

# MUSEUMS AND THE MEMORY OF THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION OF MALAYA<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Museums in Malaysia are closely associated with nation building and sought to project commonly shared experiences of the past which is no different from museums in other parts of the world notably Asia and Africa.<sup>2</sup> Yet museum study is very much neglected in this country. Virginia Matheson Hooker had written a fair bit on the Museum of National History while Nigel Worden had surveyed the museums in Melaka and these reflect the representation of the Malaysian past.<sup>3</sup> Then there are academic exercises/long essays by undergraduates which focused on certain museums, their establishment and development with passing comments on the varied exhibits.<sup>4</sup> This paper examines four different museums located in Penang, Alor Setar, Kuala

<sup>1</sup> This is part of an ongoing research on "Museums and memorials and the memory of the past" which covers museums and memorials in peninsular Malaysia and Singapore. This research is funded by a short term research grant from Universiti Sains Malaysia (2003-04) which is gratefully acknowledged. I am also grateful to various individuals who had drawn my attention to various studies on museums including the theoretical framework for museum research. They are Dr Kevin Blackburn of the National Institute of Education, Singapore, who also commented on an earlier draft, Profesor Cheah Boon Kheng, visiting professor in the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia and Professor Loh Wei Leng of the History Department, University of Malaya.

<sup>2</sup> See the interesting discussion on the role of museums in Flora E S Kaplan (editor), *Museums and the Making of "Ourselves": The role of Objects in National Identity* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996); see also, Daniel J Sherman & Irit Rogoff (eds.), *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourse, Spectacles* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Virginia Matheson Hooker, "Malaysia as History" in *A Short History of Malaysia: Linking East and West* (Melbourne: Allen & Unwin, 2003) pp. 1-12; Nigel Worden, "Representations of the Malaysia past in Melaka" paper presented at the First International Malaysian Studies Conference, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 11-13 August 1997.

<sup>4</sup> See for instance, Ayadurai Letchuman, *Peranan dan Perkembangan Museum Perak* [The role and development of the Perak museum]. Academic exercise (AE) submitted to the University of Malaya, 1996; Abdul Rahim Ismail, *Satu Kajian Ringkas Museum Arkeologi Lembah Bujang, Merbok, Bedong, Kedah* [A brief study on the Lembah Bujang archaeological museum in Merbok, Bedong, Kedah]. AE, the University of Malaya, 1986; Mohamad Saad Othman, *Museum Perak: Sejarah Penubuhan dan Perkembangan, 1862-1960* [The Perak museum: Its establishment and development, 1862-1960]. AE, Univesiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1993; and Rosdi Mohamad Salleh, *Muzium Negeri Terengganu: Satu Tinjauan Sejarah Penubuhan dan Perkembangannya* [The Terengganu state museum: A historical survey of its establishment and development]. Long Essay, School of Humanities, 1991.

Lumpur and Kota Bharu focusing on the Japanese occupation period. Two of them are general museums; the other two are specialized museums with one relating to the Second World War and the last, a museum of national history. Site visits were undertaken to all 4 museums, with each museum covered by at least 2 lengthy visits.

The discussion focuses on the various types of displays, the accompanying captions, narratives and terminologies used to evoke memory of the war. As there is not much public remembrance of the period the positioning of the displays is particularly important as most visitors would have a limited knowledge of the period which they might gleaned from text books or from oral history. The paper also attempts to fathom the kind of possible lessons that museum officials sought to impress on visitors with regards the Japanese occupation, arguably the most traumatic period in modern Malaysian history. However the discussion is descriptive in nature rather than providing some form of theoretical framework for museum studies in the lines of established scholars like David Lowenthal.

## The Alor Setar Museum

This is a general museum that covers various aspects of Kedah's ethnic culture and history. It is one of the more popular museums in Alor Setar which is also known for its Royal Museum which was undergoing renovations at the time of research. The new Alor Setar museum complex is located by the slow meandering Anak Bukit river with a splendid view of nature at the back and a busy main road in front. The exhibition hall is made up of three floors. There is a small office in a separate building and a solitary Malay wooden house at the back of the compound. There is also a small library which is useful to researchers.

How is the war remembered in this provincial museum? Both the Japanese and Siamese occupation period and its memory are treated as part of a broad sweep of Kedah history for the last 2000 years. The relevant displays and narratives are located in the museum's first floor known as *Dewan Sejarah* (Hall of history) that include photographs blown from the original, two helmets, an empty cartridge used by the British defenders and a wooden fire syringe (*gobek api*). Without much explanations it is left to the

visitors' imagination to figure out the significance of these displays such as the syringe which represents local ingenuity in coming to terms with acute shortages of various items of daily needs including food.

Besides these displays there are a few instructive narratives about this period written in Malay at the top and the English translation at the bottom. These translations are reasonably accurate although there are problems with the Japanese terms. The photos are framed in boards of 2 by 4 feet hanging from the wall in the museum's subsection titled "Kedah in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Part 1". In another section on the second floor, a wartime poster is exhibited as part of literary productions in the state.

All the frames are arranged in chronological order. Frame A is titled the "Japanese invasion of Malaya". There is a big map to indicate the progress of the invasion between 12 December 1941 when the imperial army entered Kedah and 15 February 1942 when the British forces capitulated in Singapore. The clear graphics indicating the swiftness of the Japanese conquest and the equally rapid British collapse would certainly have not missed the casual visitor who might be attracted to the replica of a British bomb right in front of this frame. At the bottom of the same frame there are two photographs, intended to highlight Japanese mobility and military technology. One is about a tank, one of the many used by the Japanese to wreck British defenses at Jitra (in Kedah), Kampar (Perak) and Parit Sulong (Johore). The other photograph is of Japanese soldiers riding bicycles hurrying towards the south to Singapore in pursuit of the retreating British-Indian-Australian soldiers. This photograph is very familiar to the wartime generation and my generation since we had heard stories of the invasion countless of times. Similar photographs are also found in other museums such as the National History Museum in Kuala Lumpur or the War Museum in Kota Bharu both of which are discussed in the paper.

In frame B titled "The Japanese in Kedah", there are 2 photographs and a brief narrative. The first is a group photograph that includes the Kedah military governor Major General Sukegawa Seiji and senior Kedah officials who are not identified. The second photograph is of K Shiba, the infamous Japanese intelligence operative based in Alor Setar since the late 1930s. The narrative for this frame highlight the superiority of

the Japanese forces and the incapacity of the colonial defenders. Parts of it are quoted below.

The Japanese army made early preparation by gathering sufficient intelligence before sending an invading force into Malaya on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1941. In Alor Setar a businessman known as K Shiba was known to have spied for the Japanese. On 7<sup>th</sup> December 41, the Japanese army arrived on the east coast, while on the 5<sup>th</sup> landed at Singgora (Thailand). The Japanese forces under the command of General Takano Matsui then marched to Alor Setar through Singgora while the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade accompanied by tanks and artillery moved into Jitra. On the morning of 10<sup>th</sup> December 1941, Japanese soldiers under the command of Colonel Saeki attacked Bukit Kayu Hitam and Changloon close to the Thai border. They also forced the retreat of Gurkha soldiers to Jitra as they marched towards Alor Setar. Major General Subaru Kawamura arrived in Jitra on the 12<sup>th</sup> December 1941, a day later his forces captured Alor Setar and forced the British to flee to Gurun. They then moved to Gurun and attacked the Punjabi forces stationed there – Gurun was taken on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1941 and the British fled to Pulau Pinang.

During their occupation the Japanese appointed a president [sic] called gunaseikan [sic] to administer the state. The Japanese secret service, military garrison, military police and secret police were formed during this period. When the Japanese forces had full control of Kedah, they forced Sultan Abdul Hamid to sign an agreement handing over all administrative matter with them and His Royal Highness remained as Sultan”.

Frame C titled “Japanese rule in Kedah (1941-43)” includes 2 photographs accompanied by a short narrative. The first photograph is of the Kedah ruler Sultan Badlishah and other Malay rulers taken in Singapore in 1943 most likely during the rulers’ meeting with senior Japanese officers which was held in January.<sup>5</sup> The other photograph is of Sukegawa Seiji in full military uniform (with 2 swords typical of a Japanese samurai) with the Japanese flag in the background. The lengthy narrative is instructive especially to the museum visitor who have the leisure to ponder over them.

In administering Kedah, the Japanese implemented a policy of cooperation with the right winged [sic] elites. The then Monopoly and Customs

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<sup>5</sup> Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali, *Pentadbiran Tentera Jepun dan Thai di Terengganu, 1942-45* [The Japanese and Thai military administration of Terengganu, 1942-45] (Petaling Jaya: University of Malaya Press, 1996) pp. 58-60

Commissioner Tunku Muhamad Jiwa ibn Sultan Abdul Hamid and Ismail Harun (2<sup>nd</sup> assistant secretary) initiated the cooperation. The Kulim district officer also cooperated with the Japanese. In his speech aired by Radio Pulau Pinang, Tunku Abdul Rahman urged the people of Malaya and Sumatra to accept the Japanese occupation to avoid further bloodshed.

At the national level the administration was headed by a director-general, assisted by a central committee, while at state level, or state government, it was headed by a Japanese general. The Japanese placed Kedah under one organization called Kedah Shusie (Choa Soshiki) [sic] which was headed by a governor (chokan kakka). The first governor was Sukegawa Seiji (1942-43). Kedah was divided into 9 districts and Alor Setar, which was previously under the purview of the state government, was administered by a district officer (guncho).

To ensure peace at the local level of the mukims [sub district] the Japanese implemented law and order under Public Act no. 248 and appointed the penghulus [head of mukim] head of the Keisatsu Kyoryoku Dan units (an organization charged with maintaining peace). The penghulus were assisted by the panglima [assistant to the penghulu] and village headmen. The most influential and feared Japanese organization then is the Kempetai, which was responsible for the actions and discipline of Japanese soldiers and the common people.

In this frame visitors are introduced to a number of Japanese wartime terms such as *guncho* (district officer), *chokan kakka* (governor), *Kedah Shusei Cho* (Kedah Administration Secretariat) which is wrongly spelt in the narrative, *keisatsu kyoryoku dan* (police cooperation unit) and *kempeitai*. These words probably do not make much sense to the ordinary visitors but they convey a special feeling of the occupation. This is especially so with *kempeitai* which is synonymous with inhibited torture of various types perpetrated by Japanese forces on a wide category of local inhabitants quite often on the flimsiest of charges cooked up by collaborating locals.

Less emotive are other Japanese terms like *Koa Kunrenjo*, a wartime institute to train Malaya's new elites, *jikeidan* (village vigilante groups), *giyu tai* (volunteer corps) and *giyu gun* (volunteer army) which appeared in another frame titled "Spirit of Nationalism". The latter terms seemed to relate to a positive appraisal of the occupation, on how the Japanese inadvertently instilled Malay self-awakening that became much more prominent after 1945. This line of argument is not new as Japanese scholars and

former officials like Itagaki Yoichi, formerly of the Malayan Military Administration's (MMA) Research Section, had been arguing on this aspect of the occupation while de-emphasizing the negative impact.<sup>6</sup> Some local scholars<sup>7</sup> and even those who had lived through the period<sup>8</sup> had been saying the same thing although there is small group of scholars who are vehement in their criticism of various aspects of Japanese wartime policies and they remained unrepentant.<sup>9</sup>

The other significant information relates to the cooperating elites which were mainly from the right of the Malay intelligentsia in contrast to the left which had provided cooperation (*kerjasama*) to the invading forces since early December 1941. Collaboration is an emotive issue in Malaysian historiography with whatever debates there was on this issue remains inconclusive. It is significant to note that collaboration (*pensubahatan*) which is much more appropriate in this case is not used indicating uneasiness among museum officials and its consultants. It is also of interest to note that one of the consultant to the Alor Setar museum had written on the theme of collaboration of the Kedah elites during both British and Japanese periods.<sup>10</sup>

Frame D was titled "The Siamese Administration in Kedah (1943-45)" with the accompaniment of 2 photographs and a lengthy narrative. One of the photograph is of the secretariat building which housed senior Japanese administrative officers including the governor while the other relates to the handing over ceremony of Kedah and Perlis to Siam by Japanese military officers which was held in Alor Setar. This handing over is one of the most painful episode of the occupation that later antagonized the most conservative and pliable of the Malays who later secretly resisted the Japanese. In the

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<sup>6</sup> See for instance Itagaki Yoichi, "Some aspect of the Japanese policy for Malaya under the Occupation with special reference to nationalism" in *Papers on Malaysian History* edited by K G Tregonning (Singapore: Malaya Publishing House, 1962).

<sup>7</sup> Zainal Abidin Wahid, *Sejarah Malaysia sa-pintas Lalu* [Glimpses of Malaysian history] (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, 1971) pp. 112-117

<sup>8</sup> Abu Talib Ahmad, "Research on Islam and Malay-Muslims during the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1942-45" in *Asian Research Trends: A Humanities and Social Science Review*, Toyo Bunko, Tokyo, no. 9: 1999

<sup>9</sup> Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star over Malaya* (Singapore: Eastern University Press, 1984); and Abu Talib Ahmad, *Malay-Muslims, Islam and the Rising Sun: 1941-45* (Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Mohamad Isa Othman, *Pengalaman Kedah dan Perlis Zaman Penjajahan British* [The Kedah and Perlis experience during British colonial rule] (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications, 2001); and *Pendudukan Jepun di Tanah Melayu, 1942-45: Tumpuan kepada Negeri Kedah* [The Japanese occupation of Malaya, 1942-45: Focus on Kedah] (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, 1992)

picture there were more Japanese officers than both Siamese and Kedah officials combined! Equally significant is the narrative which I quote in its entirety below.

Japan officially handed over Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan dan Terengganu to Siam on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1943 as a token of appreciation to Siam for allowing their forces to enter Malaya through its territories in December 1941. The handing over ceremony was held at the Padang Court, Alor Setar. Khim Pramot Changchareun was appointed as the Siamese governor in Kedah while His Royal Highness Sultan Badlishah remained as sultan. Haji Mohd. Shariff Osman was retained as State Secretary and Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra as Commissioner for Education. Kedah was renamed Saiburi Samak and the position of the State Secretary for Secretary General.

All state administration matters came under the purview of the Siamese prime minister's office which was overseen by the Supreme Military Commissioner. Siam also revived the State Administrative Council and renamed it the Montri Sabha Council. A President appointed by the sultan headed the council. Other members composed of Malay leaders, Chinese and Indian community leaders. The Siamese government was not overly restrictive about the administration of Kedah, as were the Japanese. This was evident when Kedah officers were appointed heads of government.

The museum's favourable view of the Thai occupation is in marked contrast with that expressed by the Kota Bharu War Museum. The other notable omission is the lack of displays representing the period's social history or the kind of life the locals went through. There is nothing at all other than the fire syringe which the locals improvised, not just in Kedah but all over Malaya, to replace matches that were in extremely short supply at the time.

However a brief rejoinder to the social life of the period did appear in the following frame titled "The English in Kedah after World War 2" which is accompanied by 2 photographs, one of Sir Shenton Thomas (Straits governor and High Commissioner of Malaya) and the other, Sir Edward Gent (Governor of the Malayan Union). The accompanying narrative dwelt more on the post war period and the economic and political innovations introduced by the controversial Malayan Union. However its treatment of the war time condition in the following words, "During the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war, the people of Malaya experienced a shortage of food and other basic supplies. This led to rationing and hoarding, which subsequently forced prices to increase" is quite right

although Kedah, being the rice bowl of Malaya, was less worse off for rice compared to other parts of the peninsula which were dependent on imports.

To the Alor Setar museum officials, it is the lesson of the war that need to be imparted to the visitors specifically the political awakening of the Malays after 1945. Interestingly there is not much on the prewar nationalism indicating perhaps a period of political slumber. Nor was there anything on the nationalism of other races. This is evident when frame F titled "Spirit of Nationalism" was devoted entirely to the rising Malay nationalism in Kedah while an English translation was inserted into a separate frame. In the Malay version there is a picture of Tunku Osman Md Jewa, who rose to prominence during 1942-45 as member of Force 136 which operated in the Kuala Nerang area although there is very little mention on the anti-Japanese resistance from other groups which actually requires a small section of its own. In the English version, there is a picture of Syed Ahmad Syed Mahmud Sahabuddin, one of the leading young Malays at the time. The whole narrative came in four paragraphs with the 1941-45 and 1946-48 periods given the most treatment. On the 1941-45 period for instance the narrative reads as follows:

Between 1941 and 1945 the Japanese promoted anti-west sentiment by emphasizing the spirit of "Asia for Asians", through media propaganda, Japanese language classes, the "Koa Kunrenjo", training schools, reading clubs (epposho), civil defence (jikeidan), neighbourhood association (tonarigumi), auxiliary volunteer groups, volunteer reserve (giyugun) and volunteer groups [sic] (giyutai). The Japanese occupation was a period of severe hardship and this give rise to rebellion [sic]"

In reality the pliable elites of Kedah or elsewhere did not initiate any rebellion against the Japanese as they were simply incapable of doing so. There was a minor rebellion led by religious functionaries and villagers that took place in the Kuala Muda area but it was swiftly crushed by the local police and Japanese soldiers. There is not a trace of its memory in this museum although information on it could be gleaned from the Kedah archives located less than 2 km further up the same busy road at Alor Merah.

One glaring drawback is the depressing lack of original displays that would offer greater intellectual engagement to the visitor, a situation that is also found in other



museums in the country. There are many framed wartime photographs but these are not the originals but blowups of originals kept elsewhere. In fact in the relevant section there are only three original exhibits: 2 helmets and an empty cartridge used by the British defenders in Malaya in 1941 and the fire syringe. The first two items are put on open display allowing visitors to feel it but the wooden syringe is kept in a glass case.

In another section on the second floor, which deals mainly in manuscript, there is an original wartime poster entitled "*Perkawalan Malai*" [Defense of Malaya] with a picture of 5 able bodied local youths representing the major racial groups namely Malays, Chinese, Indians and Sikhs with a Japanese warship, a tank and a warplane in the background. The date of issuance was unknown but probably sometime between 1944-early 1945 when Japan was militarily on the defensive in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. Hence there was an urgent need to mobilize Malaysians for the Japanese cause including using Islam and religious elites for the unholy aim of winning a war in which neither Muslims nor Islam had any vested interest.<sup>11</sup>

## Penang State Museum

This is a general museum more on ethnography with the exhibits presented according to period and themes. The island's history of ethnographic mingling began in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century when Malays from Sumatra migrated to Penang followed by Francis Light and the East India Company in 1786 while the previous connections with Kedah is downplayed. Under British rule the island's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural identity began to take shape and the Japanese presence before 1942 is treated as part of this ethnic mingling. There is not much on the Japanese period although the displays indicate the museum's attempt to keep alive the memory of the occupation and to recall possible lessons to be gained.

Equally interesting are the displays located outside the museum although none have any direct relation with the Japanese occupation or the second world war. There is an item that was related to the first world war in the form of an anchor of the French destroyer *Les Mousquet* which was sunk by the German light cruiser *Emden* on 29 October 1914 approximately 11 nautical miles off the Muka Head coast. This is perhaps

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<sup>11</sup> Abu Talib Ahmad, *Malay Muslims, Islam and the Rising Sun: 1942-45*, ch. 5

the only surviving evidence of the escapade of the infamous *Emden* which terrorized British merchantmen in the Bay of Bengal and the Melaka Straits in late 1914. It was also one of the few evidence to indicate that the first world war, essentially European in nature, had reached Malaya. Earlier in the day this German warship had brazenly shelled Penang harbour inflicting considerable damage including the sinking of the Russian cruiser *Zhemshug* just off the E & O Hotel with the loss of 89 lives including scores of Japanese prostitutes who were on board at the time.<sup>12</sup> An equally interesting display is an old Rolls Royce which was used as the official car for the Penang state governor between 1957 and 1967. The same car was used previously by Sir Henry Gurney until his motorcade was ambushed on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1951 on its way to Frasers Hill. The other display is the imposing statue of Francis Light which has a colorful history of its own.

The small section on the Japanese period (1941-45) is introduced by comments on the British surrender attributed to R. L. Cutter from the 'E' Company of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Straits Settlement Volunteer Force (SSVF).<sup>13</sup> This is followed by a short narrative describing what Penangites went through 3 years and 8 months of Japanese rule during which they "experienced the harsh realities of war which left an indelible scar on the survivors. Wartime condition created shortages in essential commodities and the lack of daily necessities led to privations and sufferings. The strict enforcement of law and order, in particular the swift execution of law breakers, created a tense and anxious population. The Japanese tried to create diversions for the local population, which led to the mushrooming of amusement parks, gambling and liquor stalls, cabarets and dance halls." This description is not much different from the standard texts although it must be pointed out that amusement parks were already in vogue during the late 1930s if not earlier.

The visual displays of the period is no less dramatic. There are pictures of Japanese officers in full military regalia, one of which was without any narrative. There is also a photograph of another officer addressing a crowd near the Kapitan Kling mosque

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<sup>12</sup> See Margaret Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun* (London: Routledge, 2000) pp. 82-87. *Emden* was later sunk in the Cocos Islands after an engagement with an Australian warship in November 1914.

<sup>13</sup> According to Cutter, "Penang was occupied by the Japanese invaders on December 15, 1941 without a single shot being fired. From then until Christmas, British troops began their full retreat for 'fortress' Singapore. When the British declared Penang an open city everybody felt tremendously let down, confused and betrayed. The surrender was very simple. A Japanese (Colonel Hiroishi) came, told us to stack our arms in a tripod and ordered us to go home."

in Pitt Street again without an accompanying narrative or even a caption. There is an interesting calendar titled *Penang Shimbun Victory Calendar* dated 20 February 1945 (20 February of the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Showa or often written as 20.2.20 denoting year, month and day in that order). Interestingly the calendar still referred to the English way of reckoning days, Sunday to Saturday instead of the Japanese way of reckoning *Nichiyobi* to *Doyobi*.

Another important display is the *Buku Tabung Wang Pejabat Pos Malai* (Savings account of the Malaya Post Office) accompanied with instructions to account holders.<sup>14</sup> These include a minimum of \$1.00 was required to open an account which earned 3% annual interest. Depositors could withdraw their money by means of fast withdrawal, telegraphic withdrawal or withdrawal through normal means. This item is an important aspect of Japanese wartime policy to encourage savings and to reduce inflation in Malaya.

Then there is a two and half feet long Japanese sword. This particular sword has quite an interesting history. It was surrendered by an unknown Japanese officer on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1945 and then kept as a memento by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion SSVF (Penang and Province Wellesley) to “commemorate the services of the battalion and placed at its headquarters in Peel Avenue. After the dispersal of the battalion the sword was handed over to Captain Mohd. Noor Mohamad, the officer commanding the Malay company of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion”. Mohd Noor kept the sword until July 1964 when it was presented to the Penang museum, in his words, “as a solemn token of deep appreciation of devotion and loyalty of all his friends – officers and other ranks of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion SSVF who served during the war.”

Equally interesting is the information with regards holidays, festivals and anniversaries for 2605 (1945) which were enforced in Malaya at that time. There were 21 anniversaries/holidays altogether with 3 in January, 2 for February, 3 for March, 3 for April, one for May, one for July, one for September, 3 for October, 2 for November and 2 for December. The February anniversaries/holidays were particularly important; one was

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<sup>14</sup> The full instructions in the original are as follows. “Buku ini harus disimpan dengan baik. Wang kurang daripada \$1 tidak diterima sebagai tabungan. Keluaran wang diadakan dengan tiga jalan yang tersebut di bawah: keluaran segera, keluaran dengan kawat, keluaran biasa. Wang faedah diberi 3% tiap-tiap tahun. Lain-lain perkara silalah berbincang di Pejabat Post.”

the *Kigen Setsu* (Empire Day) on the 11<sup>th</sup> and the other, the *Malai Shinsai Kinenbi* (Anniversary of the Rebuilding of Malaya) on 15<sup>th</sup> February. April celebrations were equally important such as *Jimmu Tenno Sai* (Anniversary of the demise of Emperor Jimmu, revered by the Japanese as descendent of a god or *kami* who founded the Japanese imperial family in 660 BC<sup>15</sup>) which was held on the 3rd, *Tencho Setsu* (Birthday of the Emperor of Japan) on the 29<sup>th</sup> and *Yasukuni Jinja Taisai* (Yasukuni shrine festival commemorating those who died in wars for the nation) on the 30<sup>th</sup>. July 7<sup>th</sup> is associated with the *Shiina Jihen Kinenbi* (Anniversary of the China incident) while the Manchurian incident of September 18 was also declared an important anniversary. December 8<sup>th</sup> was associated with *Daitoa Senso Kinenbi* (Anniversary of the Greater East Asian war) while the *Taisho Tennosai* (Anniversary of the demise of the Taisho Emperor) was held on the 25<sup>th</sup>. All the holidays/anniversaries relates more to the Japanese but locals were required to observe them with much reverence.<sup>16</sup> As have been discussed elsewhere Islam and the religious elites were duly incorporated as part of these celebrations such as the *Tencho Setsu* and the *Daitoa Senso Kinenbi*.

## The Museum of National History

This specialized museum, one of the many located in Kuala Lumpur, was opened to the public in 1996. The museum building itself has a fascinating history. Originally built from bricks and wood, it was used in 1888 by the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China as its main office which was the first bank to operate in Kuala Lumpur. The original building was later demolished and rebuilt with Moorish and Islamic influence similar to the nearby Sultan Abdul Samad building, Kuala Lumpur High Court and the Kuala Lumpur Memorial Library. During the Japanese occupation the building was used as a telecommunication base but reverted to a bank after the war.

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<sup>15</sup> See also W G Aston, *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest times to A. D. 697* (Tokyo: Charles Tuttle, 1975); and Donald L Philippe, *Kojiki with an Introduction and Notes* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> On such celebrations see the case in Johore, for instance, in Pejabat Agama Johor (Johore Religious Office) 23/02 *Uchapan berkenaan dengan Ulangtahun Perang Asia Timur Raya yang akan diadakan pada 8 Disember 2602* [Speeches relating to the anniversary of the Greater East Asia War which will be held on 8 December 1942]; and Pejabat Kadhi Besar [Office of the Chief Kathi] 35/02 *Surat2 Pemberitahu Harijadi His Imperial Majesty Emperor Nippon* [Letters informing on the Birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan].

After 1965 the building was occupied by various government departments before it was handed over to the Museum and Antiquity Department in 1991 to be transformed into a national museum.

The presentation of the nation's history from the prehistoric period right through the more contemporary period covering CHOGM (Commonwealth Head of Government Meeting) in 1999, Malaysian prime ministers and Malaysian kings is done impressively with the visual representation no different from the existing secondary school history textbook. There is a separate section on the Japanese occupation (section 15) but reference to the period is also found in two other sections, namely "Nationalism" and "Selected Collections".

Located on the second floor the section on the occupation is titled "The Japanese Occupation (1941-45)" with the caption printed in red, the color associated with Japan in the popular mind. The section is replete with original displays that would offer much more opportunities for visitors to engage in a dialogue with the past. There is a picture of General Tomoyuki Yamashita, the conqueror of Malaya and often dubbed the "Tiger of Malaya",<sup>17</sup> Japanese prime minister General Hideki Tojo, swords of Japanese military officers and a map, a Japanese flag with the names of officers, various denominations of the wartime currency, helmets and a photograph relating to the Japanese surrender.

Equally significant are the accompanying narratives. On the war in Malaya, for instance, one narrative seeks to inform the visitor that "walaupun pendudukan Jepun membawa kesengsaraan pada rakyat tetapi sedikit sebanyak dapat menggarap semangat kesedaran di kalangan rakyat untuk menilai keupayaan kuasa kolonial barat dan

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<sup>17</sup> Interestingly there are other claimants to the "Tiger of Malaya" sobriquet including Tani Yutaka and Tengku Mahmood Mahyiddeen. Yutaka was a Japanese youth who reverted to banditry in Kelantan and Southern Thailand after his sister Shizuko was murdered by Chinese mobs in Kuala Terengganu during an anti-Japanese riot in November 1932. Their acquittals by the colonial court was a turning point for Yutaka and his band of robbers terrorized the east coast states using southern Thailand as their base. At the time of the Japanese invasion his band of "merry men" numbered about 100 including Malays. The group also worked closely with Fujiwara Kikan then headed by Major Fujiwara Iwaichi. Tengku Mahmood Mahyiddeen was a scion of the Pattani royal family and domiciled in Kota Bharu. He later organized the Malay section of Force 136. See, Nakano Fujio, *Mare no Tora: Harimau no Densetsu* [The tiger of Malaya: Legend of the harimau or tiger] (Tokyo: 1994); and Mohd Zambari Abdul Malek, *Harimau Malaya: Biografi Tengku Mahmood Mahyiddeen* [The tiger of Malaya: A biography of Tengku Mahmood Mahyiddeen] (Bangi: University Kebangsaan Malaysia Publisher, 1999)

menyemarakkan lagi perjuangan ke arah kemerdekaan”<sup>18</sup> which is reflective of the official history of this period which sought to de-emphasize the negative aspects of Japanese rule. This line of argument would make extremely favorable impression among Japanese officialdom and possibly among Japanese visitors.

Another narrative informed the visitor of Malaya’s economic decline and the emergence of a new political awareness and a new perspective among Malaysians who had suddenly awoken from their slumber that Britain was not as powerful as they had believed. This led them, especially the Malays, to fight for their political independence. What it did not mention is that this awareness was most discernible among the elites who had collaborated with the British before the occupation and who were convinced of British military superiority until the sinking of the Repulse and Prince of Wales off the Kuantan coast in December 1941 dashed their hopes of British victory.

Visitors are informed that the Japanese period was very cruel and that its iron fisted rule was never supported by the local populace who formed various underground organization to fight the Japanese with the assistance of the Allies. Strangely the MPAJA which was communist led and which later rebelled in 1948 was not associated with this “underground organization”. As seen in another section relating to the emergency between 1948-60 the communists (and recalcitrant remnants of the MPAJA) were treated as villains in the national history. In contrast to a recent proliferation of accounts by former members to argue their case,<sup>19</sup> there is no attempt here to recognize the MPAJA’s role in the anti-Japanese resistance.

There are many more original displays relating to the period which are located near the museum’s exit. These include pictures, a military sword, a Japanese army beret, an army signal lamp, a Japanese-Malay-English dictionary, a surrender notice which was mistakenly classified as land title, a clock, a small lamp, a Japanese siren, a music box and pictures of Yamashita and three other senior officers.

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<sup>18</sup> Translated as, “Although the Japanese occupation brought sufferings to the people it also to a certain extent, brought about a new awareness among them that led them to reconsider the capability of the British colonial power and increased their struggle for independence”.

<sup>19</sup> Shan Ru-hong, *The War in the South: The Negri Sembilan’s Guerillas* (Bangkok: Mental Health Publishing, 2003); and Alias Chin Peng, *My Side of History as told to Ian Ward and Norma Mirafior* (Singapore: Media Masters, 2003). See also Ban Kah Choon & Yap Hong Kuan, *Rehearsal for War: The Underground war Against the Japanese* (Singapore: Horizon Books, 2002)

Two of the above displays are of interest. One is the Nippon go-Malay-English dictionary which was published in Kuala Lumpur and compiled by Chong Lang Fong. It costs \$1.50 and its publication had received approval from the *Gun Sendenhan* (Military propaganda section). The Malay title appears as “Nippon go-Melayu-Inggeris-Kamus” in red letters. This dictionary must have been a most useful tool for communication in those early days between the locals and the Japanese besides the use of English. The other item is the surrender notice distributed by the Japanese army at the time of the invasion which was wrongly listed as a land grant. Written in both Malay and Chinese, the notice informed Malaysians that they were not the enemies; instead the enemies were the British and Americans. In case of any of them being located Malaysians were asked to deliver them immediately to the Japanese. The deliverer would be rewarded with an undisclosed amount of money. The notice was signed “*Tentera Besar Jepun*” (Chief military officer).

There are a number of troubling issues. One is Lt Adnan Saidi who appears among 6 photographs of prominent Malays of the 1930s and in the section on nationalism, which is adjacent to the Japanese occupation section. Adnan is now semi-officially accepted as Malaysia’s hero by virtue of his exploits to resist the Japanese in early 1942 although his inclusion is problematic (not withstanding a similar claim by Singapore and the kind of treatment accorded to Lt Adnan and members of the Malay regiments especially the C Company in the defence of Singapore at Bukit Chandu or Kent Ridge in the Pasir Panjang area<sup>20</sup>) and raised rather emotive questions. Certainly his place in Malay nationalism is problematic as his struggle against the Japanese in defense of a colonial possession whose future was still undecided by the British was in contrast to the actions of other nationalists who tried to end that empire to create an independent nation even if it means collaborating with the Japanese invader. Hence the somewhat lukewarm reception among the Malaysian public except members of the

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<sup>20</sup> See the “Reflections at Bukit Chandu: A World War II Interpretative Centre” and the “Audio Tour Transcript”. This museum is in honour of Lt Adnan and his mates in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Malay Regiment who fought heroically in the last battle in the Malayan campaign. Ironically the museum is located in a building that was used to store supplies and possibly a resting area for members of the Malay regiment while 2 other more historically suitable sites, the two bungalows where members of the Malay regiment were executed by the Japanese, were demolished to make way for a car park. I am grateful to Dr Kevin Blackburn for arranging a memorable visit to this museum located somewhat off the tourist tracks. See also the comments in Hong Lysa & Huang Jianli, “The Scripting of Singapore’s National History: Toying with Pandora’s Box” in *New Terrains in Southeast Asian History* edited by Abu Talib Ahmad & Tan Liok Ee (Athens: Ohio University, Research in International Studies, Southeast Asian Series no. 167, 2003).

armed forces and Defence Ministry officials. Perhaps Adnan should be placed elsewhere within the occupation section, a move which might offend certain sensibilities especially the armed forces. As it is this issue of heroism remains unresolved in Malaysian historiography.

The other issue is the absence of any reference to the MPAJA in the section on the Japanese occupation which have been raised earlier although its inclusion in the section of the emergency is not far wrong. Other issues that are conspicuously absent is wartime race relations which severely affected postwar race relations. The museum is equally silent on the Japanese use of Islam and religious elites for non religious purposes including winning a war in which neither Muslims nor Malaysians have any vested interests.

## The War Museum (Memorial of the Second World War)

This museum was started in 1992 but was officially opened by the Sultan of Kelantan in August 1994. It is one of the 7 museums located in Kota Bharu's cultural enclave which is also the most colorful part of the town. The museum occupies the ground floor of a very historic building, one of the first brick building constructed in Kota Bharu at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and located next to another historic place, the much truncated *Padang Merdeka* (Independence field). The museum building is of western architecture, built from concrete, stone and *chengal* hard wood. Its original structure is still intact but requires the occasional repaint. Originally the building was a bank, the Mercantile Bank of India Ltd., that served local depositors, rubber planters in Hulu Kelantan and from outside the state. At times it also served as banker to the Kelantan state administration. During the war the building was used by the Kempeitai with the additions of lockups, interrogation rooms and torture rooms to its existing features. Between 1981-1992 the museum was turned into an art gallery.

The official booklet mentioned that the museum displays "evidence, photographs, and materials relating to the second world war especially in Kelantan including British defences, the fall of Malaya to the Japanese and the chronology of the fall of Kelantan to the Japanese, Japanese rule, the capitulation of Japan as a result of the atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Attention is also given to the birth of nationalism



and the development of our nation until the formation of Malaysia. Included among the exhibits are those relating to the emergency and the negotiations for independence.<sup>21</sup>

The second floor of the building, which used to be the residential quarters of the bank manager and his family, is now occupied by displays relating to the sultans of Kelantan since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century until the reign of Sultan Ismail Petra, the father of the present sultan. It also includes the anti-British uprising of 1915. A blowup photograph of bullet riddled body of Tok Janggut, the leader of the uprising now revered as a nationalist, would perhaps shocked the weak hearted but is reflective of British brutality towards indigenous opposition which had occurred earlier in Burma in the 1880s.<sup>22</sup> The Kelantan government issued a proclamation in 1915 requiring all Kota Bharu residents domiciled within the main market area to view the body when it was put on public display at *Padang Merdeka* which is just across the road. Failure to do so would incur a fine of \$25.<sup>23</sup> We are not certain of the impact of this proclamation but the hefty fine, the power of British force behind the Kelantan throne and curiosity would ensure locals converged on this particular spot. Nevertheless this rebellion have received much attention from scholars including one that is currently in press.<sup>24</sup> However for some unknown reason a recent study on Tok Janggut which is edited by Profesor Nik Annuar Nik Mahmud which include the particular photograph mentioned earlier is currently unavailable from any book store; one have to acquire it direct from the editor.

Equally interesting are the displays located outside the main building which include a replica of a pre-war pillbox, similar to the one built at Sabak beach where the Japanese landing had taken place in the morning hours of 8 December 1941, the propeller

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<sup>21</sup> The original is as follows. "keterangan-keterangan, gambar-gambar dan bahan-bahan yang berkaitan dengan Peperangan Dunia Kedua, khususnya di Kelantan, termasuk pertahanan British, kejatuhan Tanah Melayu dan kronologi kejatuhan Kelantan ke tangan tentera Jepun, zaman pemerintahan Jepun, serta kejatuhan Jepun dengan gugurnya bom atom di Hiroshima dan Nagasaki. Sehubungan dengan itu dipamerkan juga kelahiran semangat nasionalisme dan era perkembangan negara kita hingga mencapai penubuhan Malaysia. Pada zaman ini juga dipamerkan zaman darurat dan perundingan mencapai kemerdekaan."

<sup>22</sup> Sao Saimong Mangrai, *The Shan States and the British Annexation of Burma*. (Ithaca: Cornell University, South East Asia Program, Data Paper No 57, 1965) p. 166

<sup>23</sup> Abdul Aziz Ismail, "Kadok: Satu Kajian Ringkas" [Kadok: A brief study] in *Warisan Kelantan I* (Kota Bharu: Kelantan State Museum Corporation, 1982) p. 145

<sup>24</sup> Cheah Boon Kheng, "Hunting the rebels in Kelantan, 1915: The Sultan's double game" in *JMBRAS* vol. 68 part 2: 1995 pp. 9-32; Cheah Boon Kheng, "The romance of Tok Janggut: A Kelantan folk hero" in *JMBRAS* vol. 71 part 2: 1999 pp. 1-13; and Nik Annuar Nik Mahmud, *Tok Janggut: Pejuang atau penderhaka?* [Tok Janggut: Hero or traitor?] (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Publisher, 1999)

of a fighter plane mounted on solid steel and an armoured career that was used during the emergency (1948-60). According to the accompanying narrative the pill boxes were built during 1939-40 along the coast of Tumpat all the way to Kuala Besut in Terengganu and at other strategic places like the airport at Pengkalan Chepa, Gong Kedak and Machang aerodromes although their usefulness was somewhat suspect. Thus far 25 of them had been located with most of them submerged under the sea. These concrete masterpiece which are also found in other states like Penang, nevertheless served as important reminder of the occupation period and the abysmal British record to defend its colonial possession under attack by a numerically inferior force.

Perhaps the most interesting display is the "War Memorial" which was built by the Australian and Kelantan State governments "to honour those Australians who died at Kota Bharu on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1941." These men were from the No. 1 Royal Australian Air Force Squadron (3 officers and 4 sergeants) "who paid the supreme sacrifice in defence of the Kota Bharu airfield that day". Another memorial is located at the *Padang Merdeka*. It was apparently constructed after the Japanese occupation with plaques done in 4 different languages (English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil) on four different face of the concrete structure that tapers into the air. There are 2 separate plaques with the one at the top honouring British citizens from Kelantan who had died in the first world war and the other one immediately below, to honour those who died during 1941-45.

The most remarkable and varied displays are found inside the museum. These are located in 6 sections namely The Second World War in Kelantan, the Japanese Surrender, Kelantan during British Military Administration, Kelantan during Japanese (and Thai) Military Administration, Malayan Union and Independence (*Merdeka*). Their arrangement is rather haphazard with exhibits that should have appeared at the entrance are placed at the exit. If this is the intended entrance it does not look like one. Sometime in early 2004 the exhibits were rearranged and some exhibits such as the commemorative stone and a war time report on the fighting in Kota Bharu were banished to the store room as one section is being converted into a mini theatre. In the mean time the video display of the invasion of Malaya is conducted at the front section which is shown to visitors on request. Presented by the Japanese government this 80 minute video presentation was actually a wartime account of the Japanese conquest of Malaya narrated

in Japanese which might not be comprehensible to the ordinary visitors. When I viewed it in early June 2004 there was a foreigner in the small crowd. His endurance with the presentation lasted for 25 minutes while the patience of a Malay family of 6 lasted less than 3 minutes before disappearing to the other sections. Undoubtedly language was a major factor for them.

The section on “Kelantan during the Japanese (and Thai) Military Administration” is located at the back of the museum. There is an abundant of displays that could engaged the visitor. One is a bulky iron radio measuring 11 by 11 by 22 inches. There are also newspaper cuttings from wartime newspapers like the *Shonan Times* and a provisions’ purchasing card with all of them kept in a glass box. Equally interesting is the commemoration stone (*Batu peringatan Jepun*) which is a replica of the original now located at a secondary school in Machang (Hamzah Secondary School). The stone was originally constructed at the Kemuning bridge some 1.8 miles from Machang town while the original stone base is now submerged in water.

The commemoration stone measures approximately 4 feet in height and 2 and half feet wide at its base with the top tapering off. On one face there is written Nasu Butai while on the other face are Japanese characters “*Senseki Kinenhi*” [monument to commemorate the aftermath of the war]. Nasu Butai was one of the detachment of the 18<sup>th</sup> Army that spearheaded the invasion. The stone was dated 12 December 1941 and timed at 11 am. According to oral traditions it was erected to commemorate a senior Japanese officer who was killed on the previous day. In the mid-1960s some Japanese nationals broke open the original stone and took the ashes stored at its base to Japan. In the subsequent rearrangement of exhibits this stone was banished to the store room.

In the same section there are many pictures relating to the British surrender, maps and battle plans for the advance to Singapore, items such as stamps, newspaper cuttings, model planes, photographs of Singapore showing the extensive destruction caused by the invasion, Japanese military personalities like General Hisaichi Terauchi, Lt General Takuma Nishino who was commander of the Imperial Guards Division, and British officers like Major General Gordon Bennet and Lt General Sir Lewis Heath of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Indian Corp. There is even a photograph of the famed Commander Issoroku Yamamoto who led the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1942.

An old bicycle similar to the ones used by the Japanese during the invasion is put on display besides photographs including of Japanese soldiers riding bicycles, the Japanese landing at Sabak, planes dropping bombs ostensibly on the Kelantan coast, the bombings of Sabak beach, Japanese soldiers marching through the Kelantan country side, and of military personalities on both sides of the military divide such as Lt General Tomoyuki Yamashita, Vice Admiral Jisaburo Ozama (Southern Squadron of Japanese Navy Commander in Chief), Lt General Mutaguchi Renya of the 18<sup>th</sup> Division and British officers like AE Percival and Berthold Kemp. Perhaps the display that make the most impression is the photograph of desolate Sabak beach which was taken on 10<sup>th</sup> December by a Japanese photographer which shows barbed wires and truncated coconut trees that had been blown off by massive fire power. There is not a single building in sight or any sign of life. All dead bodies must have been cleared by then but still the picture conveys an eeriness of death and senseless destruction.

Other displays in this section include several photographs including that of British soldiers marching under the caption “Kelantan returns under British protection” which looked rather out of place. Another photograph show the burnt out part of Kota Bharu which was destroyed by a fire which broke out on 17 June 1944 at 2.30 pm. According to the accompanying narrative the fire spread rapidly engulfing wooden buildings with attap roof that caused much destruction to property and business.

An interesting display is a copy of a wartime report titled “Document towards Japanese Invasion” which include “Laporan Pasukan ke-25” [Report of the 25<sup>th</sup> Army] written on 28 June 1942 and “Rancangan Peperangan Malaya: Operasi dan Proses Pertahanan pertemporan kawasan Kota Bharu” [Plan for the war in Malaya: Operations and defences in the Kota Bharu engagement zone] from 8 to 11 December 1941. The original document was titled *Kota Bharu Fukin Joriku Sento* [The battle for the landing in the Kota Bharu area] in 17 pages typescript which was issued by the 25<sup>th</sup> Army on June 28, 1942.

*Kota Bharu Fukin Joriku Sento* is divided into 6 sections covering among others, the conditions of Malaya and Japan before the invasion, the local topography and its impact on strategy, on the Malayan forces, war operations, result of war operations, and other important matters for future references. On the result of the war, for instance, the

Japanese forces manage to confiscate valuable petrol and vehicles (including 23 planes, 13 armored carriers, 23 cars and 84 small lorries) besides considerable arms (24 heavy machineguns, 49 light machineguns and 8 anti-air craft guns). In section 6, the initial problems were highlighted and the impression given is that the Japanese army was still unsure of their capacity to control the country. Unfortunately during the rearrangement of museum exhibits in early 2004 this important document was removed and banished to the store room.

There are numerous maps among the displays. One is a map of the Malay peninsula to indicate Japanese military advances until mid-December 1942 complete with the relevant dates. There is also a map of Kelantan at the time of the invasion. There are pictures of members of the Kelantan royalty such as Tengku Mahmud Yusoff, who was a member of the *Montri Spa* (Montri Sabha in Kedah) in 1944. One interesting display is a copy of a speech made by the sultan of Kelantan on the occasion of the cession of the state to Thailand titled “Uchapan kepada Pegawai<sup>2</sup> dan Kakitangan Kerajaan serta rakyat<sup>2</sup> berkenaan serahan Negeri Kelantan kepada Negeri Thai” [Speech to officers and staff and people of Kelantan on the cession of the state to Thailand]. The original is in Jawi but there is also a romanized version although the word “serta” [and/with] was wrongly spelt as “setia” [loyalty] in the romanised one which is very significant indeed.

The section “Kelantan during the Japanese (and Thai) Military Administration” occupies a space of approximately 25 feet by 25 feet and 20 feet. The caption was titled both in Malay and English with a Japanese flag on its right and the Kelantan flag on the left. There are six movable platforms including one made of glass that houses Japanese memorabilia. The photographs cover a wide variety including administrators and state leaders, former death railway laborers and a former Japanese soldier. There is also a lengthy narrative describing the Thai military government in Kelantan (October 1943 to August 1945) that was characterized by soaring crime rate, Thai failure to exercise strict control on their military personnel and the unruly nature of the Thai military. The full narrative is appended below.

Under the Thai military government, things remained as they had been under the Japanese military administration. The people continued to suffer, and life was still hard due to shortages of food products and other

compulsory (sic) necessities. The shortages was caused by the war. The economy was in recession: imports and exports had ceased. The measures taken by the Thais were identical to that of the Japanese government. They encouraged people to cultivate the land in order to grow more food. Essential items continued to be rationed. Crime was more widespread than it had been when Kelantan was under direct Japanese military rule. Some members of the Thai forces were involved in immoral activities like accosting and molesting Malay women who feared to get close (sic) into the streets of Kota Bharu. There were instances of murder with corpses found in isolated places while the killer or killers remained undetected.”

The museum also put on display photographs of 6 individuals – all male – and their testimonies about the Japanese period. These individuals include former death railway labourers while one photograph was without any form of identification. The first was Jaafar Seman from Machang who left for the Death Railway as a 19 year old to replace his father in law. After the war he settled in Kanchanaburi and only returned to Machang in 1988. Another labourer, Ismail Yaakup was interviewed in 1994 when he was 72 years old. He had a varied occupation including driver and a stint in the Japanese army. Ismail had the uncomfortable experience of being subjected to Japanese brutalities. For some unknown reasons his testimony is the only one that is translated into English.

Perhaps the most significant testimony belongs to Haji Nik Muhamad Nik Abdul Kadir who was born in April 1925. A school teacher during the occupation Haji Nik Muhammad gives a positive appraisal of the occupation. On the other hand Haji Wan Ismail Mohd Saad, born in 1918 and later attended the *Shihan Gakko* in Singapore, recalled the period as one of hardship with the Japanese extremely firm, the people living in constant fear and collaborators making use of every available opportunities to benefit themselves. He also recalled that salary was paid in kinds notably daily needs and that the Japanese attempted to cultivate anti-colonial mentality among the locals.

There is much information on the Death Railway which was wrongly translated at Lethal Railway from the Malay “*Keretapi Mau*”. The displays and limited data appended are gruesome. The project claimed a total of 16,000 lives or one life for every 28 yards! There are pictures of the labourers, the POWs and even a part of a railway track although it is uncertain if this is from the original death railway. There is also a map of the railway

that straddled the Thai-Burma border from Thanbuzayat to Nongpladek. Some of the familiar stations include Tamarkhan, Tamajo, Songkhlaburi and Kanburi while the ones undecipherable include Nikki, Rinton and Tonchan. The pictures of sickly and malnourished laborers drive home the inhumane treatment meted by the Japanese to these including POWS and Malaysians. These are powerful images that are implanted in the popular mind with regards the negative aspect of Japanese rule. A picture of the Japanese and Malay rulers during the celebration of the *Tencho Setsu* in the same section is certainly out of place here.

Another important section is on heroism/bravery and the anti-Japanese activities. This section is replete with photographs of those who in the official mind have exhibited acts of heroism and outstanding bravery to face the Japanese such as Lt Adnan Saidi (there is also a photograph of the spot where he died in Pasir Panjang in Singapore), Tengku Mahmud Mahyidden (the head of the Malay section of Force 136), Mohd Zain Jaafar, Ibrahim Ismail (two members of Force 136 who were parachuted into Malaya at Pulau Perhentian off Terengganu but later captured by the Japanese and interned at Taiping), Lt Ibrahim Alla Ditta (cited as the first Malaysian to receive the Military Cross), Corporal Yaacob Bidin of the Malay regiment (the first Malay to receive the Military Medal), Tengku Osman Md Jewa, Gurchan Singh, Freddie Chapman, a group photograph of 136 Liaison Officers taken in 1942 and a picture of Claude Fenner, John Davis, Richard Broome and Basil Goodfellow. There is also a picture of the two Japanese officers who had interrogated Mohd Zain and Ibrahim at Taiping. Ibrahim Ismail who retired as a full general and chief of the Malaysian armed forces in the 1960s did write on this episode in his postwar memoir without any evidence of malice towards any of them or even other Japanese.<sup>25</sup> As in other museums the MPAJA is not treated as part of the anti-Japanese war and hence its exclusion from this section although it did appear in another section entitled "Kelantan during the British Military Administration (BMA)."

The section on "Kelantan during the BMA" period contains photographs relating to the surrender that took place in Singapore including that of Lt General Itagaki Seishiro (commander of the Japanese forces in Malaya-Singapore) surrendering his sword, and of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibrahim Ismail, *Have you Met Mariam?* (Johor Bahru: Westlight, 1984)

as this British trained outfit is closely related to the Malayan Communist Party while its members later formed the core of the MPAJA.



weapons surrendered including machineguns and swords, Japanese war criminals being marched to court which was wrongly dated 12 September 1945, the visual of a dead Japanese soldier shot by the executioners and the picture of one Hamada and Yamamoto on the way to the gallows. There are also visuals of the destruction in Hiroshima and Nagasaki caused by the atomic bombs. The 18 visuals include of the atom bomb itself, an aerial view of the mushroom like explosion and the crew members of the Enola Gay, the B-29 bombers that carried out the actual bombings. These are powerful visuals to drive home that all wars are destructive to life, property and the environment.

## Concluding Remarks

For those who had lived through the Japanese occupation of Malaya the experience is a traumatic one. Many Malaysians or their immediate family members were tortured by the Japanese or had to endure considerable hardship. It is this memory that was passed on to later generations of Malaysians. However such transmission is necessarily limited in its scope. On the other hand museums are a more effective means of preserving and transmitting the memories to a wider audience from among the Malaysian public (and non-Malaysian too) although only selected memories, the ones that are deemed nationally productive to the official mind, are promoted. It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of these attempts especially when exhibitions on ghosts at one wing of the Alor Setar museum managed to draw more crowds, and hence more excitement to museum visitors, than the permanent exhibits on the Japanese occupation located on the ground floor of the same building ever did. There is also very little appreciation of the exhibits with most visitors notably school children hurrying over them without being provided with a guided tour. One might wish to question these half-hearted efforts towards public commemoration.

By comparison the Singapore government is much more serious, albeit for its own reasons, to ensure that the occupation and the bravery of local defenders especially the original members of the Malay Regiments were not forgotten through a number of museums, the variety of its displays and expensive audio visuals that offered greater interaction with museum visitors. In contrast to the focus on these soldiers or even the prisoners of Changi and the enforced settlers of Endau there is nothing on the Dalforce