

ULASAN BUKU/BOOK REVIEWS

Food Supplies and the Japanese Occupation in South-East Asia by Kratoska, Paul H. (ed.), Basingstoke, London: Macmillan, New York: St Martin's Press, 1998. 244pp, maps; figures; tables.

One of the most pressing tasks that faced Lord Louis Mountbatten as Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia Command (SEAC) was the shortage of rice in particular and other foodstuff. British military administrations that were setup under SEAC in Burma, Malaya, and British Borneo were faced with supply and distribution problems of rice, the staple food to more than 160 million souls inhabiting these territories at the time of the 15 August 1945 Japanese surrender. Rice was in very acute supply. Likewise a similar situation of rice shortages emerged in Indo-China, Thailand (Siam), the Netherlands Indies (Indonesia), and the Philippines. Ironically, Burma, Siam and mid Indo-China were net world exporters of rice before the outbreak of the Pacific War (1941-1945). But the Japanese occupation of the whole of South-East Asia except Siam beginning from December 1941 created the dire circumstances the region found itself when the war ended.

Shortages of rice and other foodstuff were being felt in various territories in South-East Asia as early as the first year of the Japanese military occupation. Curiously some regions recorded food surpluses while neighbouring areas suffered acute shortages. Not many studies have given much emphasis to the social and economic effects of this wartime phenomenon. Hence the appearance of *Food Supplies and the Japanese Occupation in South-East Asia* is a refreshing addition to the literature on the Japanese period in South-East Asia.

The production, supply and distribution of rice and other foodstuff during the three years and eight months of Japanese military occupation is the running theme of the ten essays in this volume. This collection is interesting in itself for a number of reasons. In dealing with food shortages during the Japanese occupation, it departs from the political-centric theme. Instead, working around rice and other food production and their distribution, the papers examine the social and economic developments during the war years in South-East Asia that has received scant attention in the current literature. Secondly, two of the papers (Paul H. Kratoska, Aiko Kurasawa) give a region-wide coverage of the food situation thereby offering a wider perspective on the interrelationships and linkages between territories in the region apparent during the occupation period. Such overviews reveal that South-East Asian countries shared several similarities but at the same time each territory had distinct differences from its neighbours as demonstrated in the case studies of the Philippines (Ricardo Trota Jose), Kedah (Kratoska), Sarawak (Robert Cramb), Java (Shigeru Sato, Pierre

van der Eng), and Indochina and Vietnam (Nguyen The Anh, Motoo Furuta). A perusal of the sources utilized by the contributors revealed new documentary materials that were recently released, of materials in indigenous languages, as well as the tapping of oral sources. Overall this collection edited by Kratoska provides a refreshing perspective of a brief yet significant period in South-East Asia.

In his paper, "The Impact of the Second World War on Commercial Rice Production in Mainland South East Asia", Kratoska analyzes how the war years affected rice production and distribution in Burma, Thailand and Cochin-China. Kurasawa, in her essay, "Transportation and Rice Distribution in South-East Asia during the Second World War", emphasizes on transport in the distribution of rice covering the territories of Burma, Java and Malaya, each with its respective rice situations ranging from surplus, self-sufficiency to deficit. Linkages between the territories in the movement of rice are addressed revealing the apparent interdependence and connections of these areas during the occupation period.

"Food Production and Food Distribution Program in the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation" by Jose looks at the efforts in addressing the food shortage. He argues that these efforts were already being undertaken during the pre-war period and may prove successful under peacetime conditions but were less fruitful during the war years. In his paper, "Malayan Food Shortages and the Kedah Rice Industry during the Japanese Occupation", Kratoska paints a rather gloomy picture of the rice situation in Kedah, the rice-bowl of Malaya, which despite recording a 10 per cent expansion in area under cultivation compared to pre-war figures suffered a 25 percent decline in production. It was a peninsula-wide phenomenon that brought about food shortages in Malaya during the occupation. The consequence of the shortages, as he observes, was "the growth of a generation of children had been stunted owing to inadequate diets, and signs of malnutrition were common among adults, particularly in the rural areas and on [rubber] estates". Likewise Cramb also sees the failure and negative consequences of Japanese wartime agricultural programmes in Sarawak in his essay entitled "Agriculture and Food Supplies in Sarawak during the Japanese Occupation". He concludes that in the case of Sarawak's rural economy, the Japanese period was "a significant "interruption" to the process of agricultural development".

The situation in Java was equally gloomy as Sato examines it in "Oppression and Romanticism: The Food Supply of Java during the Japanese Occupation". The sad situation was that both the Japanese and the Javanese nationalists disregarded the practical aspects and its dire consequences in their push for "total mobilization" of the masses for their own respective agendas. In his

essay, "Regulation and Control. Explaining the Decline of Food Production in Java, 1940-6", van der Eng blames the Japanese insistence of seeking to control the whole rice market in both supply and demand as the fact that brought about the damaging effects on food supply in Java during the occupation. Details of the famine of 1944-45 in Vietnam and its consequences are examined by The Anh's contribution, "Japanese Food Policies and the 1945 Great Famine in Indochina" and Furuta's, "A Survey of Village Conditions during the 1945 Famine in Vietnam". The Anh sees the Japanese occupation as creating ruinous effects culminating in the famine. Furuta, in a joint collaborative project with Professor Van Tao of the Vietnam Research Institute of History, undertook a survey of 23 hamlets in the northern region of Vietnam for oral recollections of this disastrous happening. Both papers not only enlighten us on this, to a large extent man-made tragedy, but also offer the socioeconomic perspective of the famine to offset, and, at the same time, complement the political emphasis of past studies.

Little quarrel can be made over the selection of the essays that is representative and collectively presents a penetrating analysis of the food situation in wartime South-East Asia. However, a concluding chapter reflecting on the food situation throughout the entire region of South-East Asia would further enhance its contribution. Most of the essays are supported by a host of statistical data and maps and suffers from few grammatical infelicities. Published under the Studies in the Economies of East and South-East Asia Series, *Food Supplies and the Japanese Occupation in South-East Asia* is undoubtedly an important read for scholars as well as the general public in South-East Asia.

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Managing Marital Disputes in Malaysia: Islamic Mediators and Conflict Resolution in the Syariah Courts by Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan and Sven Cedderoth (1997), Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Monograph Series, No. 75, Surrey: Curzon Press

This book is a result of a multi-disciplinary project entitled "Culturally Conditioned Models of Conflict Resolution: A Study of Malaysia and Sweden". The second and third chapters give a very useful overview of the history of the institutionalisation of the *Syariah* in Malaysia. Various family cases handled by the Islamic courts in Malaysia are also discussed. The other five chapters

provide an analysis of how disputes are settled through various conflict resolution techniques. The book is well researched and cases documented are quite extensive. The authors claim that the study was conceived to deal with the "Malay mode of conflict resolution as practised in the Religious Offices and the Syariah courts". Such an intention and its outcome seem intriguing, especially when there is a hint that conflicts and their resolutions may be culturally determined. In actual fact, however, the study does not manage to ascertain such a supposition. The study had a limitation in that the authors started out with a preconceived typology of conflict resolution modes and then attempted to fit their empirical findings into this framework. Five of the nine chapters are titled according to the typology adopted: Consultation, Conciliation, Mediation, Arbitration and Adjudication. Under each of these conflict resolution modes, the authors present several transcribed sessions of actual cases or exchanges which had taken place either at the Syariah court, religious office or counseling office at one of two towns, Kempas and Jati (not their real names).

The casual reader would find it extremely difficult to distinguish the cases as involving the use of one type of dispute management technique or another. In fact the authors have admitted that, "on close scrutiny, we find that there is an overlap or even a continuum among the various dispute-settling techniques and procedures used by the intermediaries. What in form is one procedure is in fact another." (p. 229). However, they immediately explain this overlap of techniques as, "the result of attempts on the part of the intermediaries to bring the relevant *Syariah* rules in line with local beliefs about the ideal relationship between spouses and the importance of family solidarity. The husband is expected to provide for his wife and children and the wife is expected to be subservient, faithful and obedient to the wishes of her husband." (p. 229-230). Such a finding by the study is quite disappointing not because it may not be true but it questions the very relevance of any dispute management technique in the face of an overwhelming ideological prerogative. In not so many words, the study has actually suggested that a patriarchal tenet under which Islamic religious institutions operate in this country is often the only sure gauge of how marital disputes will eventually be resolved.

Although the cases presented are informative as to how intermediaries within the Religious Offices perform their roles in dispute settlements, the details given make it rather laborious to read. The book would have been much more readable if the authors had instead extracted the most important aspects of the cases and related them distinctively to the relevant conflict management technique. It would also be more useful to legal practitioners and social activists if the presentation of cases had been arranged according to the types of legal recourse that plaintiffs or applicants were seeking, e.g. divorce (*fasakh*, *taqliq*, *tebus talaq* or normal *talaq*), maintenance or injunctions against abuse.

This would help readers understand the many repeated complaints among Muslim women that the *Syariah* courts have often been ineffective in resolving their problems.

The study on the whole implies that all kinds of dispute settlement techniques can be useful for resolving conflicts. On the contrary, this may not be so as often times there may be several structural pre-conditions that must be put in place before the techniques can work. Some of these structural pre-conditions are astute administration of the law itself and impeccable procedural practices. Actually the law has provided for the existence of a Conciliatory Committee and a *Hakam* or arbitrator in section 48 of most *Syariah* enactments. The functions of these two 'indigenous' entities are to assist in the resolution of disputes. The study would have made a further substantial contribution towards improving the *Syariah* court system if an assessment on the workings of these two entities had been one of its foci.

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Malayan Chinese and China: Conversion in Identity Consciousness 1945-1957 by Fujio Hara. Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies Occasional Papers Series No. 33, 1997. x, pp. 166. Appendices, Glossary, Bibliography, Index.

This is a slim volume of 154 pages. There are 87 pages of text, 17 pages of copious footnotes, and another 50 pages of appendices and glossary. The volume is packed with rich data as is common of other writings by Fujio Hara, one of the foremost Japanese scholars of the Chinese in Malaysia, now professor in Nanzan University, Nagoya.

In this study Hara focuses on Malayan Chinese and China ties from 1945-1957. For Hara "connections with China continued to run deep and were even strengthened" during this period. By discussing those ties, Hara hopes to understand, even "measure the conversion in identity consciousness" from that heightened sense of identification with China to one anchored in Malaya. In his Conclusion, Hara states quite categorically that "the firm establishment of Malaya-oriented identity consciousness within the Chinese community [occurred] around the mid-1950s, on the eve of Merdeka in 1957". Hara's argument derives from his impressive survey of Chinese-language sources, particularly the Chinese-language newspapers of that period. They include those

rarely consulted pro-MCP newspapers which were subsequently banned when the Emergency was declared.

How does one understand and measure the question of change in political identity and culture? Hara suggests answers can be gained by investigating the public gatherings associated with China, the Chinese language newspapers, the role of the Chinese consulates, and the policies of the Chinese government towards the "overseas Chinese". These themes make up the four substantive chapters of Hara's book.

In Chapter One Hara discusses the involvement of the Chinese associations - the Chambers of Commerce, the Assembly Halls, the Chinese Associations, the regional organizations and especially the Kuomintang (KMT), the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) and their affiliated organisations - in China-related public gatherings. Hara believes that "we can gauge the degree of Chinese-oriented identity consciousness" by determining how widely these gatherings were celebrated (p. 16). He focuses in particular on the celebration of "Double Tenth", the Chinese National Day. A list of these gatherings, when and where they occurred, and the sponsoring organisations is presented in Appendix 2. The October 1945 celebration was a particularly widespread affair and jointly celebrated by the KMT, MCP and others. In 1947, however, the celebrations were conducted separately in different venues due to rising tensions between the KMT and CCP/MCP. However, the MCP stopped being involved after it was banned in June 1948. Subsequent celebrations organised by the KMT were relatively small and conducted indoors. In 1951, local Chinese schools remained open on Double Tenth for the first time. That year, the Singapore Chinese Chambers of Commerce, for instance, also stopped sponsoring the celebrations as it used to. Instead, it sponsored a petition to the colonial authorities requesting that requirements for acquiring Malayan citizenship be relaxed. The following year, the newly formed Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) also instructed its branches not to be involved. For Hara, it is noteworthy that the celebrations continued until 1957. This is consistent with his argument that the critical "conversion in identity consciousness" occurred in the mid-1950s. Yet Hara shows that certain groups and community leaders adopted critical stances vis-à-vis China ties beginning from the early 1950s. It appears, therefore, that Hara considers conversion to have occurred only when *all* groups had ceased involvement in *all* forms of China-related activities. In this regard, it is significant for Hara that the Chinese intellectuals continued to be China-oriented. This theme is taken up in the following two Chapters.

Chapter Two focuses on the Chinese language newspapers. Hara believes that here there is clear evidence that the Malayan Chinese maintained a China-

orientation until 1956-57 (p 51). The newspapers, Hara argues, gave as much if not more attention to China rather than to Malayan affairs. China was also referred to as "homeland" in these publications; the term *guguo* rather than *zuguo* was only used just prior to independence (pp. 43-4). These newspapers further used the Chinese system of dating until October 1949 when the People's Republic itself made the switch. Having publication holidays on Double Tenth (until 1958), and on the occasion of Sun Yat Sen's birth and death (until the mid-1950s) are also considered by Hara as signifiers of a China-orientation. However, some of Hara's examples were as much signifiers of one's cultural identity, not necessarily of one's political orientation.

Chapter Three surveys the role of the Chinese Consulates (of the KMT government) between 1946 to January 1950. The consulates' principal activities included: auditing the human and material losses suffered by the Chinese during the Japanese occupation; demanding that war-crime tribunals be set up to punish the Japanese military personnel responsible for the massacres of the Chinese; and providing relief for Chinese in the immediate post-war period

Various groups of Chinese had initially requested the consulates to help them solve their problems. A survey of damages and losses was concluded by the consulates but the KMT government ultimately waived any claim for reparations from Japan. Neither did the consulates themselves provide any financial assistance to victims on the basis of this survey. Hara shows the demand by all types of Chinese organisations for the establishment of war tribunals and for the return of the 50 million Straits dollars "donation" levied by the Japanese military. Accordingly the consulates pressured the British authorities to pursue these demands. Ultimately a war crimes tribunal was set up but many Chinese groups considered that the sentences passed were too lenient. The United Kingdom and China also agreed, belatedly in March 1948, to work towards returning assets seized by the Japan in British territories. But this agreement did not result in a return of the "donation".

Nor were the consulates' efforts in seeking relief for Chinese facing hardships more successful. Hara identifies four different groups. First, many Chinese who had been forcibly relocated by the Japanese faced eviction after the War because they occupied state land, forest reserves, Malay Reservation land and privately-owned properties. The consulates approached the colonial authorities on their behalf but were unsuccessful. The consulates also promised, but did not deliver relief aid (pp 56-7). Second, the consulates interceded on behalf of Chinese who had been arrested following Malay-Chinese clashes during 1946-49. On several occasions they successfully lobbied the authorities to commute death sentences to jail terms. In early 1947, the consulates also requested the colonial authorities to notify them in the event of any "overseas Chinese" being

arrested, detained or deported. However, many groups of Malayan Chinese opposed the consulates' demand. Hara explains that the opposition "reflected on the one hand the views of people sympathetic to the Chinese Communist Party and on the other hand the thinking of people whose lives were beginning to be rooted in Malaya" (p. 59). A third effort was to assist those who had turned to hawking and petty trading to make a living. Their livelihoods were threatened when the local governments began licensing them again and restricted where they could trade. The consulates' interventions to the local governments went largely unheeded. And fourth, there were some representations on behalf of Chinese farmers who were forcibly relocated into new villages. However, most of the consuls were reluctant to become too involved because they suspected that many of those affected were pro-communist.

In fact, it was the MCA, formed in February 1949, which "began rescuing evacuated Chinese farmers and completely took over the role of the consulates" (p. 73). In a short five-page discussion, Hara challenges the common wisdom that the MCA "was organised by rightists from the outset". Based on evidence gathered from the *Nan Chiau Jit Pao*, Hara argues that a wide range of Chinese organisations took part in the MCA's formation. Hara argues that, initially, "the Chinese organisations were the basic units of the MCA, and their leaders participated in the formation of the MCA in their capacity as representatives of their organisations" (p. 72). And as a result of its efforts in the new villages, the MCA "undeniably helped to divert attention of Chinese farmers away from the consulates and China toward Malaya" (p. 73).

No doubt many Chinese turned to the consulates for help and representation. No doubt the consulates considered that they were helping *their* overseas Chinese. But to what extent the Chinese, in turning to the consulates for help in their time of desperation, were also displaying political identification with China cannot be easily determined. In fact the Chinese turned to the local Chinese organisations and political parties and appealed directly to the colonial authorities too for help, a point which Hara under-emphasises. In fact, his argument that the MCA drew widespread support when it was formed, suggests that the Malayan Chinese were not unprepared to turn away from the consulate to its apparent local replacement, in the hope of gaining assistance and representation, which Hara shows that the consulates could not deliver.

Finally, in Chapter Four, Hara investigates the Chinese government's policy toward "Overseas Chinese". The KMT government attempted to involve Malayan Chinese in its National Assembly and in various activities under the auspices of its Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission during 1946-48. However, most of these proposals were dropped because of criticisms by the British authorities, the Malay nationalists and various Chinese groups and

individuals including the pro-MCP associations and publications, the moderate leftist Malayan Democratic Union, as well as community leaders like Lee Kong Chian. Calls to the Chinese newspapers and organisations to register themselves with the consulates were largely ignored, except by those closely identified with the KMT. An official visit to Malaya by the chief inspector of schools was similarly criticised. Likewise, the People's Republic also attempted to conduct elections and to involve overseas Chinese in its various representative bodies. In the event, elections were never held in Malaya and the Malayan representatives were drawn from China returnees. In this and the foregoing chapter, we learn more about the Chinese consulates and their activities, and the policies and orientation of the Chinese governments vis-à-vis the overseas Chinese, rather than about the orientation of the Malayan Chinese towards China. In fact, Hara shows that many groups of Chinese were beginning to distance themselves from China.

Studying the political culture and identity of any given society remains a difficult task and methodologically controversial. Some researchers conduct surveys to sample a cross-section of the population comprising people of different classes and backgrounds. Such generalisations are often contested. Others conduct participant-observation research over a period of time in a particular locale. But the ethnographic data about the community studied does not render itself easily into knowledge which can be generalized for an entire society. Still others identify prominent individuals associated with important events, activities and processes and conduct intensive interviews with them. "Texts" associated with these individuals and events are also consulted. Researchers who resort to the latter prefer, nowadays, to let these informants speak for themselves, avoiding interpretation which might be contrived, even erroneous. The task is doubly difficult for historians who consult contemporary documents, newspapers and journals of past times, as Hara does.

Part of the problem is because an individual, indeed an entire community, can often display seemingly contradictory identities. Depending on the circumstances, the person or community can display a greater or lesser ethnic, sub-ethnic, national, class, or gender consciousness. Put simply, one can possess multiple identities. Hara's attempt to determine, even measure, the conversion from a China-oriented to a Malaya-oriented identity consciousness does not adequately recognise the dynamism involved in the phenomena of political and cultural identity. From Hara's evidence, one might argue that conversion occurred in the early 1950s, rather than the mid-1950s. However, this is not the point. The point, rather, is that Hara's attempt to measure in specific terms the conversion of an entire community is inherently problematic.

The 1945-57 years were turbulent. Not only was there a civil war in China but an Emergency in Malaya too. Parties, unions, organisations and publications which had enjoyed unprecedented freedom, were suddenly banned. Numerous individuals were detained, deported or killed. Up to 600,000 people, mostly Chinese, were resettled behind barbed wires. Moreover, the post-War economy had not been rehabilitated. Many experienced hardships. All these considerations impacted on the everyday concerns and consciousness of the Chinese. There was a momentum towards *forming* an independent Malayan nation but not all Chinese could acquire citizenship under the original constitutional proposals being considered. The use and promotion of Chinese language, education and culture, critical emblems of Chinese identity, was also subjected to restrictions. The Chinese, indeed all in Malaya, were undergoing dramatic changes in their sense of cultural and political identity. My point is to suggest that the China- and Malaya-oriented identities that Hara juxtaposes are not mutually exclusive. Most Malayan Chinese stood betwixt and between, desiring to remain Chinese culturally while moving towards Malaya politically.

Hara's study, therefore, does not resolve the puzzle of "conversion". The strength of his book lies elsewhere. It is, to my mind, an excellent survey of the political mobilisation of the Malayan Chinese in all its complexities in the post-War period. His focus on the Malayan Chinese and China ties during 1945-57, is a valuable contribution towards an understanding of the competing pulls and strains that embroiled the Chinese in Malaya in those pre-Independence years. Originally written in Japanese, the translation of Hara's text into English remains awkward.

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