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The Japanese Occupation of Insular Southeast Asia: Japanese Homogenizing Policies and Local National Identities in British Borneo, the Philippines and the Netherlands Indies **

Abstract

This paper investigates the Japanese occupation in the countries of Maritime Southeast Asia and juxtaposes local national identity of British Borneo, the Philippines and the Netherlands Indies with the Japanese administration policies acting as a homogenizing factor. The paper states that the Japanese implemented administrative simplification and a uniformity of wartime policies. This contrasts sharply with the differences in national historiography and historical memory of World War II in East-Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia. The argument here is that these differences result from the differences in policy implementation, context and indigenous popular responses in the individual countries to the Japanese policies for Southeast Asia. These differences are therefore reflections of the individual national identities.

Key words: Japanese, World War II, Policies, National Identity, Borneo, Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia

Japan succeeded in occupying the vast territory of Southeast Asia during World War II. This presented Japan with the problem of managing these newly acquired regions. Japan did have experience in colonial administration and since the start of the 20th century had brought the territories of Taiwan and Korea into the Japanese Empire. Soon after the defeat of Germany in World War I various island groups in the Pacific Ocean became a League of Nations mandate given to Japan. By 1937 Japan had firmly established itself in Manchuria and that same year launched into a struggle with China, one that had already spanned four long years prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 which marked the beginning of World War II in the Pacific. When Japan quickly brought all of Southeast Asia into its sphere of influence in 1941-1942 the Japanese administrators were overstretched but not without policy experience.

Today Southeast Asia consists of 11 countries. A rough geographical division leaves us with five nations considered to be geographically a part of mainland Southeast Asia and another five being insular nations of varying size. Indonesia and the Philippines are the largest of these countries with Singapore, East Timor and Brunei far smaller in size. Malay-

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sia belongs in fact both to insular Southeast Asia as well as to Mainland Southeast Asia with East-Malaysia on Borneo Island and West-Malaysia on the Malay Peninsula. In the years before World War II the territory that is now Malaysia was administratively extremely complex. Several administrative entities were discernable there: the British Crown Colony of the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States, various un-federated Malay States, the Kingdom of Sarawak and the territory of the North Borneo Chartered Company now referred to as Sabah but then simply called North Borneo or British North Borneo. Singapore was part of the Straits Settlements and so was Labuan Island on Borneo but the neighboring Kingdom of Brunei administratively formed yet another protectorate of Great Britain. The territories of the other colonial powers also contained administrative complexities but were generally far simpler in structure.

This paper focuses only on what were to become the Philippines, Indonesia and East-Malaysia in order to more easily categorize and fleece out the interplay of various factors through comparative analysis to explain the differences in the post-war historiographical views and historical memories of the Pacific War era in these countries. To include the region of mainland Southeast Asia, where the political situation at the time was more complex with Thailand nominally independent and Vichy France in Indochina in power for much of the duration of World War II, would make this essay too general and too long. The argument in this paper is that the differences in historiography and historical memory of the era of World War II in East-Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia today were caused through local differences in policy implementation, context and indigenous popular responses despite relatively uniform Japanese central policies for the whole of Southeast Asia. These events reflect therefore the crystallization of national identity in these individual nations during the Japanese Occupation era.

Japanese Simplification of Colonial Administration

Japan knew that it would have to efficiently govern the different regions and territories of Southeast Asia that it would capture through a southward attack. In anticipation, Japan decided to greatly simplify the administration of the colonial possessions in the regions. On 26 November 1941 the Japanese Army and Navy reached an agreement where the Navy would be responsible for the administration of: Dutch Borneo, Celebes, the Moluccas, the Lesser Sunda Islands, New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago and Guam.¹ The Army would be in charge of: Hong Kong, the Philippines, British Malaya, British Borneo, Burma, Java and Sumatra.² The explanatory comment section of the document stated that the general rule here was that the Navy was put in charge of areas that were sparsely populated and which would be incorporated in the Japanese Empire whereas the Army was in charge of the more complex densely populated areas.³

The Philippines largely survived the Japanese administrative reforms as a single administra-

1 H. J. Benda et al., *Japanese Military Administration in Indonesia: Selected Documents*, New Haven, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1965. Document 2: Central Agreement between the Army and the Navy on the Military Administration of Occupied Areas, p. 5.

2 Benda, p. 5.

3 Benda, p. 7.

tive unit except for the obvious fact that American leadership was replaced by Japanese control. The whole region of British Borneo however was totally reshaped. The various British colonies in the region were amalgamated and the whole of British Borneo was now governed by one Japanese Governor. For British Borneo this reform brought an end to the complex administration of four different entities (Labuan, Brunei, Sarawak and British North Borneo) prevalent in that region and to an extent this can be seen as the beginning of administrative thinking that would lead to the formation of East-Malaysia many years later. Where the Japanese became a unifier in British Borneo or East-Malaysia, in the case of the Netherlands-Indies or Indonesia however, the Dutch administrative unity was broken and the Japanese Army governed Java and Sumatra with the Navy in charge of the eastern section of the Netherlands Indies including Dutch Borneo. This effectively broke up the administrative unity of the Netherlands Indies into different administrative territories or colonies under Japanese control. The eastern part of what is now Indonesia was underdeveloped and sparsely populated and administration by the Navy was therefore relatively straightforward. In the case of Java it also made sense to place one Army Governor in charge as Java was by far the most densely populated area of the Netherlands Indies. Japanese data for 1943 estimated the population of Java to be 51,023,161 people.⁴ The island of Sumatra was initially administratively connected to the former British territory of Malaya.⁵

One complicating administrative factor that the Japanese did have to take into account was the various indigenous rulers residing in the colonial possessions they had conquered in this region. Here also a central policy plan was implemented. Initially the Japanese were skeptical towards the indigenous rulers. In British Borneo this created the situation in which the Sultan of Brunei effectively found himself and his territory made part of the unified administration area of what had been British-Borneo but merely as an administrative subdivision of Miri Province instead of the single administrative region it had been before.⁶ This was in line with the Japanese policy of gradually eliminating the indigenous rulers that was preferred by the local administrators of Sumatra and Malaya. The administration in charge of the Sultans and Rulers in Malaya and Sumatra even stated in July 1942 that these were to be gradually eliminated.⁷ The central authorities in Tokyo in December 1942 issued clear orders against this.⁸ Emphasis was put on how the Japanese needed the support of the indigenous population and to respect indigenous rulers.⁹ Despite local differences, the general policies drafted by Tokyo and implemented by local military governors were standard all over the region but the structure of the various administrative entities was reshaped and simplified.

As the regions of Insular Southeast Asia were divided between the Japanese Navy and the Japanese Army on 20 November 1941, there would be a principal authority and a

4 Gunseikanbu, *Jawa Nenka*, Jakarta, Jawa Shinbun Kai, 1944, reprinted by Tokyo, Biblio, 1973, p. 219.

5 I. Hata (ed.), *Nanpo Gunsei no Kiko Kanbu Gunseikan Ichiran*, Tokyo, Nanpo Gunseishi Kenkyu Foramu, 1998, pp. 24-25.

6 B. Reece, *Masa Jepun: Sarawak under the Japanese 1941-1945*, Kuching, Sarawak Literary Society, 1998, p. 54.

7 H. J. Benda et al., *Japanese Military Administration in Indonesia: Selected Documents*, New Haven, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1965. Document 49: Items Concerning the Disposition of Heads of Autonomous Areas, pp. 184-185.

8 Y. Akashi and M. Yoshimura (eds.), *New Perspectives on the Japanese Occupation in Malaya and Singapore, 1941-1945*, Singapore, NUS Press, 2008, p. 5 and footnote p. 10.

9 H. J. Benda et al., *Japanese Military Administration in Indonesia: Selected Documents*, New Haven, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1965. Document 7: Telegram on the Administration of Occupied Southern Areas, p. 47.

subsidiary authority in each region.¹⁰ The Navy would assist the Army and vice versa depending on who held final responsibility in an area. The outline of that governing authority was: general administrative matters, public peace and order, acquisition and development of resources, finance and economic matters, infrastructure matters, propaganda and intelligence matters and then finally control of enemy property and facilities.¹¹ The Japanese implemented this rudimentary administrative structure throughout the region.

Uniformity in Japanese War Goals and Policies

Not only was the Japanese administrative structure similar throughout the region, Japanese policies and principles were also uniformly applied all over Southeast Asia. The policy towards indigenous rulers was just one example but all these policies were spelt out in centrally drafted documents. "Military governments shall be established in occupied areas to restore public order, expedite acquisition of resources vital to national defense, and ensure the economic self-sufficiency of military personnel."¹² An inherent tension in the principles of the Japanese administration was that one principle stated a respect for indigenous practices, but also that the natives would have to endure economic hardship caused by resource extraction and that violence would be used if they did not comply. The natives would then somehow also be made to trust the Japanese but were not to be encouraged to become independent.¹³ It seems an almost impossible task but it was nonetheless the Japanese objective. The position of the indigenous rulers highlights this well. On the one hand the local sultans and kings were to be respected but they also saw their states being subjugated and put under very strict regulations leaving very few illusions about real power despite the promise that their rights would be respected.

For Malaya, the Netherlands Indies, British Borneo and the Philippines, the Japanese emphasized the acquisition of resources vital for the war, prevention of outflow of resources to enemy nations and the use of existing enterprises to minimize the efforts of the extraction process; very much secondary to these was the achievement of economic self-sufficiency and consolidation of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.¹⁴ These were all orders agreed upon by the Japanese at the highest level. The resources targeted were specifically: petroleum, other mineral resources, agriculture, forestry, fishing and manufacturing.¹⁵ The orders were administratively handed down and issued to the local military governors in charge of the various areas in occupied Southeast Asia who were then responsible for the implementation of these orders. Exploitation of these territories needed to be carried out as smoothly as possible by the local authorities in order to help the Japanese war effort. The local military governors did have some leniency in how they personally dealt with the area they were responsible for but the general instructions were clear and uniform for the Southeast Asian countries and territories occupied.

10 Benda, Document 2: Central Agreement between the Army and the Navy on the Military Administration of Occupied Areas, p. 4.

11 Benda, Document 2: Central Agreement between the Army and the Navy on the Military Administration of Occupied Areas, pp. 4-5.

12 Benda, Document 1: Principles governing the Administration of Occupied Southern Areas, p. 1.

13 Benda, pp. 1-2.

14 Benda, Document 5: Outline of Economic Policies for the Southern Areas, pp. 17-18.

15 Benda, pp. 19-20.

Local Differences in Japanese Policy Implementation

Differences in the ways the policies set by Tokyo were implemented in the various areas under Japanese control was dependent on the Japanese personnel on the ground in the various local administrative areas. The orders were very generally phrased which granted a high degree of freedom to individual commanders on the ground. One example was that Tokyo had decreed that indigenous rulers needed to be respected yet the administration in charge of the sultans and rulers in Malaya and Sumatra stated in July 1942 that these areas were to be gradually eliminated and their rulers pensioned off.¹⁶ In Java, the first of the autonomous rulers was reappointed by the Japanese military governor in July 1942.¹⁷ One can clearly discern two different policy accents by two different Japanese Army Governors implementing the same central Japanese policy. The Japanese officers in charge of Sumatra and Malaya decided to make quicker progress toward removing the authority of the indigenous rulers whereas the Japanese authorities in Java decided to work with the local rulers and nationalist leaders. In Java, Commander Imamura took the initiative to bring the nationalist Sukarno out of imprisonment in Sumatra to Java against the advice of his superior for Southeast Asia, Marshal Terrauchi.¹⁸ Imamura's tolerance towards Indonesian nationalist leaders would go a long way in recruiting those Indonesian nationalists to work with the Japanese. In Borneo this was largely a non-issue as there was no political movement to speak of. In the Philippines the Japanese went much further. The decision to make the Philippines independent was made in Tokyo. In 1943, the Philippines was made independent and Vargas was praised for his voluntary cooperation "in the successful termination of the Greater East Asia War."¹⁹ Malaya, Sumatra, Java, Borneo and Celebes were also mentioned and promised more political participation but no independence.²⁰ It seems likely that the Japanese found greater appeasement of the indigenous population and leadership necessary in the case of the Philippines than in the cases of British Borneo and Indonesian nationalists.

Policies related to self-governance could be promoted or postponed by local commanders to an extent even when they were ordered from Tokyo directly. Locally on Java, Imamura was trying to bring Sukarno in line with the Japanese policy to win the support of the people.²¹ On British Borneo the Japanese Commander Maeda visited the Sultan of Brunei to reassure him and maintain his support in trying to legitimize Japanese rule.²² This however did not change the reality of the administrative reduction of Brunei's administrative position as a sub-region in a local province. Maeda even visited the Sultan of Pontianak on 12 May 1942.²³ That same sultan would later be accused of treason by the Japanese and executed with other local sultans and rulers from adjacent kingdoms.²⁴ In September 1942 Maeda died in an airplane accident and in his honor Labuan Island was renamed Maeda Island

16 Benda, Document 49: Items Concerning the Disposition of Heads of Autonomous Areas, pp. 184-185.

17 Benda, Document 13: Order Concerning the Autonomous Area in Java, p. 60.

18 G. S. Kanahela, 'The Japanese Occupation of Indonesia: Prelude to Independence', PhD thesis, University of Cornell, 1967, p. 53.

19 H. J. Benda et al., *Japanese Military Administration in Indonesia: Selected Documents*, New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1965. Document 9: Premier Tojo's Address before the 82nd Extraordinary Session of the Imperial Diet, p. 51.

20 Benda, Document 9: Premier Tojo's Address before the 82nd Extraordinary Session of the Imperial Diet, p. 51.

21 G. S. Kanahela, 'The Japanese Occupation of Indonesia: Prelude to Independence', PhD thesis, University of Cornell, 1967, p. 55.

22 Bob Reece, *Masa Jepun: Sarawak under the Japanese 1941-1945*, Kuching, Sarawak Literary Society, 1998, p. 58.

23 Reece, p. 61.

24 See for more details K. G. Ooi, *The Japanese Occupation of Borneo 1941-1945*, London and New York, Routledge, 2011, pp. 102-107.

by the Japanese. At the time Maeda was trying to win the support of the royal elite on Borneo. A similar process took place on Java. Imamura managed to win the confidence of the nationalist elite and in the process to reduce the number of Japanese troops garrisoned on Java to a mere 10,000 soldiers which effectively freed up more troops desperately needed for the war.²⁵ What is less known is how effectively the Japanese implemented the same policy with the Javanese royals from the various indigenous kingdoms on Java.²⁶

Commander Watanabe in Malaya and Sumatra on the other hand was notorious in his desire not to accommodate a policy of support for the desires of the indigenous population.²⁷ As hard liner, he treated the sultans with far less respect than his counterparts in other regions and was reprimanded by Tokyo.²⁸ Tokyo clearly reacted when its policies were implemented too liberally. In this case, the local Japanese commander had to give in and a few months later the Japanese held a public ceremony reinforcing the position of the sultans of Malaya and Sumatra.²⁹ The Navy administered areas of Eastern Netherlands Indies were seen as more primitive compared to those of Java and the distances there from the administrative centre made governing even harder. The Navy was largely against self-rule in the region. When in 1943 Tokyo decided to allow preparation for future independence of Indonesia, the Java newspapers under the Japanese army administration exploited that news for propaganda purposes but the indigenous population in the Navy controlled area was left completely in the dark.³⁰ Nothing was announced. The local Japanese Navy commanders were more reluctant to implement these policies compared to the Army but even in the Army there was argument between the commanders in Java and Sumatra before the policy decreed in Tokyo was adopted. In the Philippines this situation was from the outset different because of the heavier resistance there when the Japanese came in as well as the fact that the Americans had given the indigenous people more administrative control. Here, general Homma was in charge but replaced in August 1942 by Tanaka.³¹

Local Tactical-Geographical Conditions: Availability of Resources and Proximity to the Front

Acquisition of regional resources by the Japanese military was paramount in Japanese policy but differed in the regions. Here, local conditions played out that were beyond the control of the Japanese governors and commanders in the region. 16 million people lived in the Philippines in 1939.³² As we have seen, the population of Java exceeded 51 million in 1943. For British Borneo post-war estimates add up to less than 1 million inhabitants in

25 G. S. Kanahela, 'The Japanese Occupation of Indonesia: Prelude to Independence', PhD thesis, University of Cornell, 1967, p. 65.

26 See F. Dhont, 'Outlasting Colonialism: Socio-political Change in the Javanese Principalities under the Japanese Occupation of Indonesia during World War II', PhD thesis, Yale University, 2012.

27 Y. Akashi and M. Yoshimura (eds.), *New Perspectives on the Japanese Occupation in Malaya and Singapore 1941-1945*, Singapore, NUS Press, 2008, p. 34.

28 Akashi, p. 44-45.

29 A. Reid, *The Blood of the People: Revolution & the End of Traditional Rule in Northern Sumatra*, Singapore, NUS Press, 2014, pp. 113.

30 G. S. Kanahela, 'The Japanese Occupation of Indonesia: Prelude to Independence', PhD thesis, University of Cornell, 1967, pp. 93-94.

31 T. A. Agoncillo, *The Fateful Years: Japan's Adventure in the Philippines 1941-1945*, Diliman, University of the Philippines Press, 2001, p. 356.

32 L. S. Millegan, 'Census of the Philippines: 1939', *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 1. Nov 1942, p. 77.

total.³³ This represents a completely different manpower situation in the various areas.

For the Japanese, people were seen as a resource to be utilized for the war effort. Actual data is very fragmentary but it is known that laborers were imported in large numbers in British Borneo. The Japanese created the *North Borneo Labour Business Society* and imported 12,000 workers.³⁴ On Labuan Island 3,000 Javanese workers were imported to work on the construction of the airfield.³⁵ Local people were also made to work but additional foreign laborers were brought in where needed. Despite geographical proximity to the Philippines, these laborers did not come from the Philippines.³⁶ Laborers were recruited from Java where they were amassed in Javanese harbors and later shipped out overseas.³⁷ Aiko Kurasawa estimates the number of Javanese workers (*Romusha*) to have been 2.5 million.³⁸ Shigeru Sato adds that the actual number was much higher due to replacements for expired contracts and after worker death.³⁹ After the war, a Japanese general testified that about 270,000 *Rōmusha* were transported out of Java to work.⁴⁰

The data seems to indicate that in the Philippines there was no large export of workers whereas many Javanese died in foreign jungles. A British administrator arriving in Brunei after liberation in 1945 painted a picture of what happened to those workers brought outside of their homeland: "Someone in a jeep would be traversing one of the jungle tracks and come across perhaps three or four thin starving Javanese by the roadside."⁴¹ That story is echoed in many locations. Emaciated Javanese dying alongside the roadside is a collective memory of World War II in Indonesia. Resentment against this forced recruitment also fuelled the rebellion by Albert Kwok in what is now Kota Kinabalu in North Borneo as it flared up following a rumor in October 1943 that Chinese men were to be rounded up for labor and girls for brothels.⁴²

In the case of women, the exploitation seems to have been more complicated and is even harder to reconstruct. Women were also exploited as sexual slaves or 'comfort women' (Jpn, *Jugun Ianfu*). From the little that is known it is clear that the Javanese girls sent to Borneo met Filipina girls there.⁴³ Taiwanese women were even found in Sumatra.⁴⁴ Data for South Sulawesi stated that 223 women had been working there,⁴⁵ 72 of whom were (local) Toraja

33 Y. L. Lee, 'The Population of British Borneo', *Population Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3, March 1962, p. 227.

34 B. Reece, *Masa Jepun: Sarawak under the Japanese 1941-1945*, Kuching, Sarawak Literary Society, 1998, p. 150.

35 Pasukan Penyelidik Jabatan Sejarah Universiti Malaya, *Kajian Sejarah Labuan 1800-1984*, Labuan, Perbadanan Labuan, n.d., p. 286.

36 R. T. Jose, 'Labor Usage and Mobilization during the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines, 1942-1945', in P. Kratoska (ed.), *Asian Labor in the Wartime Japanese Empire: Unknown Histories*, New York, Routledge, 2015.

37 One example of a local study is found in F. Dhont, 'A Case of Romusha in Yogyakarta,' in T. J. Connors et al. (ed.), *Social Justice and Rule of Law: Addressing the Growth of a Pluralist Indonesian Democracy*, Semarang, Diponegoro University Publisher, 2011, pp. 493-514.

38 A. I. Kurasawa, 'Mobilization and Control: A Study of Social Change in Rural Java, 1942-1945', PhD thesis, University of Cornell, 1988, p. 258.

39 S. Sato, *War, Nationalism, and Peasants: Java under the Japanese Occupation 1942-1945*, Armonk, M.E. Sharpe, 1994, p. 157.

40 A. I. Kurasawa, 'Mobilization and Control: A Study of Social Change in Rural Java 1942-1945', PhD thesis, University of Cornell, 1988, pp. 259-260.

41 T.S Monks, *Brunei Days*, Sussex, Book Guild, 1992, p. 149.

42 Monks, p. 147.

43 G. Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War*, London and New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1994, p. 144.

44 Hicks, p. 140.

45 Y. Yoshimi, *Jugun Ianfu Shiryoshu*, Tokyo, Otsuki Shoten, 1992, p. 367.

women and 49 came from Java.⁴⁶ Soldiers' testimonies also provided information reinforcing this mix of local and imported 'comfort women'. One testimony by a soldier, Kayasama Yoshikichi, stated that where he was based there were Japanese, Korean and local 'comfort women'.⁴⁷ In fact, between 670,000 and 1 million Koreans were brought to Japan as forced labor since 1939, including women, some of whom would end up as comfort women in the Japanese empire.⁴⁸ To the credit of the Philippines government the special position of the Philippines as an independent country protected the export and exploitation of Filipino laborers.

It is important to remember that the conditions on the ground were very different in the territories controlled by Japan. The acquisition of resources was a major Japanese policy,⁴⁹ while these resources were not uniformly distributed in Southeast Asia. Borneo was oil rich and oil was an essential and scarce resource for the Japanese fleet. This oil rich area was also very sparsely populated hence the need to import workers. In Brunei and Miri this created a situation where the Japanese focus on oil extraction there necessitated the importing of workers as the population of British Borneo was not large enough or concentrated enough to support Japanese labor needs. These elements influenced how the Japanese occupation would later affect the post-war historical memory of the Bruneians and the people of Borneo. In a similar fashion, the sparse population density of the Navy territories of Eastern Indonesia would create somewhat less friction with the local population as compared to Java. It seems clear that the collective memory of World War II was territorially based but has become, through historiography and narration, a narrative of suffering at the hands of the Japanese.

The same dynamics played out across insular Southeast Asia. The availability and nature of the resources that the Japanese wanted colored the experience of the war in the region. Luzon and Java were densely populated compared to Borneo. Some estimates state that Mindanao only held 1 million people of the total 18 million of the Philippines.⁵⁰ Such factors had a tremendous influence on how the Japanese would interact with the local population and how these then came to view the Japanese. Where the Japanese extracted resources but did not have to rely too heavily on or victimize the local population there was less resentment against the Japanese. The inherent tension of the principles of the Japanese administration of respect for indigenous practices yet inflicting economic hardship caused by resource extraction was mitigated where foreign workers were introduced in large numbers. The example of the rebellion led by Albert Kwok in North Borneo indicated that fear and resentment of exploitation of locals for labor triggered rebellion. Yet for guerrilla warfare and effective resistance to be possible, the actual proximity to the front mattered greatly. What was so different between the Philippines, the Netherlands Indies and British Borneo was the fact that in the Philippines resistance was widespread and organized. Even in Mindanao resistance was very important.⁵¹

46 Yoshimi, p. 368.

47 Y. Kasayama, 'Korean Guard' in H. T. Cook and T. F. Cook (eds.), *Japan at War: an Oral History*, New York, The New Press, 1992, p. 116.

48 A. Juretsu, 'Forced Labor' in H. T. Cook and T. F. Cook (eds.), *Japan at War: an Oral History*, New York, The New Press, 1992, pp. 192-193.

49 H. J. Benda et al., *Japanese Military Administration in Indonesia: Selected Documents*, New Haven, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1965. Document 1, Principles governing the Administration of Occupied Southern Areas, p. 1.

50 M. S. Vallejo, *The Battle of Ising: The Untold Story of the 130th Infantry Regiment in the Liberation of Mindanao and the Philippines 1942-1945*, Quezon City, New Day Publishers, 2015, p. 17.

51 See J. H. McGee, *Rice and Salt: A History of the Defense and Occupation of Mindanao During World War II*, San Antonio, The Naylor Company, 1962.

In British Borneo there were several successful resistance movements.⁵² In Indonesia pockets of resistance flared up, such as in Pontianak, only to be quickly extinguished. Only in Papua, close to the war front, did some of the Dutch manage with some degree of success to effectively organize resistance against the Japanese. Other areas were largely passive as the distance from outside support weighted heavily. The Pontianak massacres where many sultans were killed on suspicion of resistance showed how ruthlessly the Japanese could act.⁵³ They also showed how little could be done to stop the Japanese when the local population was too far from Allied support, which was essential to any viable and durable resistance. The Filipino resistance fighters of course had support from American submarines. Neither the British nor the Dutch could match or even come close to such logistic support and this goes a long way to explaining why local resistance movements were not that successful outside of the Philippines. It would be wrong to assume that the indigenous population outside of the Philippines did not have the strength to resist; other factors also played a role.

Differences in Local Indigenous Responses to the Japanese: Resistance and Accommodation

The British in British Borneo did not experience a unified front of indigenous forces articulating political demands. There was no single area of British Borneo to begin with as conditions in Brunei under a local Sultan were different from the relatively small Labuan island part of the Straits Settlements. The Kingdom of the Brooke Rajas had been in existence for 100 years and the area that is now referred to Sabah was ruled by a trading company. There was very limited national feeling that could grow. In the Philippines as well as on Java, where intellectuals of the whole of the Netherlands Indies would meet and study, this was clearly more the case as a national identity had crystallized more. The Philippines and Java were densely populated, politically active and somewhat developed in the era before World War II yet a very different war experience would become part of the historiography in each of these contexts.

As labor was clearly one vital resource extracted from Java and then exported to various areas all over insular Southeast Asia it is striking that in the Philippines laborers were not sent abroad to that extent. The fact that the Japanese gave independence to the Philippines in 1943 and gave responsibility for the labor policy to the Filipino government must have weighed in here.⁵⁴ The attitude of the Javanese in accommodating the Japanese when asked to by Imamura would seem to have had negative results as there seems to be a paradox here where Java was exploited more ruthlessly. In the case of British Borneo where the main resource was oil, population density was so low that workers had to be imported anyway, but even there resistance paid dividends. The rebellion in what is now Sabah caused the Japanese to bring in workers from Java and not exploit the local girls.⁵⁵ In the Philippines, resistance occurred and this almost immediately put tremendous stress on the Japanese sol-

52 T. Harrison, *World Within: A Borneo Story*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1959.

53 K. G. Ooi, *The Japanese Occupation of Borneo, 1941-1945*, New York, Routledge, 2011, pp. 102-107.

54 Ricardo T. Jose, 'Labor Usage and Mobilization during the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines, 1942-1945' in P. Kratoska (ed.), *Asian Labor in the Wartime Japanese Empire: Unknown Histories*, New York, Routledge, 2015, p. 267.

55 M. Hall, *Kinabalu Guerrillas: An Account of the Double Tenth Rising against the Japanese Invaders in North Borneo*, Kota Kinabalu, Opus Publications, 2009, p. 94.

diers. The Indonesian passivity toward the Japanese has to be seen in relation to the local political context before the war.

While the Americans had supported the Philippines in the process of gaining independence, in Java the Dutch had missed an opportunity for goodwill with the Indonesians that would cost them dearly when the Japanese attacked. The Dutch had even refused the Indonesians a minor form of self-government. The Sutarjo Petition in 1936 was a very minor appeal to gradually allow more self-government for the Dutch East Indies within the Dutch Empire but these minor requests were blatantly rejected on 16 November 1938.⁵⁶ The Americans in the Philippines in striking contrast had been seen to be on a clear political trajectory of Filipino independence. The Japanese advertised the independence of the Philippines but they could not deny that the USA had promised this already for 1946.⁵⁷ Another element to evaluate was the strength of the armed forces. In July 1941 the Dutch set up an Indonesian militia to aid the Dutch armed forces and the total number of Dutch armed forces rose from about 70,000 people in 1940 to 122,000 in March 1942, about half of them on Java.⁵⁸ Ironically, the Americans only had 31,000 US Army troops (including 12,000 Filipinos) and an extra 120,000 troops in poor shape in the Philippines Army.⁵⁹ These numbers therefore do not seem to be all that different. This makes it even more striking that the Philippines resisted so massively whereas the Javanese forces seemed to have melted away.

The Japanese policy was clear: "(...) the native inhabitants of the Southern areas shall be guided to assume their proper places and cooperate in the establishment of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere under the leadership of the Empire."⁶⁰ The same document later goes on to state that efforts were made to limit the impact of the war on the indigenous population as long resources can be extracted and areas made self-sufficient but also clearly spells out that "(...) no measures shall be taken for the sole purpose of placating the natives. At the same time, care shall be exercised not to encourage nationalist movements."⁶¹ This created the ironic situation that Indonesia as a country that supported Japan to an extent was not being helped at all in its goal of independence whereas the country that resisted was in fact made independent. On 23 January 1942 Japan announced that if the Philippines cooperated with Japan it would become independent.⁶²

Ironically for Indonesia this policy of accommodation toward Japan did not pay off as the country suffered enormously in the war. This suffering was carried mostly by the ordinary local poor people, where men and women became Romusha laborers and lanfu comfort women. In British Borneo the local population also suffered but more so the Allied soldiers who were imprisoned there. In the Philippines the suffering caused by the war is portrayed to be more the result of a heroic struggle against the Japanese.

56 B. H. M. Vlekke, *Geschiedenis van den Indischen Archipel*. Roermond-Maaseik, J.J. Romen & zonen, 1947, pp. 450-451.

57 R. T. Jose (ed.), *World War II and the Japanese Occupation*. Quezon City, University of the Philippines Press, 2006, p. 144.

58 R. Van Maaren and H. Eijgelshoven, 'Ons Indië Prooi van Japan', in B.R. Immerzeel and F. van Esch (eds.) *Verzet in Nederlands-Indië tegen de Japanse bezetting 1942-1945*, Den Haag, Uitgeverij Koninginnegracht, 1993, pp. 21-22.

59 C. Porter, 'New Light on the Fall of the Philippines' *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 27, no. 4, Dec 1954, p. 372.

60 H. J. Benda et al., *Japanese Military Administration in Indonesia: Selected Documents*, New Haven, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1965. Document 6: Outline of the Conduct of Military Administration in Occupied Areas, p. 26.

61 Benda, Document 6: Outline of the Conduct of Military Administration in Occupied Areas, pp. 29-30.

62 R. T. Jose (ed.), *World War II and the Japanese Occupation*, Quezon City, University of the Philippines Press, 2006, p. 114.

The Philippines has a genuine pride in this resistance whereas in Indonesia resistance was largely symbolic in national historiography. In the Philippines outside support helped but for Indonesia this failed to materialize because the country was too far removed from any supply line and the head of the Allied administration responsible in the area was not American but British with far less resources at his disposal. The extent of the resistance in the Philippines is clear from the numbers. Figures from 1964 state that 127,200 Japanese troops were active in the Philippines on 15 August 1945 and 486,600 Japanese (368,700 Army and 117,900 Navy personnel) died in the Philippines with another 12,000 dying later.⁶³ Data for Indonesia show that only 10,000 troops were to guard Java in Indonesia in late 1942.⁶⁴ In British Borneo the numbers show three infantry battalions of which a large number of these troops were later withdrawn in mid-1943.⁶⁵ These are preposterously low numbers but are clearly indicative of how the Japanese maintained a degree of confidence in their rule of British Borneo and Java that they did not have in the Philippines. Many Japanese troops in Indonesia were active in the Eastern areas of Indonesia and specifically on Papua Island where the front lines were but there were tremendous differences in the political and security contexts of the Philippines in comparison to British Borneo and Indonesia.

In Manila President Quezon told Jose P. Laurel that the Filipinos should cooperate with the Japanese if needed and try to keep the Philippines together to protect the population.⁶⁶ In Indonesia this was different to an extent. Contrary to President Quezon who was in a position of political authority before the war, the political activists Sukarno and Hatta had been imprisoned by the Dutch for many years when the Japanese released them from jail and popular support for the Dutch colonial power was far less widespread. In Indonesia, the policy of supporting the Japanese would not be seen as treason but more as a forced compliance. This was not that different from what happened with some politicians in the Philippines. Vargas as Mayor of Manila also had to comply with the Japanese demands of: keeping law and order and restoring utilities; regulating movement of goods in and out of Manila; supervising enemy nationals; procuring labor and resources for the Japanese; surrendering firearms; continuing relief works and accepting Japanese directors and experts in the administration.⁶⁷ Emilio Aguinaldo stated also that the guerrilla people from the USAFFE should stop their efforts.⁶⁸ In British Borneo the Japanese administration did not involve the need for large-scale administration. The Japanese did replace the Europeans as the elite but utilized the system of indirect ruler where local indigenous leaders remained in place.⁶⁹ There were signs that the Philippines did have some degree of decision making power. Jose P. Laurel also stated that he could not comply with the request of the Japanese to declare war on the USA after the independence and the Japanese accepted this position.⁷⁰

It is clear that the Japanese implemented these policies in an attempt to appease the Fili-

63 K. Kiyofumi, 'White Flag', in H. T. Cook and T. F. Cook (eds.), *Japan at War: an Oral History*, New York, The New Press, 1992, p. 373.

64 G. S. Kanchele, 'The Japanese Occupation of Indonesia: Prelude to Independence', PhD thesis, University of Cornell, 1967, p. 65.

65 B. Reece, *Masa Jepun: Sarawak under the Japanese 1941-1945*, Kuching, Sarawak Literary Society, 1998, p. 54.

66 R. T. Jose (ed.), *World War II and the Japanese Occupation*, Quezon City, University of the Philippines Press, 2006, p. 111.

67 Jose, pp. 112-113.

68 Jose, p. 117.

69 K. G. Ooi, *Rising Sun over Borneo: The Japanese Occupation of Sarawak 1941-1945*, Houndmills, Macmillan Press, 1999, p. 47.

70 R. T. Jose (ed.), *World War II and the Japanese Occupation*, Quezon City, University of the Philippines Press, 2006, p. 156.

pinos who had already obtained a stronger position politically than the Indonesians had obtained from the Dutch and were inclined to keep cooperating with the Americans. In Java and Indonesia the Japanese clearly did not provide the same degree of autonomy or limit exploitation as they seem to have done in the Philippines. The pre-war conditions seem to have been responsible for this difference in resistance as well as the proximity of the Allied forces during the development of resistance. Some estimates state that 518,000 Japanese soldiers died in the Philippines.⁷¹ This was unthinkable elsewhere in insular Southeast Asia, where resistance was far more subdued and not at all widespread and instantaneous. In Indonesia there was some resistance by Dutch soldiers who were quickly rounded up. In Borneo there was minimal colonial resistance against the Japanese when they attacked. Resistance here took the shape of trying to destroy the oilfields in British Borneo and Dutch Borneo. This was done in Miri-Seria in British Borneo.⁷²

In the various layers of Filipino society and throughout the political spectrum resistance was widespread from the start. The United Front that formed in 1942 was anti-Japanese but pro-American and willing to organize.⁷³ About the leftwing Hukbalahap Ricardo T. Jose wrote: "The Hukbalahap was a revolutionary organization, seeking not just to oust the Japanese, but also to achieve a more equitable distribution of wealth. The USAFFE guerrillas on the other hand, sought to restore the pre-war, or peace time, order."⁷⁴ Here again there is a clear difference with Indonesia where the Indonesian Communist Party was forbidden since 1927 and many communists were exiled in Papua in the notorious *Boven Digoel* camp. In the Philippines, the Communist Party and the Socialist Party merged in 1938 after some Communist leaders were pardoned.⁷⁵ This created an atmosphere of greater political sympathy for the colonial power when the Japanese invaded. In March 1942, the Hukbalahap had come in contact with MacArthur.⁷⁶

In British Borneo the indigenous resistance was concentrated largely around one major incident that occurred in what is now Sabah. Albert Kwok led this rebellion and made contact with the Sulu Provincial Governor in April 1943.⁷⁷ This provided reinforcements and allowed him to more effectively organize the resistance. The actual attack is extremely minor compared to the scale of resistance in the Philippines. On the 9th of October 1943 Albert Kwok led an attack on Jesselton (now Kota Kinabalu) and the next morning on 10 October 1943 the guerrillas captured the town.⁷⁸ The bulk of these troops were about 300 Chinese but support also came from Sulu, while many Bajau and Dusun tribes did not support the rebels.⁷⁹ This effectively killed the momentum of the rebellion and on 19 December

71 S. Nakano, 'The politics of Mourning', in S. Ikehata and L. N. Yu-Jose (eds.), *Philippines-Japan Relations*, Quezon City, Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003, p. 343.

72 B. Reece, *Masa Jepang: Sarawak under the Japanese 1941-1945*, Kuching, Sarawak Literary Society, 1998, p. 27.

73 B. J. T. Kerkliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines*, Quezon City, Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2014, p. 111.

74 R. T. Jose (ed.), *World War II and the Japanese Occupation*, Quezon City, University of the Philippines Press, 2006, p. 262.

75 T. A. Agoncillo, *The Fateful Years: Japan's Adventure in the Philippines 1941-1945*, Diliman, University of the Philippines Press, 2001, p. 622.

76 Agoncillo, p. 631.

77 M. Hall, *Kinabalu Guerrillas: An Account of the Double Tenth Rising against the Japanese Invaders in North Borneo*, Kota Kinabalu, Opus Publications, 2009, p. 33.

78 Hall, p. 55.

79 Hall, p. 57.

1943, 100 Japanese soldiers crushed the remnants of the rebel group.⁸⁰ One day later military support from the Philippines arrived but it was too late.⁸¹ This one incident was the largest that occurred in British Borneo and that was indigenously led. One effect was that the rebellion did cause the Japanese to maintain about 25,000 men in the region.⁸²

Although the resistance in North Borneo is totally minor compared to that of the Philippines, it is again the proximity to the Philippines and the Allied support network that enabled it to even begin to organize. In Mindanao the intelligence the guerrillas provided with a network of more than 80 radios and an organized body of 35,000 guerrillas was a major contribution to the Allied forces.⁸³ When the rebellion in British Borneo occurred that network was not yet strong enough to extend support despite the geographical proximity between Sabah and Mindanao. Crushed by already weakening Japanese, the rebellion led by Albert Kwok became a major event in East-Malaysian history because of the element of indigenous resistance against the Japanese.

Agas and *Semut* would be military operations mounted by Australian and British secret troops in 1944 to more professionally organize and take up the resistance against the Japanese.⁸⁴ In British Borneo and near the end of 1944 a plane from the Philippines brought in the first British special troops with Tom Harrison.⁸⁵ The problem however was that the region was too far away for the British to provide logistic military support and the Americans had limited interest in that area with the Dutch even less able to do anything in the region.⁸⁶ Indigenous people in the Limbang area would however support the *Semut* operation.⁸⁷ In 1945 about 100,000 indigenous people were supporting *Semut*.⁸⁸ Japanese would suffer greatly in the area as many were killed and those retreating in February 1945 were constantly harassed in the Jesselton region.⁸⁹ From 1945, resistance to and harassment of surviving Japanese troops in Sabah was considerable.

In Java and Sumatra by contrast the Japanese maintained firm control until Japan surrendered on 15 August 1945. In fact, there the Japanese were even ordered by the Allied Forces to play a postwar role as guards for the Dutch civilians in the region in the context of Indonesian resentment towards colonialism.⁹⁰ In Indonesia, logistic support of the Allied forces was lacking and all attempts to organize resistance failed. This was also because the pre-war political climate did not make the indigenous population look that favorably upon the former colonial master. Sporadic events of Indonesian resistance recorded in In-

80 Hall, pp. 62-63.

81 Hall, p. 64.

82 Hall, p. 95.

83 M. S. Vallejo, *The Battle of Ising: The Untold Story of the 130th Infantry Regiment in the Liberation of Mindanao and the Philippines 1942-1945*, Quezon City, New Day Publishers, 2015, p.85.

84 T. Harrison, *World Within: A Borneo Story*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 140-141.

85 Harrison, p. 139.

86 Harrison, pp. 140-141.

87 Harrison, p. 216.

88 Harrison, p. 220.

89 I. Ueno, *An End to War: A Japanese Soldier's Experience of the 1945 Death Marches of North Borneo*, Kota Kinabalu, Opus Publications, 2012, p. 94.

90 I. J. Brugmans (ed.), *Nederlandsch-Indië onder Japanse Bezetting: Gegevens en Documenten over de Jaren 1942-1945*, Franeker, T. Wever, 1960, pp. 616-617.

donesian history are even smaller than in East-Malaysia. The massacre of Emplawas on the Island of Barbar of 5 October 1944 is virtually unknown by Indonesians. Three Japanese had been killed after punishing locals and later the Japanese killed many villagers in revenge.⁹¹ Slightly more familiar to Indonesians today are the incidents of Tasikmalaya and Indramayu where minor uprisings occurred with again only a few Japanese killed.⁹² The Peta rebellion of 14 February 1945 by some members of the indigenous Japanese trained militia is most widely known.⁹³ Their resistance is highly praised after the war and is prominent in Indonesian historiography as this group of Japanese trained Indonesian soldiers became the nucleus of the Indonesian Army. In the Indonesian collective memory of the war victimization is the main component. This is supported by the fact that only very few examples of Indonesian resistance to the Japanese occurred contrary to in the Philippines where resistance by all segments of the population is part of the collective memory of the history of the war and historiography. In Indonesia the resistance of the left-leaning elements of society against the Japanese is largely undocumented and very obscure.⁹⁴ Another element lacking in Indonesian historiography is the resistance of traditional rulers such as the Sultan of Pontianak.⁹⁵ All of these events were minor however and it is safe to say that Indonesian resistance against the Japanese was slight. Indonesian historiography is yet to fully incorporate the resistance of all groups and elements of Indonesian society that showed such signs. Contrary to the Philippines and even East-Malaysia in 1945 resistance in Indonesia was never organized properly with support from the Allied forces and the pre-war political policies of the Dutch colonial power made the socio-political environment less conducive for resistance.

Conclusion

Insular Southeast Asia experienced administrative simplification and largely uniform policies that the Japanese implemented across the region. These policies were carried out by Japanese administrators who by making slight modifications in the implementation already had an effect on the different areas in which they were active. It is however the local factors that largely determine how the war is perceived today in historical memory and the historiography of East-Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. This paper has shown that local factors of proximity to the front and differences in local resources that influenced the form of local exploitation by the Japanese had a tremendous impact on how the Japanese occupation played out and would later come to be perceived. The attitude of the local political elites and the general population in reaction to the specific resources the Japanese would exploit as well as the political reality before the war in each of these countries were also tremendously important.

91 H. Janssen, *Schaamte en Onschuld: Het Verdrongen Oorlogsverleden van Troostmeisjes in Indonesië*, Amsterdam, Nieuw Amsterdam Uitgevers, 2010, pp. 122-123.

92 A. I. Kurasawa, 'Mobilization and Control: A Study of Social Change in Rural Java, 1942-1945', PhD thesis, University of Cornell, 1988.

93 N. Notosusanto, *Pemberontakan Tentara Peta Blitar Melawan Jepang*, Jakarta, Pustaka Jaya, 1984.

94 Some work here has been done by A. E. Lucas, 'The Bamboo Spear Pierces the Payung: the Revolution against the Bureaucratic Elite in North Central Java in 1945', PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1980.

95 K. G. Ooi, *The Japanese Occupation of Borneo 1941-1945*, London and New York, Routledge, 2011, p. 104-107.

The Philippines, through resistance, managed to obtain privileges and some degree of autonomy, whereas Java and Indonesia more broadly by being more accommodating in allowing the population to be exploited paid a heavy price for very limited political gain. A mitigating factor was however that any attempt to resist was bound to fail as it was not aided by the Allied support network that was so much closer to the Philippines and even Sabah compared to Java where most Indonesian nationalists were based. Java also did not have the advantage that British Borneo had where the Japanese were largely interested in exploiting the oil resources and in doing so exerted less pressure on the indigenous population of British Borneo.

The Philippines resisted the Japanese and managed to do so both by combining right and left-leaning groups with the support of the Americans. These groups largely liberated their own country and took great pride in these events. This then became part of Filipino historiography and historical memory. In Borneo the resistance was mostly led by British and Australian trained indigenous people from the interior of Borneo Island. There was also an element of Chinese resistance that now forms a source of pride for the Chinese community in East-Malaysia and has received a place in local historiography. The historical memory of the war in the region is of suffering but not of specific victimization of the indigenous population. In the case of Indonesia, political accommodation to Japan was considerable. Indonesian historical memory was clearly influenced by the Japanese exploitation since victimization is prevalent in that memory. Indonesian historiography is still very rudimentary yet essentially reflects the lack of political desire to resist the Japanese following disappointment with the colonial rule of the Dutch. The variables of proximity to the war front where Allied logistic support could be brought in as well as the existence of the political will to resist the Japanese seem to have been the paramount ingredients that explain why the Philippines resisted and the Indonesians largely did not. In East-Malaysia the exploitation was directed more towards the extraction of oil as a resource and the population was spared from excessive victimization. These individual circumstances and events therefore highlight the different national identities shaped during the Japanese occupation where Japanese uniform policies met national uniqueness. As a result the local historiography and national memory of each country reflect the Japanese occupation very differently despite the uniformity of Japanese policies implemented at that time throughout Southeast Asia.

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Франк Донт

**Јапанска окупација острвске југоисточне Азије:
јапанске политике хомогенизације и локални
национални идентитети у Британском Борнеу,
Филипинима и Холандској Индији**

Апстракт

Овај рад истражује јапанску окупацију у земљама поморске југоисточне Азије и упоређује локални национални идентитет Британског Борнеа, Филипина и Холандске Индије са јапанским административним политикама које су деловале као фактор хомогенизације. У чланку се наводи да су Јапанци применили административно поједностављење и униформност политика током рата. Ово се у великој мери супротставља разликама у националној историографији и историјском сећању на Други светски рат у Источној Малезији, Филипинима и Индонезији. Аргументује се да ове разлике произлазе из разлика у примени политика, контексту и одговора народа у појединачним земљама према јапанским политикама за југоисточну Азију. Ове разлике су, дакле, рефлексije појединачних националних идентитета.

Кључне речи: Јапан, II светски рат, политике, национални идентитет, Борнео, Малезија, Филипини, Индонезија