational and Social Dimensions of the Chinese Diaspora*, (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003), 53.

<sup>624</sup> This poll is part of a series sponsored by the German institute Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom; Merdeka Center for Opinion Research, "Public Opinion Poll on Ethnic Relations," February 21-26 and March 2-4, 2006.

<sup>625</sup> Merdeka Center for Opinion Research, "Survey on Ethnic Relations 2011," May 24 to June 8, 2011.

<sup>626</sup> See for example: Cuit Zaini Hassan, "Orang Cina Malaysia, Apa Lagi Yang Anda Mahu?" [Malaysian Chinese, What More Do You Want?], *Utusan Malaysia*, April 28, 2010.

<sup>627</sup> See: Ameen Latiff, "Ye Lin-Sheng Dedahkan Sikap Rasis Orang Cina Terhadap Melayu!" [Ye Lin-Sheng Reveals Chinese Racism towards Malays!], *MyKMU.net*, October 23, 2013; Duta, "Tuan Rumah dan Tetamunya" [The Host and His Guests], *pulokdohDOTcom*, March 12, 2012.

consternation. Such depictions have proven especially egregious when lent credence by Malay leaders. In August 2008, Ahmad Ismail, chief of the Penang UMNO division, publicly denigrated the Chinese as *orang tumpang* (squatters). He also warned the Chinese to “not become like the Jews in America” and to avoid interfering in the wealth or politics of the country.<sup>628</sup> In February 2010, Nasir Safar from the Prime Minister’s Department derided the Chinese and Indian minorities as *pendatang* (migrants), elaborating that “Indians came to Malaysia as beggars and Chinese, especially the women, came to sell their bodies.”<sup>629</sup> In the 2013 general elections, there was a large-scale defection of Chinese voters away from the MCA, while UMNO lost a broad swathe of urban Malay votes to the opposition *Pakatan Rakyat* (People’s Alliance). The prime minister nevertheless blamed the “Chinese tsunami” for the coalition’s poor performance at the polls. Following this, the UMNO-owned *Utusan Malaysia* broadsheet published a provocative front-page editorial headlined “What more do the Chinese want?”<sup>630</sup> A public trading of accusations and counter-accusations of racism ensued. The Malay daily defended its position by accusing the Chinese collective of repaying Malay benevolence and largesse with ingratitude and betrayal.<sup>631</sup> Similar sentiments abound. More recently in May 2014, Ustaz Abdullah Zaik Abdul Rahman, president of the Muslim organisation *Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia* (ISMA), admonished the Chinese as *penceroboh* (trespassers) who “should be thankful that they have more than what they need in this country.”<sup>632</sup>

The contradictory messages emanating from the state and vocal Malay activists reveal a gulf between official speak and reality. Ostensibly, to count as ‘patriotic’ Malaysians and true ‘nationalists,’ the Chinese should observe their designated place in Malaysia’s socio-political hierarchy, to be politically inert and to not threaten Malay dominance or exacerbate Malay insecurity. Why have fears of potential Chinese subversion prevailed? In part, deeply-entrenched perceptions of the Chinese as intrinsically predatory and the Malays as inherently deficient are to blame. In the aforementioned Merdeka public opinion polls of 2006, 71 percent of Malay respondents agreed with the statement that most Chinese are greedy; in

<sup>628</sup> Aljazeera, “Race Row Rocks Malaysia,” September 11, 2008.

<sup>629</sup> “India Pelampau, Cina Jual Tubuh” [Indians Are Extremists, Chinese Sold Their Bodies], *Malaysiakini*, February 2, 2010.

<sup>630</sup> Zulkiflee Bakar, “Apa Lagi Orang Cina Mahu?” [What More Do the Chinese Want?], *Utusan Malaysia*, May 7, 2013; and Jeremy Grant, “Global Insight: Malaysia’s ‘Chinese tsunami’ puts Najib in a bind,” *Financial Times*, May 7, 2013.

<sup>631</sup> Malay Mail, “Utusan revisits ‘Apa Lagi Cina Mahu?’, says Chinese Ungrateful,” October 27, 2013.

<sup>632</sup> Looi Sue-Chern, “Chinese Brought to Tanah Melayu Are ‘Trespassers,’ says Muslim group,” *The Malaysian Insider*, May 6, 2014; ISMA, “Kedatangan Pendatang Cina Bersama Penjajah British Satu Bentuk Pencerobohan” [The Migration of Chinese alongside British Colonisers was a Form of Trespass], *Portal Islam & Melayu*, May 6, 2014.

2011, the proportion was 68 percent. Conversely, 63 percent of Chinese respondents agreed with the statement that most Malays are lazy; in 2011, the figure was 58 percent. Interestingly, half of all Chinese and Malay respondents also concurred with their ethnic group's negative stereotypes. These results affirm the persistency of racial dogmas. They also confirm that a large proportion of Malays and Chinese continue to perceive their fellow countrymen as ethnic Others.

#### Multiculturalism, Acculturation and Superficial Unity

Even among the Chinese community, there are accusations that a sizeable group of 'cliquish' fellow Chinese appear to be ostracising themselves and living in wholly Chinese worlds.<sup>633</sup> According to one critic, these Chinese may consider themselves Malaysians, but in their daily lives, they are only "Malaysian for 20 percent [of the time], but Chinese 80 percent [of the time]."<sup>634</sup> The transgression apparently is that these Chinese are not Malaysian *enough*. Accordingly, to be deemed sufficiently Malaysian is to be fluent in the Malay language, to socialise primarily with people of other ethnicities and to eschew Chinese media. Such criticisms flow from a vision of a multicultural Malaysia which devalues diversity and in effect endorses "racism in a politically-correct guise."<sup>635</sup> The paradox of multiculturalism as an ideal and in practise, as experienced elsewhere, is also evident in Malaysia. Ostensibly, the state promotes multicultural Malaysia as a model representation of 'truly Asia.' (See: Figure 31.) In reality, however, there are persistent internal pressures which advocate assimilation. As the philosopher Homi K. Bhabha observed, when the ideals of multiculturalism are besieged by the practicalities of real world implications, "cultural diversity is not in reality a plural choice."<sup>636</sup> Perhaps, those who take issue with 'non-Malaysian' Chinese have failed to appreciate the varied ways in which acculturation has taken root in contemporary Malaysian society.

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<sup>633</sup> See: Lisa Ng, "Malaysian. Chinese. Totally Foreign," *Malaysia Today*, May 14, 2011; and Sheridan Mahavera, "Some Chinese don't speak Bahasa at all," *The Malaysian Insider*, May 14, 2011.

<sup>634</sup> Tai Zee Kin, "Ethnic Han (Chinese)-Malaysians, Please Wake Up From The Legacy Of Our Ancestors' Grievances And Despairs!," Tai Zee Kin Facebook Post, May 20, 2013.

<sup>635</sup> Stephen Spencer argues that multiculturalism has become increasingly a conservative concept. He outlines the arguments of various detractors, among them Stuart Hall, Sneja Gunew, Ayn Rand and Kenan Malik; see: Spencer, Stephen, *Race and Ethnicity: Culture, Identity and Representation*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 205-206.

<sup>636</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "Culture's In-Between," 54. For similar views on the counterproductive effects of institutionalising multiculturalism, see: Kenan Malik, *Multiculturalism and Its Discontents*, (London: Seagull Books, 2013).





Figure 30. Malaysia 'Truly Asia' advertisement. Source: Tourism Malaysia.

Social scientist Sharmani Patricia Gabriel describes Malaysian social life as a series of inter-cultural intersections. She points to the prevalence of “spaces of cultural exchange and collaboration” in which “performative aspects of contact, adaptation, appropriation, and trans-racial exchange” have become normative forms of societal practice. Acculturation, in Gabriel's estimation, is evidenced by the flourishing of a distinctly Malaysian-styled hybridity observable within vernacular languages, imbibed through creolised cuisine and practised as shared customs which cannot be defined as strictly Malay, Chinese or Indian. Such cultural practices, she argues, are evidence of *bangsa Malaysia* in practise, in spite of or perhaps despite state formulations which seek to “constantly homogenise spatial and historical contexts of the nation.”<sup>637</sup> These transracial exchanges transcend homogenous notions of Malaysianness. As such, any attempts at demarcating what is essentially Malaysian will only arrive at a mishmash of Malay, Chinese, Indian and colonial cultural influences.

Similarly, anthropologist Timothy P. Daniels, in his study on Malaysian society at the turn of the millennium, observes that “although many aspects of a formerly plural colonial society exist, it is clear that citizens of post-independence

<sup>637</sup> Sharmani Patricia Gabriel, “Translating Bangsa Malaysia: Toward a New Cultural Politics of Malaysian-ness,” *Critical Asian Studies* 43, 3 (2011): 356, 358.

Malaysia mix *and combine*" (Original italics). Cultural contestations, Daniels posits, arise out of "state imposed policies that assume a 'Malaysian national culture' based upon Malay culture."<sup>638</sup> As a result, despite the veneer of "hopeful togetherness" perpetuated by "everyday experiences and deeper yearnings," he observed a seething "fire below the surface" born of "incinerating strains between the notions and realities of equality and inequality."<sup>639</sup> To explain this dissonance, where minority groups have managed to claim space in society but not equal rights, Daniels proposes differentiating between legal and cultural citizenship. The concept of cultural citizenship, he argues, extends beyond legal citizenship; that is, while one may legally be a citizen, one can also have 'second' or 'third class' cultural citizenship. That is, cultural citizenship is a qualitative, graduated citizenship arising from power relations with the state and civil society; it is experienced as a sense of belongingness. Within the enduring 'discourse of origins' prevalent in Malaysia, where "each 'race' has an original place that they are *truly* from," Daniels suggests that the ethnic Chinese "are not full 'belongers' in Malaysian society; they may qualify for 'legal citizenship' but full 'cultural citizenship' still lies outside their grasp."<sup>640</sup>

Given the gradations of cultural citizenship and by extension, belongingness, how do these factors shape Malaysian society and interracial relations? While Malaysian lived experience is enlivened by transracial cultural exchanges, many Malaysians believe that ethnic relations have deteriorated; in 2011, only 36 percent of respondents polled, compared to 64 percent in 2006, felt that the different ethnic groups were 'getting closer.'<sup>641</sup> Approximately one third felt that 'ethnic unity' was 'sincere and friendly,' while 44 percent felt that there was only 'superficial unity.'<sup>642</sup> There is a palpable sense that "the different races learn in separate schools, eat separately, work separately and socialise separately."<sup>643</sup> In previous US ambassador to Malaysia John R. Malott's view, current racial and religious tensions "are at their worst than at any time since 1969" when the nation was embroiled in open inter-racial riots.<sup>644</sup>

The sense of superficial unity is compounded by the state's ineffectual response to simmering interracial tensions. On the eve of *Hari Merdeka* (Independence Day) 2014, the Deputy Prime Minister assured the nation that

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<sup>638</sup> Daniels, *Building Cultural Nationalism*, xviii, xxi.

<sup>639</sup> Daniels, *Building Cultural Nationalism*, 263.

<sup>640</sup> Daniels, *Building Cultural Nationalism*, 62.

<sup>641</sup> Merdeka Center, "Public Opinion Poll."

<sup>642</sup> Merdeka Center, "Public Opinion Poll."

<sup>643</sup> Jennifer Pak, "Multi-Racial Malaysia Caught at Economic Crossroads," *BBC News*, September 13, 2011.

<sup>644</sup> John R. Malott, "The Price of Malaysia's Racism," *Wall Street Journal*, February 8, 2011.

Malaysia was a harmonious, multiracial society. “We have done it and have succeeded, in the name of 1Malaysia,” he said.<sup>645</sup> This pronouncement was in stark contrast to the gloomy picture painted by civil and political groups. An opposition party leader warned that the nation was engulfed in an “environment of fear and a sense of intolerance.”<sup>646</sup> The Christian Federation of Malaysia appealed to Malaysians to “save Malaysia from the forces of bigotry, religious extremism and racial polarisation.”<sup>647</sup> Public disenchantment with media depictions of harmonious interethnic relations resulted in the trending of the Twitter hashtag ‘IfMerdekaAdsWereReal.’

#### Religion: Old Difference, New Divide

While Islam is recognised as the official religion of the country, constitutionally, there is a separation of state and religious jurisdictions. Since the Eighties however, Islam has become increasingly bureaucratised through the consolidation, centralisation and expansion of Islamic state institutions, resulting from UMNO’s strategy to retain the mandate of its Malay constituents and to neutralise the appeal of Islamist opposition parties. Consequently, Islamisation has encroached into Malaysian public life.

The effects of this creeping phenomenon in exacerbating interracial relations, and the contradictions it imposes upon the ideals of a shared national identity, cannot be overstated. Ideations of a distinctive national identity have become increasingly conflated with a Malay-Muslim-Malaysian triptych. In this configuration, minorities are destined to remain a putative Other, not only on the bases of primordial indigeneity and ethnicity, but also religion. More worryingly, Islamisation has opened the way for expressions of more radical strains of Islamic religiosity, fuelling intolerance and promoting segregation. Among the Chinese, this has resurrected a deep-seated, nascent wariness of being singled out and potentially scapegoated.

While the constitution provides non-Malays the right to freedom of religion, Malays are automatically deemed to be Sunni Muslims. Muslim-non Muslim marriages are forbidden, ‘deconversions’ are criminalised and Muslims are subjected to *sharia* law which applies to moral, religious and family matters. Through such legal and bureaucratic instruments, argues Maznah Mohamad,

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<sup>645</sup> Channel News Asia, “Malaysian PM, DPM Urge Solidarity, Unity in National Day Message,” August 30, 2014.

<sup>646</sup> DAP, “57th Merdeka Day Message by DAP Parliamentary Leader Lim Kit Siang,” *Democratic Action Party*, August 30, 2014.

<sup>647</sup> CFM, “We Must Continue to Hope,” *Christian Federation of Malaysia Media Statement: Merdeka Day and Malaysia Day 2014*, August 26, 2014.

Malays have been ring-fenced as religious subjects outside of the constitution.<sup>648</sup> High-profile cases involving Muslims challenging the civil or *sharia* courts to assert their constitutional right to freedom of religion have been struck down.<sup>649</sup> These cases have stoked inter-ethnic tensions: many view these ‘no exit’ rulings as an erosion of constitutional freedoms, while conservative Malay-Muslims have been angered by what they perceive as meddling on the part of non-Muslims and civil legislators.

Islamisation has encouraged radical elements to emerge. State religious authorities increasingly promote an Islamic way of life which rejects “liberalism, capitalism, pluralism, secularism, materialism and modernity.”<sup>650</sup> These have been accompanied by growing demands for *hudud*, an Islamic penal code which includes punishments such as amputation of limbs and stoning to death, to be applied to all citizens, regardless of faith. The recent instatement of wholesale *sharia* law in neighbouring Brunei – an independent nation with a 75 percent Malay-Muslim population – has incited Islamist groups in Malaysia to apply pressure on the government to follow suit.<sup>651</sup> Isma, for instance, argues that unless *sharia* is adopted, Malay-Muslim identity would be undermined and Malaysia’s Islamic identity “diluted.”<sup>652</sup> Such incendiary agitation has escaped censure from a government keen to avoid confrontation with rightist Muslim constituents.

In exploring the underlying reasons for the the populist appeal of Islamisation among broad swathes of the Malay population, social scientist Gerhard Hoffstaedter suggests that the nationalisation of Malayness, through the constitutionalising of the Malay language, Malay royalty and Islam as national tenets, has denuded the Malay subject of his traditional Malay identity. This, he hypothesises, “leaves Islam as a primary identity marker of note.”<sup>653</sup> Accordingly, the progressive Islamisation of Malaysia is a manifestation of Malay longing for an authentic and unique identity. This perhaps explains why more Malays have come to perceive themselves as Muslims first, rather than Malay or Malaysian.

The prioritisation of Muslim identity over that of national or ethnic identities has led to Malay identification with the international *ummah* or community of

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<sup>648</sup> Maznah Mohamad, “Legal-Bureaucratic Islam in Malaysia: Homogenising and Ring-Fencing the Muslim Subject,” in *Encountering Islam: The Politics of Religious Identities in Southeast Asia*, ed. Hui Yew-Foong, (Singapore: ISEAS, 2013), 123.

<sup>649</sup> For example: Azlina Jailani/Lina Joy, Kamariah Ali, and Zaina Abidin Hamid and his three children.

<sup>650</sup> Malay Mail, “Malaysian Muslims Facing Fascist Indoctrination, Former Minister Says,” July 31, 2014.

<sup>651</sup> Stuart Grudgings, “Brunei Adopts Sharia Law, Others in Region Consider It,” *Reuters*, April 29, 2014.

<sup>652</sup> “Say No to a ‘Liberal Democratic’ Country, Isma Tells Malaysians,” *Malay Mail*, July 24, 2014.

<sup>653</sup> Hoffstaedter, *Modern Muslim Identities*, 35.

believers. This has led to infiltration of Islamist agendas from abroad.<sup>654</sup> Intelligence gathered in the global war on terror exposes Malaysia as a transit point and recruitment ground for various militant groups, among them Al-Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiah and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS).<sup>655</sup> In June 2014, 15 Malay-Muslim combatants from Malaysia were reportedly killed while participating in *jihadi* activities against President Bashar al-Assad's regime.<sup>656</sup> More recently, a group calling itself Jemaah ISIS Malaysia pronounced Sabah and Sarawak as *kafir* (non-believer) states, declaring that it was "the obligation of Muslims to slaughter the peoples there."<sup>657</sup> This proclamation was targeted at *Dayak* aboriginal groups, who are counted as *bumiputra* but differentiated on the grounds that they are not Malay or Muslim.

The government ostensibly condemns Islamist terrorism. However it has sent mixed messages to the public. Shortly after local police arrested three Malaysians for suspected links with ISIS, Prime Minister Najib Razak rallied UMNO members by exhorting them to be "brave like ISIL fighters" in defending Malay hegemony.<sup>658</sup> Conflicting messages from the Malay political leadership, compounded by multiple public controversies involving Muslim leaders and state Islamic authorities, have fanned the flames of intolerance. More insidiously, the prevailing atmosphere has escalated distrust and promoted dismay and fear. A Malaysian Chinese commented online: "If this does not scare you to emigrate..." Another netizen replied: "Actually, the proclamations of [Muslim radicals] don't scare me into considering emigration. It's the silence of our Malay friends that does." While there are dissenting Malay voices, their pleas for an end to the politicisation of ethnic and religious issues have been overshadowed by unrelenting demonstrations of Islamist zeal.<sup>659</sup> Consequently, non-Malays have become increasingly cautious and anxious in their interactions with Malays. "My

<sup>654</sup> Joshua Wu, "Extremism in the Name of Islam and Malaysian Muslims," *New Mandala*, September 22, 2013.

<sup>655</sup> The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, July 22, 2004; and Luke Hunt, "ISIS: A Threat Well Beyond the Middle East," *The Diplomat*, July 7, 2014.

<sup>656</sup> Malay Mail, "Wisma Putra: 15 Malaysian ISIS Militants Allegedly Killed in Syria," *Malay Mail*, June 24, 2014; Marina Mahathir, "We've Got Walking Timebombs," *The Star*, July 3, 2014.

<sup>657</sup> Dukau Papau, "Report Made Over 'Behead Dayaks' Postings," *Malaysiakini*, September 2, 2014.

<sup>658</sup> Melissa Chi, "Be Brave Like ISIL Fighters, Najib Tells UMNO," *The Malay Mail*, June 24, 2014. Note: ISIS is also known as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

<sup>659</sup> For dissenting Malay-Muslim voices, see for example the weekly opinion column 'Musings' by Marina Mahathir in *The Star* and articles on her blog, <http://rantingsbymm.blogspot.co.uk>, which include original articles that have been censored or withheld from the mainstream press. Also Mariam Mokhtar's column in *Malaysiakini*, and CT Ali's column in *Free Malaysia Today*, two online alternative news outlets.

fear is that I will hardly have any Malay friends [anymore],” lamented Nathaniel Tan, a social activist and author.<sup>660</sup> This sentiment is widely shared. “I used to have Malay friends come over and eat together,” said a Malaysian Chinese lecturer at a local education institution, “But nowadays, everything’s *haram* (forbidden).”<sup>661</sup> The blurring of the boundaries between religion and the state has heightened confusion. Some have come to believe that Malaysian equates to being Malay or Muslim.<sup>662</sup> “I feel it’s like that,” said Celline Toh, a Chinese mother, “I don’t want my children to think it’s just about one race, about Malay. I don’t want them in the future to think that Malaysian is Malay, no Chinese.”<sup>663</sup>

The fear of cultural annihilation is not shared equally. There is an optimistic segment within the Chinese collective who cling to an idealised notion of *bangsa Malaysia*. Among the most notable and vocal adherents are Hannah Yeoh, a Malaysian Chinese opposition politician, and her Malaysian Indian husband, Ramachandran Muniandy. They registered the race of their newborn children as Malaysian but their requests and subsequent appeals were denied. As a result, their childrens’ ethnicity was pre-assigned by the respective authorities; their eldest is registered as Chinese, while their youngest is designated as Indian. This debacle, played out publically, attracted derision from minority voices. A frustrated citizen publicly denounced the government for propagating “lies about the Malaysian dream of national unity.”<sup>664</sup> The dream however retains its potent allure. In May 2013, Siew Yong Chang, who attended a post-election rally, wrote an open message to the Prime Minister. In it, he described the feeling of unity among the multiethnic crowd, signing off with: “PS. I am not Chinese, I am Malaysian.”

For some, identifying as Malaysian is not a choice. This is especially so when identifying with Chinese means little, save as a label that identifies them as an Other. Toronto-based Lim Yow, when asked what being Malaysian Chinese meant to him, replied:

I am ethnic Chinese, removed from China, ostracised by the Chinese. And frankly, I don’t care because I am Malaysian. I feel that being Malaysian is to be a product of a gigantic melting pot of cultures, traditions and histories. I must be at least third generation Malaysian. As far as I am concerned, I am as Malaysian as any other Malaysian, no matter what ethnicity.<sup>665</sup>

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<sup>660</sup> Liew, “Future Expressions.”

<sup>661</sup> Name withheld, from focus group discussion, March 25, 2012.

<sup>662</sup> On a discussion of how the term evokes multiple interpretations, see: Mohamed Mustafa Ishak, “Tun Dr. Mahathir and the Concept of ‘Bangsa Malaysia,’” *Journal of International Studies* (2006): 49-76.

<sup>663</sup> Celline Toh, from focus group discussion, March 25, 2012.

<sup>664</sup> K.J. John, “Which Promises, Whose Lies?,” *Malaysiakini*, September 18, 2012.

<sup>665</sup> Lim Yow is a pseudonym. Private correspondence, October 3, 2014.

Lim explained that he felt “doubly removed from my Chinese roots” because he did not speak Chinese or hail from China. He felt that the state’s discriminatory practices invalidated his identification as Malaysian. As a result, he believed that, like him, “those who can, will flee.” He claimed he was “cynical enough” to request that his comments remain anonymous. When asked to clarify, he replied: “Do I believe that the government will actually bother to read an academic paper and take vindictive notes? You betcha.”<sup>666</sup> In some respects, Lim is ‘triply removed’ from his roots, not only devoid of a sense of Chineseness, but also a voluntary exile from his homeland.

## Diaspora Space: Growing Roots and Falling Leaves

Almost six decades on since independence, the Malaysian Chinese continues to find himself in a perpetual state of struggle, between histories and between identities. Like many established diasporic collectives everywhere, this struggle encompasses the imprecise continuums of genealogy, cultural practices or historical legacy.<sup>667</sup> He is locked within a “diaspora space,” where tensions of power created “between old and new identities” hold sway, and where “the parameters of inclusion, exclusion, otherness and belonging are challenged.”<sup>668</sup> This is a perpetual struggle to *identify with* and to *belong to*.

What are the ‘old’ and ‘new’ identities inherent within the Malaysian Chinese struggle? A digression into Sinophone studies provides an insight, by drawing upon the intersections between multidisciplinary fields relating to China, the Chinese diaspora and Chinese transnationalism. This discourse avoids the notion of an existent Chinese essentialism which threads Sinitic cultures in a “hierarchical centring and linear rerouting back to the imagined ancestral homeland.”<sup>669</sup> Instead, it amplifies the local and endorses the heterogeneity of Sinitic cultures. As Shu-mei Shih explains:

Sinophone culture... is a transnational phenomenon as one can find it anywhere in the world, but in its specific expression and practice, it is different from place to place. Sinophone culture is therefore transnational in

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<sup>666</sup> Private correspondence, October 6, 2014.

<sup>667</sup> For perspectives on the multiplicity of global diaspora Chinese identities, see: Cushman and Wang, ed., *Changing Identities*; Tu Wei-ming, “Preface to the Stanford Edition,” in *The Living Tree*, ed. Tu Wei-ming (California: Stanford University Press, 1994); Allen Chun, “Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity,” *boundary 2*, 23, No. 2 (1996): 111-138; and Julia Kuehn, Kam Louie and David M. Pomfret, eds., *Diasporic Chineseness after the Rise of China*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013).

<sup>668</sup> Spencer, *Race and Ethnicity*, 191.

<sup>669</sup> Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese*, 45.

constitution and formation but local in practice and articulation.<sup>670</sup>

Within this discourse, Malaysian Chinese identities are not circumscribed by “a preference for the myth of return (the nostalgia for a lost origin) over the urgency of assimilating into the host society.”<sup>671</sup> Rather, E.K. Tan argues that the Sinophone condition is characterised by displacement and a longing to belong. This condition does not ascribe to extreme positions, such as that espoused by previous conceptions of the Chinese diaspora experience as *luoye-guigen* (falling leaves return to their roots) or *zancao-cugen* (to cut the grass and pull out the roots).<sup>672</sup> The former emphasises the driving myth of return to the motherland, while the latter reflects voluntary and involuntary assimilation leading to the elimination of racial identity and cultural heritage. Tan concurs with Wang Gungwu and Ling-Chi Wang that a more befitting paradigm is *luodi-shenggen* (to strike ground and grow roots) as this captures the essence of flexibility inherent to the diasporic condition and “balances the productivity of traditions and the potentiality of assimilation.”<sup>673</sup> This remains a destabilising concept however as the struggle to identify with the original and imaginary homelands persists. Thus, a space of ‘in-between’ best conjures the local realities of the Chinese diasporic subject.

The concept of the Sinophone is a useful launching point in illuminating the Malaysian Chinese dilemma of identifying as both Malaysian and Chinese. However, it also lends one to ask, why does this dichotomy endure? Why is there a need to identify with one or the other, or at all? As Taiwanese ethnologist Allen Chun has proposed, identity and its relevance is dictated by context; that is, it is invoked only when there is a “necessity to identify.” Accordingly, “there may be instances in which ethnicity is totally irrelevant.”<sup>674</sup> Turning this hypothesis on its head, what if ethnicity is *always* pertinent, regardless of whether one conceives of the ‘need’ to identify? Arguably, the Malaysian Chinese condition is, and has been, even historically, circumscribed by ethnicity; whether or not there has been impetus *to identify* as Chinese, the Chinese found himself *identified as* nevertheless. That

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<sup>670</sup> Shu-mei Shih, “What is Sinophone Studies?,” in *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, eds. Shu-mei Shih, et. al., (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 7.

<sup>671</sup> E.K. Tan, *Rethinking Chineseness: Translational Sinophone Identities in the Nanyang Literary World*, (New York: Cambria Press, 2013), 17.

<sup>672</sup> These literal translations are the author’s.

<sup>673</sup> Tan, *Rethinking Chineseness*, 16. The concept *luodi shenggen* was made popular by a conference and 1998 publication on the topic by Wang Gungwu and Ling-Chi Wang titled *The Chinese Diaspora*.

<sup>674</sup> Chun, “Fuck Chineseness:” 134-135.



is, the condition of being Chinese is not necessarily ascribed from within, it is prescribed from without.

During the Japanese occupation, to be identified as Chinese was potentially a matter of life and death. In the decades which marked the transformation of British Malaya into an independent state, the Chinese was compelled to consciously uncouple notions of ethnicity and nationality upon pain of being deported, incarcerated or ostracised. In contemporary Malaysia, ethnicity remains a marker of outsider status. Under these circumstances, the politics of exclusion, and the dilemmas of identity conjured, are a mainstay of Chinese experience. Identity is thus a constant evoked in lived experience; a signifier of not-quite-belonging.

The enduring sentiments of unbelonging are predicated upon “a history of anxiety that attends the condition of being not-at-home.”<sup>675</sup> Arguably, the sense of perpetual dislocation keeps the original-imagined homeland dichotomy alive. When one does not truly belong *here* nor *there*, the in-between space of displacement becomes the only possible refuge. That is, the original-versus-imaginary homelands conundrum and the ‘old’ Chinese-versus-‘new’ Malaysian identities dilemma are psychic manifestations of placelessness. To belong to *anywhere else* is to be irredeemably lost to the self or at the very least, to lose a part of the self. This sentiment is especially true of the generations who have been born and bred in Malaysia; they can no more deny they are Malaysian than they can deceive themselves they are not Chinese. The in-between space of being neither from *here* (original homeland) nor *there* (imaginary homeland) is all there is if one is to maintain self-authenticity. To remain authentic is to acknowledge that one is a hybridised subject, as reflected in the perpetual process of refining and redefining what it means to be a citizen of Malaysia yet ethnically Chinese. To do otherwise, by renouncing either identity, is to risk self-deception. The potential price paid as an ‘identity amputee’ is to be cast adrift, anchorless and rudderless.

And yet, the condition of displacement also offers the possibility for reinvention. In the ‘unhomely’ there is potentiality for freedom beyond nationalist discourses. The Indonesian-Chinese academic Ien Ang’s determined efforts to relegate her identity to the “unambiguous and undecided” and to recast herself as “a multiply situated subject without a homeland” springs to mind as an example of unbounded self-narrativisation.<sup>676</sup> As long as the Malaysian Chinese does not truly belong, he inhabits a diaspora space. He is free to conjure a transnational

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<sup>675</sup> Eddie Tay, *Colony, Nation and Globalisation: Not at Home in Singaporean and Malaysian Literature*, (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011), 151. For literary expressions of dislocation in Chinese, see: St. Andre, “You Can Never Go Home Again.”

<sup>676</sup> Ien Ang, “No Longer Chinese?,” 18.

imaginary which involves the “cultural deterritorialisation of identity and belonging that transcends the nation-state” and where “mobility and hybridity... decentres both the [original homeland] and the [imaginary homeland] as determinants of identity.”<sup>677</sup> This transnational imaginary represents a virtual site of belonging, where ‘home’ becomes an amalgamation of multiple sites – physical, communal and psychic – where one may find refuge and belongingness.<sup>678</sup>

Faced with the myriad possibilities offered by a transnational imaginary, the Chinese diasporic subject is nevertheless confronted by ubiquitous reminders of an ascendant China which brings into sharp relief the competing contours of Chineseness between “vernacular, localised, hybrid diasporic Chinese identities” and the “homogenising, essentialising and nationalising force of a global China.”<sup>679</sup> For Malaysian Chinese who suffer most acutely from a sense of displacement, the struggle often manifests in a sojourning into Chineseness, an inward journey in search of safe harbour, culminating in an anchoring of the self in imaginary roots through culture and heritage even though the *qiaoxiang* or home village remains resolutely Malaysia.<sup>680</sup> Arguably, (re)sinicisation represents a ‘return to roots’ of sorts while maintaining deference to the original homeland; that is, exodus is possible without dereliction.

There is a ‘return to roots’ phenomenon within segments of the Malaysian Chinese populace which has, thus far, yet to receive scholarly attention. There are however indications: one barometer is the number of Malaysian Chinese students enrolled in Chinese medium education. Ninety-five percent of Chinese parents now send their children to Chinese schools or colleges. This represents a notable increase compared to previous decades.<sup>681</sup> Granted, there has always been a steadfast core of pro-Chinese education proponents who regard Mandarin-language instruction as vital in safeguarding the transmission of Chinese identity and culture.<sup>682</sup> That a substantial number of parents appear to concur is significant, although it is acknowledged that pragmatism plays a role. The perspectives of Wynn Keng Loo and her husband illustrate contrasting motivations. Loo could not explain why it was important that her five-year-old son should be literate in

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<sup>677</sup> Ien Ang, “No Longer Chinese?,” 21.

<sup>678</sup> For a discussion on the multidimensional meanings of ‘home’ to diasporic or minority individuals, see: Becky Thompson and Sangeeta Tyagi, *Names We Call Homes: Autobiography on Racial Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>679</sup> Julia Kuehn, et. al., “China Rising: A View and Review of China’s Diasporas since the 1980s,” 10.

<sup>680</sup> Yow, “Weakening Ties.”

<sup>681</sup> For enrolment numbers up to the 1990s, see: Tan and Santhiram, *Education of Ethnic Minorities*, 92-108.

<sup>682</sup> Alan Collins, “Chinese Educationalists in Malaysia: Defenders of Chinese Identity,” *Asian Survey* 46, 2 (2006): 298–318.

Mandarin, except to say, “I am Chinese; it is a part of me.”<sup>683</sup> Her husband, who does not speak or write Chinese, was initially ambivalent, so she convinced him that this would promote their son’s future competitive advantage. Regardless of the impetus, the impact is undeniable; there is a contemporary generation of young Malaysian Chinese who are attuned to their Chineseness and able to engage with the larger Sinophone world in a common tongue.

Following the lifting of restrictions on travel to China in the 1980s, the number of Malaysian visitors has progressively increased. Among Asian nations, Malaysia now represents the third largest source country for visitors to China, after Japan and South Korea.<sup>684</sup> While there are no known available figures as to how many of these Malaysian travellers are ethnic Chinese, it is highly probable that this group constitutes the majority. A study on the spatial distribution of international tourists in China reveals that tourists from countries which share a strong Chinese background, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore, gravitate towards locations in the South and Southeast, among them Guangzhou, Fujian, Jiangxi, Hainan and Hunan. Their preferred destinations differ from those often frequented by other tourists and imply visits to ancestral sites. For such visitors, these travels may evoke “a sense of belonging that they are part of the great Chinese civilisation” and are “*long de zhuanren*, descendants of the dragon.”<sup>685</sup>

The momentum towards Chineseness is also reflected in contemporary practices of naming. Among the post-1990 generation in particular, it is commonplace for young Malaysian Chinese to sport given names rendered in *Pinyin*, the standard Mandarin transliteration. This marks a departure from the traditional norm of given names transliterated according to dialect association. If, as sociologist Hew Wai Weng claims, names shape culture and identity awareness, the orientation to *Pinyin* potentially signals an assertion of Chineseness predicated upon Mandarin as the de facto *lingua franca* of the Sinophone world.<sup>686</sup>

For some individuals, a ‘return to roots’ fulfills the twin desires of longing to belong with the need for a discernible historical self. To illustrate, we turn to brief portraits of several Malaysian Chinese. Jadryn Loo, for instance, revealed that she

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<sup>683</sup> Wynn Keng Loo, interview by author, September 30, 2014.

<sup>684</sup> China National Tourism Administration (CNTA), “Foreign Visitor Arrivals: January-December 2013,” January 16, 2014.

<sup>685</sup> Jadryn Loo, private correspondence, June 14, 2012.

<sup>686</sup> Hew Wai Weng, “Naming and Chinese Muslim Identities: Boundary-Making, Negotiation, and Hybridity in Malaysia,” in *Personal Names in Asia: History, Culture and Identity*, eds. Zheng Yangwen and Charles J-H Macdonald, (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010).

greet each morning accompanied by the strains of *Yiyongjun Jinxingqu*, the national anthem of the PRC.<sup>687</sup> Although we were in the lobby of a hotel in downtown Kuala Lumpur, she played the anthem on her mobile and sang along with gusto. To her, the anthem was a clarion call for Chinese everywhere to stand up and make their mark. Loo wears her pride in her Chinese heritage conspicuously. She is often garbed in a silk blouse with Mandarin collar, professes to be a Chinese tea connoisseur and readily broadcasts her frequent trips to China online.<sup>688</sup> A recent photo of her at Tiananmen Square in Beijing was captioned: “An annual homage to this special place in my heart.” Loo’s professed affinity for all things Chinese would not be so striking if not for her career choice; apart from being a practising lawyer, she is a Malaysian politician. This is quite unusual for non-Malay politicians; exhibiting ‘Malaysianness’ – such as dressing in a Malay *baju kurung* outfit and making speeches in the Malay language, for example – plays more effectively to a culturally-sensitive constituency and assures greater political currency.

Loo has a reputation as a political firebrand. Her unexpected defection from DAP in December 2003 to the MCA caused a firestorm.<sup>689</sup> MCA is the Chinese component within the ruling coalition government and coincidentally, also the third largest Chinese political party in the world after the Communist Party of China and the Kuomintang of Taiwan.<sup>690</sup> Her dedication to politics is born of a desire “to help my people, especially the Chinese,” and she sees no contradiction between her pro-China stance, championing equal rights for the ethnic Chinese, and her desire to better the country.<sup>691</sup> It is almost as if being pro-China and pro-Chinese are synonymous, and yet, these sympathies are not incongruous with being Malaysian.

Loo was not always so immersed in her Chineseness. She recalls that it was her time studying and working abroad in New Zealand which awoke a dormant pride within her, fuelled in part by her postgraduate studies on China, and in part by her tenure at the Department of Chinese Affairs under Prime Minister Helen Clark. “I came to really appreciate what it means to be Chinese,” she said, “And to marvel at this ancient civilisation and culture of our ancestors.”<sup>692</sup> In Loo’s estimation, the Malaysian Chinese condition is increasingly shaped by the PRC’s

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<sup>687</sup> Jadryn Loo, interview with author, July 15, 2012.

<sup>688</sup> Jadryn Loo, *Speaking Out Blog*, <http://jadrynloo.blogspot.co.uk/>.

<sup>689</sup> Utusan Malaysia, “DAP’s Grooming Efforts Affected by Jadryn Loo’s Resignation,” December 31, 2003.

<sup>690</sup> Heng Pek Koon, “Chinese Responses,” 44.

<sup>691</sup> Jadryn Loo, private correspondence, June 14, 2012.

<sup>692</sup> Jadryn Loo, interview with author, July 15, 2012.

influence. She believes that China's growing eminence has endowed greater importance upon the ethnic Chinese. When asked to explicate, she replied:

[Malaysian Chinese] are important because of the rise of China and our connections to China. Most of all, we are Chinese. Chinese will help the Chinese no matter what the circumstances. The Malays can't bully us now because our big brother China is there. Malays can no longer ask us to go back to China as and when they like.<sup>693</sup>

When asked how China's influence promotes the cause of the ethnic Chinese, Loo replied, "If anything were to happen to the Chinese here again, China will use its soft power to punish the deserved. Indonesia is an example when racial riots happened in 1998 and it was not 'rehabilitated' until recently."<sup>694</sup> Like many, Loo appears convinced that China metes out retaliatory sanctions through unofficial channels. There is, for example, an urban myth concerning Robert Kuok, Malaysia's wealthiest entrepreneur.<sup>695</sup> It was rumoured that Kuok was strong-armed into divesting his sugar business to the state despite press reports to the contrary.<sup>696</sup> The Chinese government supposedly responded by capping China's annual import of Malaysian palm oil. This story is unverifiable; however, Kuok's leverage within Malaysian and Chinese corridors of power is renowned.<sup>697</sup> He has been linked to numerous development projects on the mainland, including the China World Trade Centre in Beijing. He was also invited to sit on the committee which oversaw Hong Kong's return to China. Further, it is openly acknowledged that Kuok's purchase of *South China Morning Post* from the media baron Rupert Murdoch, was to fulfill a "favour to the Chinese government to keep it in safe hands" (that is, pro-Chinese).<sup>698</sup>

Kuok seems keenly aware of the precariousness of his position as a Hong Kong-based Malaysian magnate with substantial business interests in China. When it comes to his dealings with the Malaysian authorities, says securities

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<sup>693</sup> Jadryn Loo, private correspondence, June 14, 2012.

<sup>694</sup> Jadryn Loo, private correspondence, June 13, 2012.

<sup>695</sup> DAP, "Don't Mess with the Sugar King, Jibby," September 24, 2012. This same story is repeated, almost word for word, across multiple blogs and websites, and has been duplicated in chain emails, purportedly originating from a commentary by *Zhong Zheng News*.

<sup>696</sup> Kathy Fong and Jose Barrock, "The Reason for Kuok's Exit," *The Edge Malaysia*, November 9, 2009.

<sup>697</sup> Edmund Terence Gomez, *Chinese Business in Malaysia: Accumulation, Accommodation and Ascendancy*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 40-49.

<sup>698</sup> See: John Berthelsen, "The South China Morning Post's Revolving Door Revolves Again," *Asia Sentinel*, March 4, 2011; Chanyaporn Chanjaroen and William Mellor, "Billionaire Kuok Says His Empire Can Last 'Generations,'" *Bloomberg*, January 31, 2013.

analyst Hugh Peyman, Kuok has “had to prove he was a better Malaysian than anyone else.”<sup>699</sup> It is perhaps in this spirit that Kuok donated US\$30 million towards the construction of Xiamen University’s first foreign campus in Malaysia.<sup>700</sup> Kuok’s endowment was announced in tandem with President Xi Jinping’s state visit to Malaysia in October 2013. Why was this gift announced under the aegis of Beijing diplomacy? Is this reflective of PRC’s ‘soft power’ diplomacy in action? In an interview with Malaysian media, Kuok described his largesse as a “gesture of appreciation,” saying, “I only wish Malaysia well.”<sup>701</sup> In describing his affection for Malaysia, he explained, “Roots are roots, except that my other root is the root of my parents – and that is China. I am twin-rooted.” When asked to comment on racial discrimination in Malaysia, he sidestepped the question, saying, “This will only lead to highly controversial statements, which is not good for anybody. One must never hurt those Chinese who are living in Malaysia, never be the cause of any kind of inter-racial hostility.” While Kuok appears keen to prove his Malaysianness, he has also actively promoted himself as a “patriotic *huaqiao*” or Overseas Chinese.<sup>702</sup>

Kuok’s savviness in exploiting his twin roots is obvious. In similar fashion, is the resurgence in commemorations of Chinese war memory in Malaysia indicative of communal elites doing the same? In initiating such activities, and actively advocating participation from PRC officials, are these elites also capitalising on their dual identities? Of course the motivations of a few cannot be simply transposed to the experiences of the many. As Donald Nonini has remarked, “diasporic Chinese throughout the Asia Pacific [cannot] be reduced to being represented metonymically by a very few, spectacularly successful capitalist exemplars, however much rightful ethnic or racial pride might seem to call for it.”<sup>703</sup> Nevertheless, that many have been drawn to cultivate their twin roots and to retrace their Chinese heritage cannot be denied.

For some, the return to their Chinese roots is an intimate, private affair, a regathering of ancestral threads. In 1999, at the age of 53, Leong Sau Chan decided to make a trip to locate her father’s ancestral village in Shunde district,

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<sup>699</sup> Andrew Tanzer, “World’s Shrewdest Businessman: Robert Kuok,” *Forbes*, July 28, 1997.

<sup>700</sup> This represents a significant symbolic gesture as Xiamen University was established by the Malayan Chinese entrepreneur Tan Kah Kee in 1921.

<sup>701</sup> Li Xueying, “Robert Kuok Still Rooted to Malaysia despite Spending 40 years in Hong Kong,” *The Star*, October 9, 2013.

<sup>702</sup> Woo Joon San, “George Yeo Yong-boon: Staking a Future in the Homeland,” *China Daily Asia*, May 3, 2013.

<sup>703</sup> Donald M. Nonini, “Shifting Identities, Positioned Imaginaries: Transnational Traversals and Reversals by Malaysian Chinese,” in *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*, edited by Aihwa Ong and Donald M. Nonini, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 222.

Guangdong province. She is the third among 10 siblings. All she had by way of a compass was “a little book, written by grandfather.”<sup>704</sup> It was a record of the Leong family lineage tracing back four generations. However her attempt to locate the clan’s *ci tang* or ancestral hall proved fruitless.

Her brother, Leong Keng Sun, was more persistent. He made three trips to Shunde district and with the help of friends in Hong Kong, Taiwan and China, eventually located the Leong family ancestral hall in 2012. (See: Figure 32.) Since then, both sister and brother have made subsequent visits. The current ancestral hall is a replacement structure, located about 500 meters away from where the original *Dong Jian Liang Gong Ci* (East Stream Leong Ancestral Hall) once stood, the latter now derelict and in ruins. The ancestral register, housed previously in a metal box on the premises, which recorded the births and deaths, also migration and return details of clan members, has been lost. When asked what her impressions were when she visited the *ci tang* for the first time, Sau Chan exclaimed:

Overwhelmed! I knelt down and lit joss sticks. At last, I could call on my ancestors. I thanked them, because without them, there won’t be me. I’m so glad I got a chance to pay my respects. At least I have roots. I’m so happy I reconnected, that means I didn’t just pop up from nowhere! I am proud to know I have a family tree, not like the Monkey King, popping out of a rock!

Sau Chuan’s professions of joy at knowing, at last, that “at least I have roots” were tinged with relief. Never mind that the ancestral traces are faint; her historical self had been legitimised, linked to a verifiable location and anchored in a specific past.

Her brother Keng Sun had multiple motives for tracing the family genealogy: to validate the existence of verifiable forebears, to record for posterity, and to forge a sense of connection with a father who had passed away too early. He recalled that his father often invited friends over for a meal, and inevitably, in their discussions “they always touched on China.”<sup>705</sup> “He would say, so proudly, ‘We are Shunde people,’” he recalled, “During his lifetime, Malaya was anti-Communist and China was communist. If he had lived another 15 years, he would have made a trip to look for his Shunde clan, his father’s Sun Leong Poh clan, and his ancestors.”

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<sup>704</sup> Leong Sau Chan, interview by author, April 30, 2014.

<sup>705</sup> Leong Keng Sun, interview by author, June 3, 2014.



Figure 31. Leong clan ancestral halls in Shunde district, Foshan prefecture, Guangdong province.

Top: The original site. Bottom: The current site. Source: Leong Keng Sun.





Figure 32. Migrant story: Leong-Lim family portraits.

Top: Lim family portrait. Lim Lan Ying is seated second from left. Her maid is to her left.

Bottom: Wedding of Leong Hon Kwong to Lim Lan Ying in Kuala Lumpur, 1939.

Source: Leong Keng Sun.

Keng Sun's quest to uncover the family's history did not end with locating the ancestral hall; he also made it a point to record family stories, remembered from his youth, now meticulously documented through notes, photos and videos. When asked what the two-year search had meant to him, he answered, "Fantastic! At least there is a history; we know where we come from. It was difficult and frustrating but now that it is done, all the Leongs will know. When I die, someone else [in the family] will know the story."

Sociologist Paul Thompson describes family stories as "symbolic coinage of exchange between the generations, of family transmission."<sup>706</sup> Such transmissions shape family 'scripts' and enforce perceived inherited instincts or repeated patterns. These often unconscious, invisible threads of family history exert powerful behavioural influences in the lives of successive generations.<sup>707</sup> In the Leong siblings' retelling of their family history, several scripts emerged. These revolved around the themes of resilience, achievement, also pride in their Chineseness. For instance, the siblings were perceptibly proud that their grandfather, Leong Hoe Keng, was a *xiu cai* or scholar-official who had passed the entry level imperial examinations. Despite this, Hoe Keng and his brother decided to brave the unknown by venturing abroad. Keng Sun retraced their steps, between Shunde and Shenzhen, by road. The journey took him three hours. "Sometime between 1895 and 1900, no one knows for certain," said Keng Sun, "They walked all the way to get on a ship. It must have taken days!" Similarly, the siblings were proud of how their maternal grandfather Lim Tong and great-grandfather, Lim Tai, had overcome the odds. They had migrated to Malaya with little. Lim Tai was a carpenter by trade who eventually built a thriving undertaker business, and even owned an estate which supplied wood for the enterprise.

It is noteworthy that Hoe Keng eventually named his sons Hon Meng, Hon Kwong and Hon Chor. 'Hon' is the Cantonese transliteration of 'Han' meaning ethnic Chinese; thus, their names can be read as 'Wise Chinese,' 'Brilliant Chinese' and 'First Chinese' respectively. Did Hoe Keng wish to remind his sons, all born in Malaya, to remember their Han roots? Their father, Leong Hon Kwong, was also a learned man. Prior to the Japanese occupation, he had taught Chinese classics at a local school and was an ardent Kuomintang supporter. After the war, he rose to prominence within the Malayan Civil Service as state assistant comptroller.

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<sup>706</sup> Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson, eds., *Between Generations: Family Models, Myths & Memories* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 36.

<sup>707</sup> Anna Ancelin Schützenberger, *The Ancestor Syndrome*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Hove: Brunner-Routledge, 2004).

For Keng Sun, the stories he had overheard of the Japanese occupation from his parents flowed into his personal memories of the Malayan Emergency years and even the civil riots of 1969. In his recounting, there was palpable sense of persecution and even betrayal. He spoke of the harsh treatment of the Chinese at the hands of the Japanese; his uncle had “got a whacking, kicking and slaps.” His parents had tried to hide in the jungle because “there was no protection from the British at all.” He remembers the Fifties and Sixties as trying times, when “any Chinese found to be involved in or suspected of criminal activities would be sent to China. My classmate’s father, he was a gangster, he was deported.”

These historical episodes served to reinforce his perception that the Chinese were singled out as Other: “The communists were against the Japanese, the British were using the Chinese, the British and communists worked hand in glove, and the Malays were nobody.” In his view, independence initially brought further disaster. “It was after Tunku [Abdul Rahman], the communists wanted their say, and that’s when they were disallowed,” he said, “A lot of the Chinese joined the communists; they had wormed their way into the schools. They went into the jungle. Only the communists struggled for the Chinese.” The riots of 1969 left a particularly bitter taste in his mouth as he witnessed Malays, under the protection of the Malay Regiment, set fire to Chinese homes. Two of his friends volunteered to join “vigilante groups to protect Chinese neighbourhoods.” After curfew hours, “only the army and police, the military trucks, were allowed on the road, and some Malays, they hopped onto these trucks. Two of my friends were guarding the roads and when [the trucks] came, they were shot.”

Within the Leong family history, the migrant theme looms large across multiple generations. Among the 10 Leong siblings, seven have made their homes abroad. Of the generation after, 21 grandchildren in all, six continue to reside in Malaysia while the rest are scattered across the globe. What does this migratory script suggest in terms of this family’s sense of belonging, or perhaps unbelonging? Clearly, the migrant theme has been repeated and reinforced through successive generations, rather than abandoned. The Leong family appear to take pride in the fact that many of their kinfolk have managed to make their way to more liberal climes. As a result, resettlement abroad has not been experienced as a wrenching uprooting; instead, emigration is a pragmatic move towards developing a ‘security net.’ Thus, to the Leongs, growing roots on ever further foreign soil is considered a success, to be admired and encouraged.

In contrast to the Leong siblings’ search for their ancestral history, Chai Hon Keong has always known his family story. His father, Chai Wai Leong, was the fourth among seven sons, and with his father Chai Shu Fang’s blessing, was the

first in the family to leave Hepozhen in the early 1930s “to prospect in Malaya to evaluate opportunities.”<sup>708</sup> Later, three other brothers followed in his footsteps though the second brother, Chai Mee Ting, left just before the Japanese invasion of Malaya and was not heard from again. The sojourning brothers promised that once they made their fortune, they would build a stone house for their kinfolk.

The ‘Big House’ in Xin Rong Cun village was erected between 1949 and 1950. Chai Hon Keong described the site: “All four families who lived there had separate kitchens and separate living quarters. Within the compound, there is also an ancestral hall. It is a house enclosed by surrounding walls with big gardens. Three *longan* trees Wai Leong planted are still there.” From his description, one can imagine how grand this house must have seemed when it was completed. Not only did it signal success and prosperity, it stood as a physical testament to the strength of the family lineage.<sup>709</sup> Unfortunately, in fulfilling their filial obligation, the brothers unwittingly imperiled their parents. When China became embroiled in the Communist Revolution, Chai Shu Fang was “branded a capitalist landlord, resulting in punishment which likely shortened his life.” His sons, who had “intended to return to China to settle after making their success in Malaya,” found their hopes dashed. Chai Shu Fang passed away in 1957, physically estranged from his sons in Malaya.

Over the last decade, Chai Hon Keong has made regular trips to Hepozhen. He found the ancestral home abandoned, lying fallow from disrepair. His mission has been to restore it to some semblance of its former glory. In so doing, he has restored his family’s ancestral legacy. For him, home has always meant Malaysia, and he has never questioned his Chinese roots nor felt any conflict about the duality of his heritage – it is simply the way it is. Through his labour of filial piety, he has reinforced the family’s ancestral ties and preserved its history so that it will not slip into antiquity. His story illustrates that one can return to, and even nurture, one’s historical roots, and yet have an entrenched sense of belongingness to the Malaysian homeland.

There is a marked contrast in sentiments between those who have reconnected with their ancestral histories and those who feel culturally and historically disenfranchised yet hew so hopefully to an idealised vision of *bangsa Malaysia*. In the absence of a discernible collective past, those who have managed to construct some semblance of a historical self have found a way to accommodate

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<sup>708</sup> Chai Hon Keong, private correspondence, June 11 and 14, 2014.

<sup>709</sup> On the significance of the architecture of traditional Chinese homes as familial symbols, see: Nancy Jervis, “The Meaning of Jia,” in *House Home Family: Living and Being Chinese*, eds. Ronald G. Knapp and Kai-Yin Lo, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 223-234.



the duality of their identities despite the lived realities of graded cultural citizenship. Paradoxically, the sense of unbelonging is most keenly felt among those who feel adrift, removed from their ancestral or cultural roots, and also spurned in their hopes of being recognised as authentically Malaysian. Often, such sentiments, as we shall see in the next segment, promote the adoption of transnational strategies.



Figure 33. Contemporary Malaysian Chinese: a spectrum of self-identification.

Clockwise from top left:

Politician Jadryn Loo at home in her trademark silk blouse with Mandarin collar.

Politician Hannah Yeoh in red floral *baju kurung* Malay dress on Independence Day. Her attempts to register the race of her children as 'Malaysian' were unsuccessful.

Siew Yong Chang: "I am not Chinese, I am Malaysian."

Leong Sau Chan in Shunde in November 2013; she captioned this photo 'ancestral place.' Sources: Photos courtesy of those depicted.

## Walking on Two Roads

Chinese war narratives of resistance and martyrdom are antithetical to a national historiography which prioritises Malay supremacy. If Malaysian history represents a cultural battleground, Chinese war memory is a casualty. Chinese memory-work has produced a range of reactions, from deliberate forgetting to selective remembering. The history of this collective is thus clouded in ambiguity, resulting in postwar generations of Malaysian Chinese who are historically adrift. More insidiously, exclusion from the national narrative augments feelings of unbelonging and rejection. Some have sought to anchor themselves within their familial history; some circumvent the lack of a discernible historical past by embracing their cultural heritage, while others have chosen to jettison the past altogether.

These multiple responses conform to contrasting discourses surrounding 'culture' and 'belonging' within Malaysian Chinese society. Subjected to "Malay indigenist discourses [which] act to discipline, register, and locate Chinese as questionable and problematic citizens, for while residing in Malaysia, they are positioned within Malaysian space yet are not identified as being of Malaysian society or history," one strain emphasises the simultaneity of being "properly Malaysian and traditionally Chinese," while another seeks to "affirm local identities and authentic national Malaysianness."<sup>710</sup>

To transcend the politics of identities imposed upon them, Malaysian Chinese ascribe to various transnational practices to capitalise on their mobility and modernity. These traverses follow well-worn paths: education abroad, employment overseas and, in some cases, obtaining foreign citizenship. Nonini describes such practices as evidence of a "middling transnationalism," evoked by the imagery of "walking on two roads, not one."<sup>711</sup> Among Chinese diasporic groups, this strategy of "flexible citizenship" is not unusual. Among those who have settled and flourished in postcolonial states, many remain "politically alien, or alienable." As a result, to navigate the "disjunctures between political landscapes and shifting opportunities of globalisation," many view residence or citizenship abroad as a form of 'insurance' to mitigate against political insecurity and to provide access to global labour markets.<sup>712</sup> Choy See Kuan's attitude is illustrative. Despite being Chinese, her son was fortunate to receive a state-sponsored scholarship to study abroad. Upon his graduation, she encouraged him to find work there. "He'll be safer," she said, "Because you never know what can happen in

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<sup>710</sup> Nonini, "Shifting Identities," 207-208.

<sup>711</sup> Nonini, "Shifting Identities," 210.

<sup>712</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 17-18.

Malaysia. And who knows? Maybe we can eventually leave too.”<sup>713</sup> To her dismay, he opted to return home.

With every success story of a Malaysian ‘making it overseas,’ there are corresponding public debates about ‘brain drain.’<sup>714</sup> It is estimated that there are up to 1.4 million Malaysians residing abroad.<sup>715</sup> Other projections suggest that the figures may be as high as 2 million. These estimates do not include those who have dual citizenship or who have surrendered their Malaysian citizenship. Possession of dual citizenship is illegal though the process of divesting oneself of Malaysian citizenship is a self-elective one. Anecdotal evidence suggests that few give up their Malaysian citizenship so as not to foreclose the possibility of a future return and so that they may visit their family readily. Hence, it is impossible to know how large the Malaysian diaspora really is.

Among those who have emigrated, available evidence implies that the Chinese comprise the largest group. A World Bank 2011 report notes that “Malaysia’s diaspora has a strongly ethnic dimension,” and apart from opportunities overseas, “perceptions of social injustice appear to feature prominently in the decision to migrate.”<sup>716</sup> It is projected that if the current emigration trend continues, complemented by natural attrition due to low birth rates, the Chinese minority population will decline to 18.6 percent by the year 2035.<sup>717</sup> The Malaysian government is attuned to the economic implications.<sup>718</sup> It established TalentCorp, an outreach program that has cost US\$20 million to date, to attract Malaysians home. However, the outcome has been lacklustre, registering only 2,500 returnees since its inception in 2011.<sup>719</sup> The increasingly illiberal climate in Malaysia exacerbates the situation.<sup>720</sup> Even liberal Malays, in reaction to growing Islamic fundamentalism, are following in the steps of minority emigrants.<sup>721</sup>

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<sup>713</sup> Pseudonym, interview by author, October 12, 2013.

<sup>714</sup> For example: Adrian Wan, “Xi Jinping Surprises with Reference to Malaysian Singer Fish Leong,” *South China Morning Post*, October 6, 2013; Jerome Kugan, “Ipoh-born Wins MasterChef UK with Nasi Lemak, Wonton Soup,” *The Star*, May 17, 2014; Malay Mail, “In Tale of ‘Rainbow Loom’ Maker, Racial Quota Rears its Head Again,” September 27, 2014.

<sup>715</sup> World Bank, *Malaysia Economic Monitor: Brain Drain* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2011).

<sup>716</sup> World Bank, *Malaysia Economic Monitor*, 108.

<sup>717</sup> Wong Chun Wai, “Where Have All the Chinese Gone?,” *The Star*, May 9, 2010; and Helen Ang, “Honey, I Shrunk the Chinese!,” *Centre for Policy Initiatives*, December 9, 2009.

<sup>718</sup> Liz Gooch, “Loss of Young Talent Thwarts Malaysia’s Growth,” *New York Times*, October 1, 2010.

<sup>719</sup> Md Izwan, “Malaysia Struggles to Woo Malaysian Experts Home Due to ‘Better Life’ Abroad,” *The Malaysian Insider*, April 8, 2014.

<sup>720</sup> The Economist, “Repression in Malaysia: Disconnect,” April 11, 2015.

<sup>721</sup> Amy Chew, “Malay Muslims fleeing country as fundamentalism takes hold,” *South China Morning Post*, December 14, 2014.

Wynn Keng Loo is among the many Malaysian Chinese who live and work abroad. She intended to be away for two years, but has lived in the United Kingdom now for over a decade. Her son, who was born there, has right of abode. When asked why she decided to stay, she said, "The politics isn't great, the economy isn't great, and education isn't great." When prompted, she elaborated: "The Chinese are victimised. When we live there we accept it because there's no choice. When we are away, you can see it more clearly, and you have choice." Asked if she would ever return, she shrugged, "Maybe, when we retire."

In a survey conducted as part of the aforementioned World Bank report, respondents were asked whether they felt a strong sense of patriotism for and/or emotional attachment to Malaysia – 35 percent 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed,' while 19 percent felt 'unsure.' That 54 percent felt little patriotism or emotional attachment towards their homeland, or are – at the very least – undecided is poignant. A quarter was adamant that they would not return to Malaysia permanently, while 44 percent remained uncertain. The wounds of displacement, it appears, run deep. As long as policy-making is based "on identity," posits political analyst Amy Freedman, "further incorporation of the Chinese with the larger Malay population is likely to be minimal."<sup>722</sup> Thus, the Malaysian Chinese are destined to remain, for the foreseeable future, an Other within Malaysian society.

Despite continued marginalisation, most Malaysian Chinese identify themselves as Malaysians first and Chinese second. Using this yardstick, state endeavours in inculcating a Malaysian national identity have been productive, although not unequivocally successful. Jennifer Leow's story is illustrative. After graduating in nursing in Sydney, Australia, she returned to work in Malaysia for several years. Frustrated at the lack of career advancement, she returned to Sydney where her prospects were better. With the influx of Chinese nationals to Australia, she has found herself interacting with more mainland Chinese among peers and patients. This interaction has prompted her to question her Chineseness. She began taking Mandarin language classes, and *erhu* and *guzheng* lessons.<sup>723</sup> These experiences engendered an appreciation for Chinese culture, although the uncertainty remains: "I don't really feel like an ethnic Chinese because I wasn't born and bred in China. I am a Malaysian. I am a Chinese born in Malaysia."<sup>724</sup> In 2014, Leow successfully applied for Australian citizenship. Unlike others who have covertly retained dual citizenship, she decided to surrender her Malaysian nationality. Australia is now officially, permanently home. And yet, she

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<sup>722</sup> Amy L. Freedman, "The Effect of Government Policy and Institutions on Chinese Overseas Acculturation: The Case of Malaysia," *Modern Asian Studies* 35, 2 (2001): 440.

<sup>723</sup> *Erhu* is a stringed musical instrument. *Guzheng* is a Chinese zither.

<sup>724</sup> Jennifer Leow, private correspondence, November 26, 2013.



remains torn: "I don't feel like an Aussie but a Malaysian with Aussie citizenship." Her struggle of mediating multiple identities continues.

Issues of identification are both highly subjective and deeply personal. For many Malaysian Chinese, the process of self-identification involves accommodating national and ethnic dualities. This process is complicated by the lack of historical knowledge from which to derive awareness of a sense of a historical or collective self.<sup>725</sup> For some, the absence of a historical past has necessitated a search for 'usable' cultural markers, be it familial, ancestral or cultural. For those who experienced the war, memory of the past remains fraught and contested: survivors and relatives of victims continue to mourn their war dead, while Chinese communal elite reinterpret Chinese war memory to validate the community's assertions of belonging within Malaysian society.

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<sup>725</sup> Assmann and Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity:" 130.

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the influence of Chinese war memory in the making of contemporary Malaysian Chinese identities. Chinese experience of the Japanese occupation of British Malaya between 1941 and 1945 was prioritised because of its significance in the historical trajectory of the Chinese in the territory. The research premise rested upon uncovering the associations between memory and history with processes of identity construction. The challenges and limitations inherent in a study of this nature must be acknowledged. To begin with, the premise upon which this thesis rests is potentially contentious. Extrapolating identity-making from both the presence and absence of historical memory is a difficult and often necessarily subjective task. Further, identity is an exceedingly subjective ideation; how a person self-identifies and represents himself to the 'world' outside of himself is highly judicious. Different arenas of expression encourage switching and shifting along a spectrum of identities. Additionally, memory and history do not represent a neutral accounting of factual events which have come before. Their relevance to the individual and the collective lies in the 'use-value' of the past in the present where memory-work inscribes and reinscribes the past as cultural commodities within a repository of symbolic identity markers. Hence, the cultural production of identity, memory and history is not free from the constraints of social frameworks. Indeed, social contexts and social relativities provide the scaffolding for their construction and perpetuation. Thus, this study presents a bold approach to interrogating the links between identity, memory and history. The outcomes are uneven, raising questions even as they answer others. However, by expanding discourse, often in unexpected directions, this thesis challenges the notion of identity construction as a primarily cultural expression, and paves the way for a proposed framework of study which prioritises the historical self as vital to the process.

Thus, Chinese war memory cannot be examined in isolation. Deliberations must take into account how Chinese historical experience, underpinned by racial dogmas which circumscribe the Chinese as a distinct, separate and migrant Other within Malayan/Malaysian society, may exert their influence in modulating war memory. Consequently, this study explored how remembrances of the occupation have evolved over time, foregrounded against the culmination of Malaysia into an independent and later a highly industrialised nation-state; a process paralleled by the transformation of the Chinese from sojourner to settler, from migrant to citizen. Observed ambivalence towards war memory hints at the presence of silences,

raising questions regards transmission, suppression and marginalisation, and whether unexpressed memory 'leaks' into the consciousness of successive postwar generations, inadvertently shaping conflicts of identification. Thus, tracing the undulations of war memory and its attendant silences, it was proposed, would reveal how the Chinese have come to negotiate their past and also the duality of their national and ethnic identities.

Three lines of inquiry were pursued to develop a cogent investigation. The first involved delving into civilian experiences of the occupation. To that end, archival research, consisting primarily of war crimes trial cases and supplemented by print media sources, was utilised. This resulted in a methodical survey of Japanese war atrocities; an exercise which has not, as far as this author is aware, been previously attempted. This undertaking was necessary to produce a comprehensive composite of civilian lived experience and highlight interactions between various social actors. The details gleaned from this composite served as valuable reference in later deliberating the coherence of individual testimonies and communal narratives. The presence of incompatibilities signalled that selective aspects of war memory may have been potentially suppressed, manipulated or valorised. The outcome of this exercise addresses a conspicuous gap on civilian war experience within existing historiography. Academic discourses on Chinese war experience predominantly evoke the *sook ching* massacres of February to April 1942. However, this purge, as was demonstrated, was merely a chapter within a wider catalogue of oppressive measures adopted by the Japanese military in asserting control over the colony.

The preliminary typology of war atrocities and ensuing analysis which eventuated expands existing discourse on Japanese occupation historiography. It not only contributes to knowledge on Japanese war crimes in Malaya, it provides a new perspective on Japanese occupation policies through the lens of civilian encounters. By categorising war crimes, we are able to extract fundamental data to determine the prevalence of atrocities, their frequency, the methods employed, the victims involved and the geographical extent of operations. This approach provides a measure of certainty and avoids generalisation. It also allows for a multitude of divergent voices – of victims, perpetrators and witnesses alike – to emerge in their own words. Too often, the experiences of prominent civilians and military personnel are documented in historical accounts while those of the masses are sidelined. Using this approach, it was possible to include the experiences of individuals across a broad social spectrum. We learnt not only what they endured, but how they felt and what they thought.

The composite picture of the occupation which developed, it is argued, provides for a more nuanced understanding of how the occupation touched lives. While oral testimonies or written memoirs may achieve a similar objective, that is, to record recollections, this approach provides a distinct advantage. The testimonies gleaned from the trials were raw and unadorned; they had not been filtered through the passage of time. Further, as this method necessarily involves examination of a substantial number of cases, the information gathered can be triangulated to provide for more accurate assessments. For instance, in stating that mass killings were numerous, we can say with certainty that one-third of the atrocities examined involved mass killings, the earliest during the *sook ching* operations of February 1942, the last in September 1945, with an escalation in incidences between June and September 1945. This approach to the study of war crimes, it is suggested, can serve as a model for future comparative studies in other occupied territories in Southeast Asia. That the Japanese devised elaborate strategies and operationalised calculated manoeuvres to mediate and manipulate social complexities is deserving of further study. Such studies will yield insight into the inner workings of the Japanese military administration in managing diverse populations across multiple territories in the region, and enhance knowledge on Japanese imperialism in the Asia-Pacific theatre. More importantly, it will excavate civilian experiences, affording them the significance long denied.

The exposition on war atrocities confirms that the Chinese were disproportionately affected. It also affirms that persistent and random violence was visited upon the whole populace, a fact often overlooked. This outcome challenges simplifying myths of Malay collaboration and Chinese victimhood, and eschews representation of the occupation in simple, racial terms. The inadvertent hand of the British is discernible in creating conditions conducive to the perpetuation of these myths. The conciliatory stance adopted by the British towards collaboration consigned the issue to ambiguity. Meanwhile, British sympathy for Chinese suffering allowed the collective to assume the mantle of victimhood, almost to the exclusion of all other ethnic groups. As a result, there has been little space for introspection and these myths have remained largely unchallenged. The pernicious repercussions continue to shape communal narratives and contribute to perceptions of the war in racialised terms. For instance, it was demonstrated that victimhood cannot be conveniently equated with resistance; many became casualties through no instigation on their part. This however has not barred communal remembrance of the Chinese fallen as 'martyrs' or 'patriots.' The subtext to this narrative infers that the Chinese resisted and sacrificed. Conversely, the unexpressed implication is the Malays capitulated and did little to defend Malaya.

Accordingly, through Chinese eyes, how can their claims of belonging – paid for in blood – be denied?

The picture of the occupation which emerged reveals that civilian life was infused with unmitigated fear. Widespread local complicity socialised terror, sowed seeds of mistrust and encouraged silence. The prevailing atmosphere not only exacerbated interracial divisions, it deepened them. Armed Chinese resistance heightened Malay fears of Chinese irredentism; the Chinese appeared determined to wrest Malaya from the Malays. Malay tolerance towards the Chinese, precarious at the best of times, would never fully recover. Conversely, Malay deference to the occupiers cemented Chinese convictions that they were traitorous. Not only did they appear indifferent to Chinese suffering, some were willing participants in enforcing Japanese oppression. Prior congenial relations appeared to have been a sham; in times of strife, the Malays could not be trusted. Thus, the bitter legacy of the occupation cannot be deduced simply from body counts and other physical damage wrought; more insidiously, it compounded negative Malay-Chinese perceptions of the other.

The second line of inquiry focussed on exploring divergences between communal and national narratives of the war past by examining multiple sites of memory. It was argued that the prevailing paradigm of Malay hegemony is not robust enough to account for the presence of disparate narratives. While national sites have become increasingly Malay-centric – partly to disavow the nation of its colonial past, partly to reinforce Malay claims to indigeneity – motivations for the perpetuation of Chinese sites of memory are not as explicit. Some promote remembrance of the war dead, others seek to record events for posterity and still others encourage vigilance against a repeat of Japanese imperialism. Counter-narratives have also emerged to directly challenge the official narrative by expounding a non-racialised ‘people’s history.’

Visible manifestations of Chinese memory-work have become conspicuously politicised in recent decades. Communal elites and community organisations actively resurrect memory of Chinese sacrifice to legitimise Chinese claims of belonging. Chinese anti-Japanese resistance is conflated with Malayan patriotism, a conduit towards integrating Chinese war experience into the Malaysian anti-colonial narrative. And yet, in light of China’s prominence and the ensuing elevation of Sino-Malaysia ties, these narratives have become increasingly and somewhat incongruously yoked to China’s War of Resistance. The resinicisation of Chinese war memory endorses a Sino-centric Chinese essentialism, thus tacitly promoting dual identification with both the original and ancestral homelands. The motivations and ramifications are unclear; does

condoning ethnic essentialism hinder the inculcation of a shared Malaysian identity? Conversely, is resinicisation a manifestation of ethnic Chinese frustrations? Or simply a pragmatic overture to capitalise on Chinese 'twin roots'?

The third line of inquiry involved gathering multiple Malaysian Chinese perspectives of the war past through informal polling, interviews and focus group discussions. Among those of the war generation, the occupation evoked varied recollections: of deprivation, personal loss or a heightened awareness of the Chinese as a targeted minority among the races. Many chose to submerge what they had experienced or witnessed because Chinese war memory, with its confused narratives of resistance and subversion, had little currency in the postwar milieu which emerged. For many contemporary Malaysian Chinese, allowing the past to slip into antiquity is preferable to confronting potential irksome issues of persecution, collaboration or interracial strife. Further, memory of the war conjures an Overseas Chinese migrant past; it is a reminder of Chinese Otherness within Malayan/Malaysian society. Unintentionally however, the trauma of the past has seeped into the present. The Malaysian Chinese condition is characterised by an entrenched anxiety of remaining outsiders. Beneath the yearning to be recognised as genuinely Malaysian lies an undercurrent of wariness, born of the fear of being singled out and turned upon.

Thus, on multiple levels, there is little inducement for the average Malaysian to remember or to uncover the war past in all its complexities. The Japanese occupation has become, to all intents and purposes, a forgotten war within the annals of Malaysian history. Collective memory of the occupation has been displaced by an official narrative promoting Malaya as victim of an imperialist conflict between Britain and Japan. The Malayan Emergency has not suffered the same fate, even though in many respects it too was an imported conflict to contain global communist influence. The prominence of the MPAJA/MNLA in both historical episodes casts the ethnic Chinese in the role of nemesis. That this movement actively engaged in anti-Japanese activities is irrefutable; that their sole motivation was to defend Malaya is debatable. Among the MCP cadre, there was a core of revolutionaries keen to throw off the yoke of colonialism and refashion Malaya into an independent socialist state. Among its many Chinese volunteers however, few initially harboured nationalist aspirations; many took to arms simply to resist Japanese aggression targeted at their kind. If Japanese oppression had been more equally distributed, it is perhaps likely that a more multiethnic resistance movement would have emerged. Among the guerrillas, many eventually came to be schooled in communist ideals which incited aversion for colonialism, Japanese or otherwise. That the movement successfully nurtured subversion cannot be denied; the occupation stimulated national awakening, not only among the Malays, but also

among Chinese involved in the resistance. They emerged from the war with a heightened sense of identification with their adopted land and a desire for an independent proletariat utopia; race was irrelevant in this reckoning.

The Malay-dominated government however has little incentive to elucidate the plethora of Chinese allegiances before, during and after the war. There is little benefit to shedding light on competing nationalist movements which paved the road to statehood. Rather, the political establishment asserts the prominence of UMNO in securing independence for Malaya from the British. Further, maintaining the spurious narrative of imminent Chinese subversion is expedient to galvanising the Malay collective. Perpetuating an Us-versus-Them archetype fixes minorities in their place; it justifies the hierarchical ordering of society. In place of the war, the Malayan Emergency, with its overtone of Malay-Chinese rivalry, has become the founding myth of the Malaysian nation.

The victors have rewritten history. A state-sanctioned, mono-racial version of history is meant to galvanise the diverse peoples of Malaysia into a common whole. And yet, what the state considers a 'positive' and 'factually right' version of history augments enduring racial dogmas: of covetous migrants plundering Malay indigenes; of subversive migrants whose allegiance remain suspect. This version of history has become counterproductive to the state's avowed objectives. Looking into the nation's historical mirror, minority citizens see little reflected back. In response, Malaysian Chinese memory-work plunders the past for 'usable' narratives, reshaping collective memory to support communal claims of belonging. While in-depth policy deliberations are beyond the scope of this study, the observation that contests over historical memory reflect the struggle to belong highlights the contradiction posed by an ethnocratic history in promoting multiracial unity. National history, when employed expressly for the purpose of nation building, should engender among its citizenry a sense of the shared past. Granted, it can also be a tool to augment majority claims of indigeneity; however, this should not be at the expense of heightening ethnic divisions and promoting exclusion. If the current emphasis on ethnicity was a moot point, would the Chinese collective cling so arduously to their historical, ancestral or cultural legacies? If the issue of identity was less fraught, perhaps this would mitigate the need for devising historical counter-narratives.

Thus, the outcomes of this study, and the questions raised by it, have potential implications for diaspora and minority identity studies. As noted, contemporary socio-political conditions alone cannot account for how minorities mediate or layer multiple identities. The historical trajectory of the collective, and the social continuities which undergird its progress, are fundamental to exploring

how identities emerge; they are constituted not only in response to contemporary contests, but also deeply-entrenched dogmas. Merely appraising the historical experience of a particular collective is insufficient; how selective aspects of the past are suppressed or valorised is more pertinent to understanding how individuals or groups strategically (re)position themselves within society.

In Malaysia, continued experience of institutionalised discrimination and alienation has locked the Chinese into a 'diaspora space' of perpetual dislocation. Many have thus been motivated to adopt a 'flexible citizenship' outlook. The duality of being ethnically Chinese and also citizens of a postcolonial nation state is perceived as valuable cultural capital in opening the door to multiple transnational vistas. In this respect, the Chinese dimension of the Malaysian 'brain drain' phenomenon is an outcrop of marginalisation; many seek opportunities abroad to mitigate against political uncertainty. For others, exposure to the global Chinese diasporic ethnoscape has meant increasing identification with ethnic Chinese essentialism, in part a result of China's clout to shape discourses surrounding ethnic Chinese identities.

As a case study, this research on the Malaysian Chinese exemplifies the multifaceted challenges inherent in domesticating a minority population set against a multiracial context, and subjected to competing social, political, cultural and economic agendas. While the initiative to 'make Malaysians' out of the Chinese segment of the population has been largely successful, this has not ensured unity nor promoted multiracialism. The situation has been made more complex by the increasing Islamisation of the majority Malay population, many of whom identify foremost as Muslims, rather than by ethnicity or nationality. The challenge therefore does not lie only in making Malaysians out of its minority populations, but in inculcating an overarching national identity among its diverse citizenry. In the final estimation, the success of Malaysia's multiracial project will depend on the state's ability to engender a cohesive civic identity without succumbing to traditional trappings of ethnicity or religion.

In contemporary Malaysia, the oft-feared 'time bomb' of ethnic diversity inherited from the colonial past has been displaced by prevaricated religious divisions. To defuse the political threat of Islamist parties, the state has co-opted Islam as a political universalist project. The progressive conflation of state and religion has allowed space for more radical forms of Islamism to surface. The lurch towards illiberalism is proving regressive for nation building. Even as the potential for an idealised Malaysian community appears tantalisingly within reach, religion has emerged as another battleground for distinction. Thus, the identity terrain has



shifted, from ethnicity to religion, but the battle lines remain steadfastly drawn in terms of racial differences.

If the nation's convoluted past were better illuminated, Malaysians may have a deeper understanding of why and how interracial contestations have become so entrenched. This could perhaps pave the way towards reconciliation and accommodation. At the very least, a more nuanced comprehension of the historical source of Malay and Chinese fears may eliminate the reflexive recourse towards a politics of identity which only promotes intransigence and leads to a 'security dilemma' deadlock.

For generations of postwar ethnic Chinese, indoctrinated with nationalist ideology and an idealised vision of a multiracial Malaysia, the experience of continued alienation represents an incomprehensible paradox. If the Chinese were more enlightened to the origins of Malay fears about potential Chinese subversion, would they be less assertive in demanding parity? Would this perhaps lead to more meaningful concessions? Similarly, if Malays were aware of how Chinese historical experience has inculcated a sense of belonging among this collective, would they remain as threatened by Chinese demands for inclusion within Malaysian society? Or would they continue to perceive such assertions as Chinese intent to overwhelm and dominate them? Until a truly shared past is nurtured, there is little prospect for comprehension or reflection on how history has shaped present antagonisms. Without mutual understanding, racial diversity will always appear threatening, and the challenge to develop a shared national identity will remain a Sisyphean task.

In the meantime, the Malaysian Chinese remain a people without a discernible history. Despite its significance in shaping this collective's present, the average Chinese is ambivalent about the community's war past. They find little succour in rehashing a past that bears little likeness to their present struggles. What little they do know of that past, that their forebears were potentially subversive, possibly Chinese nationalists or even communists, contradicts their yearning to prove their Malaysian credentials. Most find it more productive to nurture a cultural past that is apolitical. Some seek refuge in their ancestral history to assuage their sense of displacement, so that they may say, 'At least I have roots.' Others submerge themselves in their cultural heritage. Culture however can only serve as a substitute, a virtual site of belonging. History, on the other hand, is tethered to the specifics of place and time. History provides permanence and provenance; it nurtures belonging.

The Chinese in Malaysia have proven willing to 'strike ground and grow roots.' But without a historical past to anchor the self, the soil has proven to be

shallow and not entirely fertile. Their roots therefore do not always grow deep, so deep that it is impossible to uproot in search of more nurturing pastures. Where they are welcomed and given a fair chance, they strive to prove themselves worthy subjects of their adopted homelands. In this regard, they have had much practise. Many are simply fatigued at never quite belonging.

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