

Japanese Propaganda in War-time Malaya: Main Issues in *Malai Shinpo* and *Syonan Shinbun*

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ABSTRACT

Propaganda and war are often linked up together that they have become essentially inseparable. While there are different kinds of propaganda to serve different purposes, propaganda during war or war propaganda is the most noteworthy that not only has it become a common phenomenon during events of conflict in human history but serves as the underlying reason for the term ‘propaganda’, as perceived by many, to bear negative connotations. As in other countries that experienced war, Malaya during Japanese occupation from 1941-45 saw vigorous war propaganda carried out by the invading authorities. This paper aims to highlight such effort on the part of Japanese administration in their attempt to win the support of Malaysians through the medium of press or newspapers. In doing so, two notable newspapers

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were selected namely Malai Shinpo and Syonan Shinbun. Not only did they last longer and more regular during the war years than others, but more importantly, they served as official propaganda tools for the Japanese war campaign in Malaya. As instruments of propaganda, certain distinctive patterns or trends can be seen in the contents of the newspapers with the aim none other than to enhance the Japanese rule. Using the method of qualitative and library research, the findings of this paper will not only further enrich knowledge on the history of the Japanese occupation of Malaya, but also provide more information on the development of press or newspapers in the first half twentieth century Malaya, a topic which has yet to be extensively explored.

Keywords: *Malaya, Japan, war, propaganda, Malai Shinpo, Syonan Shinbun*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The war that swept Malaya in 1941-45 saw many changes taking place in the country and society. The administration which was previously under British had now shifted to Japanese hands. The socio-economic scenario similarly demonstrated some new events and developments as Japan strived to enhance its rule and at the same time make full use of its possession of Malaya. Having involved in an ongoing war, it was imperative for Japan to find instrumental tools to disseminate its propaganda in the occupied areas hence, ensuring continuous support from the local people to its rule. For that purpose, the press was utilized, resulting in the change of the parameters of newspapers at that time where instead of concentrating on some domestic and international events as well as commercial printing on consumable goods or commodities like before, the newspapers were used mainly for politico-strategic purposes namely to support the ruling Japanese administration in Malaya. While the newspapers continued to publish on domestic or international events yet, only those in favour of Japan were highlighted. By the mid of 1943, as the tide of war turned against Japan, the press' role became even more crucial in mustering local support against the enemies of Japan while sustaining its loosening grip over Malaya.

2.0 PROPAGANDA: ITS MEANINGS AND IMPORTANCE

Propaganda which originates from a Latin word '*propagatus*' literally means "the very specific act of fastening down slips or roots of plants in such a way as to cause them to multiply and spread" (Kearney, 2007). As for its technical meaning, according to Black's Law dictionary, propaganda is "the systematic dissemination of doctrine, rumour, or selected information to promote or injure a particular doctrine, view or cause" hinting at a certain way used in disseminating the desired information to people for either a good or bad cause. A slightly different yet more neutral definition was put forward by Taylor who maintains that it refers to "the deliberate attempt to persuade people to think and behave in a desired way" (Taylor, 1990). It refers to outward efforts to win the support of people for a particular cause through consistent and vigorous attempts using certain mediums or means accessible to public. The mediums of course vary, ranging from printed and non-printed materials, electronic mediums, as well trained individuals whose task is to do the campaigning or propaganda works through speeches, talks and the like. Newspapers, magazines, advertisements, television or radio programs, movies, theatres, plays, pamphlets, among others are the common instruments or tools used as propaganda medium.

That mentioned, the occurrence of conflicts and wars in human history have somehow imprinted long-lasting negative connotation to the term propaganda that the two words 'war' and 'propaganda' became closely inter-twined. This can be clearly seen for instance, in a definition by Whitton who explains propaganda as "the communication of facts, fiction, argument, and suggestion, often with the purposeful suppression of inconsistent material, with the hope and intention of implanting in the minds of the 'target' audience certain prejudices, beliefs, or convictions aimed at persuading the latter to take some action serving the interests of the communicator" (Whitton, 1974). From this definition, propaganda is thus associated with possible use of violence and coercion, deceptions, lies and prejudices. The purpose is none other than to secure the interests of the group in power or group with influence, a phenomenon that is very real in events of conflicts between either nations or groups. Indeed, the

importance of propaganda especially during war time is indispensable, that it could lead to either the success or failure of war campaigns. The most effective means during such period is to employ multiple or various mediums in order to ensure that the messages conveyed reach as many people as possible and at a reasonable cost, and at a quick rate. Given the significance of the propaganda, it is no surprise that in the event of war, conflicting parties very often employ propaganda tools in disseminating messages in order to undermine enemies while highlighting their own successes or strengths.

3.0 MALAYAN PRESS BEFORE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

Regarding existing literatures on war-time press, several works are worthy of attention as they provide relevant information, albeit scanty in some writings, on the development of Malayan press before and after the Japanese occupation. One of such works is by Paul Kratoska whose study on Japanese occupation of Malaya discussed various socio-economic and political developments including that of the press. Not only did the author provide some details on the war-time newspapers but also their role as propaganda vehicles of the Japanese in garnering support from amongst the people of Malaya. While the author did mention about *Syonan Shinbun* and constantly derived information from the newspaper, citing it repeatedly in his work, *Malai Shinpo* was hardly alluded to. Instead, apart from the *Syonan Shinbun*, Kratoska accentuated the role of a Malay language newspaper called *Berita Malai* as another medium of Japanese propaganda. The reason seems to be not only because the *Berita Malai* was in Malay language hence reachable to greater number of Malay readers but more importantly, it was run by Malay nationalists such as Ibrahim Haji Yaacob and Ishak Haji Muhammad or Pak Sako who were appointed as members of Japanese Propaganda Department. On the part of the Japanese, the hiring of Ibrahim Haji Yaacob and Ishak Haji Muhammad served their interests as it reflected support from prominent Malay nationalist leaders to the Japanese rule and at the same time facilitated close monitoring on the nationalists' activities whose inclination towards independent Malaya was frowned upon by the Japanese (Kratoska, 1998).

A more detailed study on the development of press in the late 19th and 20th century Malaya is by Mohd. Dhari Othman. Dividing his discussion into formative years of the 19th century, pre-World War II period, Japanese occupation and pre-independence period, the author covered numerous newspapers which include English language newspapers and vernacular newspapers i.e. in Malay, Chinese and Indian languages. Since the author included abundant newspapers and since many of them were short-lived, only brief reviews or summaries were provided instead of in-depth details or information on the newspapers. Regarding the Malay language press, those which contained Islamic reformist ideas or Malay nationalist sentiment elicited greater review compared to others, while among the Chinese and Indian language newspapers, those which greatly concerned with the interests and welfare of Chinese and Indian communities respectively drew more reporting than the rest. Despite the abundant newspapers mentioned, ironically, no information was given on either the *Malay Shinpo* or *Syonan Shinbun* though the author did briefly touch on *Berita Malai*, the Malay language newspaper that served as a propaganda instrument of the Japanese along with other newspapers in Malay, Chinese and Indian languages; some were published for the same propaganda purpose as with that *Berita Malai*, while some others were not (Mohd. Dhari Othman, 1992).

The emphasis particularly on Malay language newspapers instead of English language newspapers seems to be the case among the existing literatures on Malayan press, thus renders the research on *Malai Shinpo* and *Syonan Shinbun* dependent on rather scattered information. The work of John Lent on the history of Malaysian mass media for one, dealt exclusively with Malay language newspapers and magazines. In his article, the author mentioned several newspapers published during the Japanese occupation, all of which however, were in Malay language (Lent, 1978). A more thorough work on Malay vernacular press is by William Roff whose treatment of the topic particularly in relation to the rise of Malay nationalism is both comprehensive and full of important details. Nevertheless, on the press during Japanese occupation, only a very brief account was given on a Malay language newspaper called *Warta Malaya* which later merged with *Utusan*

Melayu, another vernacular Malay newspaper to form *Berita Malai* that acted as Japanese propaganda medium (Roff, 1994).

Other existing literatures however, mainly mentioned *Syonan Shinbun* to some extent and *Malai Shinpo* to a lesser extent, as sources of reference indicating where information contained in the works are retrieved from. Constance Turnbull only briefly explained the role of *Syonan Shinbun* as well as *Berita Malai* as heavily controlled vehicles of Japanese propaganda with the former originated from *Syonan Times*, leaving other information related to *Syonan Shinbun* in the form of cross-references (Turnbull, 2009). Yoji Akashi (Akashi, 2008) and Eri Hotta (Hotta, 2007) too merely indicated the role of *Syonan Shinbun* as propaganda tool of the Japanese in passing with the latter maintained that the newspaper was the most important medium used by the Japanese military administration in Malaya and Singapore to disseminate necessary information to the locals, which include Japanese war campaign and propaganda, until the end of the occupation rule. The rest of information in relation to the newspaper as with the work of Turnbull is mainly in the form of citations. The same disposition can in fact be seen in other literatures on Japanese occupation of Malaya, including those of Cheah Boon Kheng who produced a list of noteworthy works on war-time Malaya (Cheah, 2012; 1980).

4.0 MALAYAN PRESS BEFORE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

Before the invasion of Malaya by Japan, there had been numerous publications of magazines, newspapers and newsletters in the country. This was particularly so from the late 19th century following the increasing rate of literacy, the development of commercial sector as well as the growing interest among the people of Malaya in keeping in touch with socio-economic and political affairs that took place inside and outside the country. The first newspapers in Malaya, however, appeared in early 19th century in Straits Settlements. They were English newspapers namely, *Government Gazette* in Penang (1806), *Singapore Chronicle* (1824) and *Malacca Observer* (1826). Soon after, by the middle of the century, more

newspapers were published in the Straits Settlements as well Malay states. It is worth noting that during the 19th century, the number of English-language newspapers seemed to have surpassed others in that there were more than forty English-language newspapers appeared in Malaya, though most of them did not last for a long time. In contrast, only about seventeen Malay-language newspapers and magazines were published during the same period (Mohd. Dhari Othman, 1992).

By the early 20th century, many new newspapers emerged while the old ones either ended or merged. Many however, were short-lived. While the character of English-language newspapers was more or less similar to previous era i.e. with greater emphasis on aspects related to commercial or industrial sector, the Malay newspapers and magazines nevertheless saw increasing interest in reformist ideas. In the meantime, Chinese newspapers in the early 20th century Malaya mainly contained China-related news before changing to commerce after the 1911 revolution, an event which marked the victory of Kuomintang or Chinese nationalists over pro-emperor faction. Tamil newspapers too witnessed a change of focus whereby unlike the previous coverage particularly on news about India and social problems facing Indian migrants in Malaya, the newspapers by the 1930s promoted a change of attitude among Indians to consider Malaya as their homeland (Mohd. Dhari Othman, 1992).

As far as the policy of the British towards the press was concerned, there was hardly any restriction on the press or newspapers, thus, ensuring press freedom and freedom of expression for the people of Malaya. Various issues were discussed or disclosed in the press unimpeded by the British authority, including the call for independence from colonial rule. Following the coming of the Japanese, however, such freedom of press and expression abruptly ceased to exist. Instead, the press development in Malaya can be said to have suffered a severe setback in that many of the existing pre-war newspapers were either suspended or forced to stop their publications while newspaper editors were subject to close scrutiny and inspection. In their place, new press or newspapers, of limited number, were published. Few

other pre-war newspapers were taken over and made into propaganda tools for the Japanese authority with different names given, publishing only those matters approved and enjoined by the ruling administration.

5.0 MALAI SHINPO AND SYONAN SHINBUN

Of about thirty publications that appeared during the war period, some were in favour of Japanese government and its policies (Mohd. Dhari Othman, 1992). Of this group, the most prominent were *Malai Shinpo* and *Syonan Shinbun*. First published in 1942, both lasted until 1945. Only issues or matters that met the approval of the Japanese authority were published in the press. Being constantly monitored by the Japanese Propaganda Department (*Sendon-Bu*), the *Malai Shinpo* and *Syonan Shinbun* were to do just what they had been assigned for i.e. to carry out propaganda in the service of Japanese cause and war campaign. During the occupation period, Singapore (*Syonan* or *Syonan-to*) became the centre for Japanese-sponsored press, magazines and Japanese propaganda. It was also in Singapore that the Propaganda Department Headquarters was set up to work closely with the Domei News Agency (*Domei Tsushinsha*), the official news agency of the Empire of Japan based in Tokyo (Kratoska, 1998; Lee, 2005). The agency came under the control of the Ministry of Communications, one of wartime Japanese cabinet ministries.

Looking at both newspapers, the *Malai Shimpo* and *Syonan Sinbun* shared several commonalities. Not only did they become the propaganda tools for the Japanese, both were established daily English newspapers and had wide audience during pre-war period, for which reasons they were chosen by the Japanese to fight for their cause and support their war campaign. As Japanese-sponsored newspapers, their publications began in 1942 shortly after the Japanese took over Malaya and lasted until the end of the war in 1945. The *Malai Shinpo* or its pre-war name *Malay Mail* was first published on December 1, 1896 in Kuala Lumpur – it was the first daily press to appear in Federated Malay States (FMS) (Brown, 1981). Meanwhile, the *Syonan Shinbun* (or *Shimbun* or *Sinbun*) was originally published on July 15, 1845 in Singapore as *The Straits Times and Singapore*

Journal of Commerce. Popularly known as *The Straits Times*, the daily newspaper was then made as the official newspaper in Singapore by the Japanese during the war period, changing its name to *The Syonan Times* (or *The Shonan Times*) and later on December 8, 1942 to *Syonan Shinbun* in conjunction with the first anniversary of the great victory of Japan (the attack on Pearl Harbour and other strategic military positions of the Western powers in Asia on December 8, 1941) known in Japan as *Dai Toa Senso* (Greater East Asia War) (Turnbull, 1995). The newspapers lasted until the surrender of Japan in September 1945, after which both resumed their old names to mark the end of Japanese rule and beginning of a new era.

5.1 Japan as Liberator of Asia and Malaya

Being sponsored by the Japanese authority, it is not surprising to find the *Malai Shinpo* and *Syonan Shinbun* served as official mouthpiece for Japanese propaganda. While there were other matters that formed the contents of the newspapers such as official announcements, notices, advertisement, prices of commodities and obituaries, a greater amount of information contained therein was of wartime propaganda materials, one of which exalting the role of Japan as liberator of Asia and Malaya from Western enslavement. Both constantly highlighted the good image of Japan, emphasizing on how the locals should be thankful and that they were indebted to Japan for emancipating them from the British imperialism and that the Japanese were better rulers than the British. In doing so, several ideas were propagated in the press such as "Asia for Asians", "Asia for Asiatics" and "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere", referring to unselfish intention of Japan to liberate Asian region from the Western clutch so that the Asians could then together enjoy peace and prosperity as free nations. Messages of similar tone were reiterated in the press such as "only Orientals will understand the Orientals" to portray the benevolent rule of the Japanese as compared to that of the British. In making sure that the message was well received by the people, the newspapers regularly reported on the support and loyalty rendered by local Malayan leaders and rulers to the Japanese authority.

Behind this effort was the work and responsibility of Japanese

editorial agencies. Not only were these agencies to make sure that only suitable materials reported in the press or made the press headlines, their job scope also includes monitoring and supervising newspaper editors, reporters as well as those associated with the publication of the press. For that purpose, the service of Japanese secret intelligence or *kempeitai* was sometimes required. Suspicious manoeuvres on the part of newspaper editors or reporters against the interests of Japan would result in their arrest for cross-examination and interrogation. Minor mistakes for instance, in reporting or printing out names or titles of Japanese dignitaries or ruler i.e. Emperor of Japan could also get the press editors or reporters in trouble. Both publications, along with other press, were supervised by the Propaganda Department in Singapore and the *Domei* News Agency.

As for the people's response to such propaganda of Japan as liberator of Asia and Malaya, while there was at first a bit of conviction that the Japanese were true to their words, that they would eventually free Malaya, the locals gradually came to grasp the notion that the Japanese were no different from the British. They too wanted to colonize and exploit Malaya and its rich natural resources. Even those who had allegedly facilitated the advent of the Japanese to Malaya in the late 1941 namely, some members and leaders of nationalist group, Kesatuan Melayu Muda (Malay Youth Association) or KMM came to realize that the Japanese had no intention to free Malaya despite their promising slogan "Asia for Asians". Instead of liberating Malaya from foreign imperialism, the Japanese meant to rule over Asian region having claimed that Japan by virtue of its superior culture and qualities deserved to become the leader of Asia. This was proven with the disbandment of the KMM in June 1942 in the Japanese attempt to control the forces of Malay nationalism and local desire to create an independent Malaya. Hence, the Japanese campaign or slogan "Asia for Asians" unfortunately for the people of Malaya remained an empty promise and wishful thinking.

5.2 Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere

Apart from the special emphasis on the noble goal of Japan as liberator of Asia, the newspapers also highlight socio-economic developments in different parts of Malaya, aiming at assuring the local people that the idea

of “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” was actually working and achievable. In the field of economy, good news were continuously reported such as increase in state revenue, development of banking system and progress made in various industries such as fishing, paddy planting, food production, etc. For instance, in *Malai Shinpo* dated April 2, 1943 it was reported that Selangor state budget showed a surplus of nearly \$7 million and that the economy was rapidly returning to normal state. In the spirit of helping out one another, there were also reports on Japanese soldiers rendering assistance to Malay farmers by introducing to the latter effective Japanese agricultural techniques (*Malai Shinpo*, 1943; *Syonan Shinbun*, 1943). Similarly, pertaining to social matters, only positive news was reported. These include the sending of tens of Malay students to universities in Japan, the establishment of police depots, training for youths, proposal to standardize education for all races and groups, greater working opportunity for women under the Japanese rule, etc.

Reiterating the idea of common prosperity for the Japanese occupied areas, the *Malai Shinpo* and *Syonan Shinbun* also contained regular reports on China, Manchukuo (Manchuria) and other Southeast Asian nations which formed the Japanese empire. Most often the reports was about how the East and Southeast Asian nations experienced prosperity and increasing wealth living under the Japanese rule, that the situations were much better compared to the pre-war period when they were under the Western influence. Special occasions involving leaders of these countries pledging loyalty to Japan and visits made by Japanese leaders to the countries, received exceptional attention in both newspapers as proofs for the alleged prosperity enjoyed throughout the Japanese empire. For instance, a visit made by Japanese Prime Minister Tojo Hideki to Manchukuo was reported in *Malai Shinpo* of April 2, 1943.

In addition to economic and social progress, Japanese tolerance attitude and respect for other cultures were also accentuated in the press. This is to win the hearts of local Malaysians who belonged to different ethnic groups and races. Shortly after they took over Malaya from the British, the Japanese authorities made public proclamations in the press that people of all occupied areas would be treated fairly and justly. In

Syonan Times (later known as *Syonan Shinbun*) of February 21, 1942 for instance, Japanese commander, Tomoyuki Yamashita announced that in the “East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” justice will be duly given to all races and individuals according to their talents and faculties under the so-called “the Great Spirit of Cosmocracy”. News on special festivals of different communities were reported in both newspapers, and so were events where leaders of various faiths and beliefs such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Shintoism, etc. participating in inter-faiths dialogues or discussions, some of which were organized by the Japanese authorities.

That said, as much as they needed continuous support from the people gained through positive reports in the press, the Japanese ensured that nothing should compromise or jeopardize the interests the empire. In doing so, again the press was employed to make sure that the locals were aware of the consequences for act of disloyalty or treason against Japan, threatening and reminding them of severe punishments inflicted on those who committed the grave offence. Speeches of Japanese military leaders delivered on various occasions or special announcements on the matter were documented in the press as warnings to the public not to betray Japan or collaborate with the enemies, referring to those associated with Allied powers. In *Malai Shinpo* dated June 5, 1943 for instance, Japanese officer Lt. General Shotaro Kayatama warned local government servants in Selangor that lack of loyalty to Nippon (Japan) will lead to summary punishment.

Despite the Japanese efforts to convince the people of socio-economic progress under their rule through the newspaper reports, it was not difficult for the locals to grasp that the press was merely a propaganda tool and nothing more. The deteriorating socio-economic conditions were too apparent and real to believe otherwise. Throughout the country the people suffered from hardships due to rising inflation, shortage of food, lack of health services, etc. and as the wartime conditions worsened, even the carefully chosen and censored reports in the press could not but give way to some truth about the difficulties facing the people. Increasing prices of goods, food rationing and greater emphasis by the Japanese authorities on the people of Malaya for self-sufficiency, as reported in the newspapers

in the later war years (*Malai Shinpo*, 1943; 1944; *Syonan Shinbun*, 1943; 1944), were among such news which, for the local readers validated the deteriorating situation under the Japanese rule.

5.3 *Pro-Malay Policy*

In providing reports on the people of Malaya, one cannot but notice the swarming attention given to matters related to Malay people – Malay leaders and rulers, Malay custom and tradition including religion, Malay education and so forth. This brings to light the Japanese policy which, as maintained by scholars and manifested in the many friendly gestures towards the Malays, was pro-Malay, and similar to that of British authorities which ruled Malaya before the advent of Japanese. The overflowing attention was even more obvious with lesser reports made on Indian community or even more so in comparison to very limited reports on Chinese people in Malaya at that time.

At least regarding Malayan Indians, there were considerable reports in relation to their support for the independence movement in British India such as the recruitment of young Indians (male and female) to join in the war against British, their general support of Malayan Indian community to Japanese rule and monetary donations for Japanese cause. Some newspaper articles also dealt with cultural and religious events celebrated by Indians in Malaya (*Malai Shinpo*, 1943), and there were some which reported on language classes offered to local Indians. As for the Chinese community in Malaya however, it was not until second half of 1943 onwards that more coverage was made on the group and even then the reports were clearly for the purpose of propaganda illustrating Chinese support to Japanese administration. For instance, in *Malai Shinpo* dated December 12, 1943, Chinese community was reported to have donated money to purchase war planes for Japanese forces (*Malai Shinpo*, 1943). The different treatment shown towards the Indians as opposed to the Chinese is not difficult to comprehend as the Japanese saw the Indians as their allies and were hoping for their support in Japanese campaign to seize India from British. In fact, looking closely at the coverage materials on the Indian community, they too, as with the coverage on the Chinese reflect propaganda approach on the part of the Japanese to obtain support from the Indians. On the other

hand, the Chinese group was somewhat undermined as they were viewed as ‘revolutionary’ and ‘hidden enemies’ given their inclination towards anti-Japanese resistance movement. Only when the Japanese felt that they were having trouble in maintaining their rule in Malaya as the tide of war turned against them that more reports, selected of course, were allowed to be printed in the newspapers pertaining to the Chinese.

Going back to the coverage on the Malays, very often the newspapers reported on Malay ruling class and how they were in support of Japanese benevolent rule and at the same time indebted to the Japanese for liberating Malaya from British colonial yoke. Of this group include local Malay chiefs, aristocrats, Malay Rulers or Sultans of various Malays states, nationalist leaders such as Ibrahim bin Haji Yaacob, as well as leaders of other Malaysian communities such as Dr. Lim Boon Keng representing the Chinese community and Dr. C. J. Paglar, the leader of Eurasian community (*Syonan Shinbun*, 1942). In *Malai Shinpo* dated July 1945 for instance, Sultan of Johor, Perak, Selangor, Kedah, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Kelantan, Terengganu and Perlis were mentioned to have met Japanese Premier Tojo Hideki in Singapore to display their loyalty and support to Japan. It was also reported that as a gesture of gratitude to the Japanese for liberating Malaya from British rule, the Malay Rulers gave monetary donations to Japanese army and naval hospitals (*Malai Shinpo*, 1943; *Syonan Shinbun*, 1943). The same newspaper on April 1, 1943 reported Negeri Sembilan chiefs expressing their loyalty to the Japanese government through the presentation of traditional Malay weapon, i.e. keris and ornamental belt to Japanese officials. Such friendly gesture of presenting something meaningful was also done by the Japanese where on October 2 of the same year it was recorded that Sultan of Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah and Perlis had been granted honorary awards namely, “Third Order Merit” and “Order of the Sacred Treasure” by the Japanese Emperor for their support to Japanese rule (*Malai Shinpo*, 1943). The aim of such reports was clear, that is to illustrate friendly relations between Malay Rulers and Japanese colonizers which in turn meant to convince Malay masses to render support to Japan.

Not only were events involving Malay chiefs and Sultans mentioned in elaborated manner, but also matters related to the religion of Malays i.e. Islam. In doing so, the Japanese aimed to portray themselves as the liberator and protector of Muslims from Western imperialism and highlight their policy of religious tolerance (Kratoska, 1998). The coverage include among others religious conferences attended by Muslim religious leaders and muftis who affirmed their loyalty to the Japanese, and the calling by religious leaders to Malay masses to render support to Japan and pray for the destruction of Allied Powers. One such case is the news about Chief Kadhi of Singapore Mohammad Ali al-Sagoff who, as recorded in the *Malai Shinpo* dated February 5, 1945 expressed support for Japanese rule and encouraged Muslims to donate for the Japanese cause in order for Japan to win the war against its enemies (*Malai Shinpo*, 1945). Special reports on overseas events involving Muslims also found a place in the press. In addition, there had also been reports on Muslim religious festivals such as *Eid al-Fitri*, *Eid al-Adha* and *Maulud Nabi* celebrations and other Islamic related matters such as the granting of provision of pilgrimage to Makkah by Japanese authorities for Muslims, the issuance of Islamic law known as Mohammadan Law, the establishment of Islamic religious council in several Malay states, etc. (*Malai Shinpo*, 1943, 1944, 1945, *Syonan Shinbun*, 1943). To portray further their favourable policy towards Malays, the Japanese also made it clear in the newspapers of their non-interference stance in the matters of Islamic religion.

Concerning other reported materials on Malay people, some are to do with social advancement of the group. This include the better working prospect and condition of Malay women under Japanese rule compared to that of the British, and better opportunities provided to young Malays to further their education overseas. On the latter, many reports were made on the opportunity given to bright Malays to study in Japanese universities, though looking at the majority of the chosen candidates they mainly belonged to Malay aristocratic class. For instance, in *Malai Shinpo* dated June 4, 1943 it was reported that Tengku Ya'acob (younger brother of Sultan Selangor) and Raja Nong Chik bin Raja Isahak from Selangor, as well as Ungku Mohsen and Ungku Aziz (nephews of Ungku Abdul Aziz) from

Johor, had been sent to Waseda University, Tokyo (*Malai Shinpo*, 1943). Other reports of positive tone meant to portray compassionate attitude of Japanese towards the Malays include assistance given to Malay farmers by Japanese soldiers, allowances to government pensioners, widows as well as orphans, and the sending of certain number of Malay civil servants for training to become officers (*Malai Shinpo*, 1943).

Having mentioned the wide-ranging and favourable reports on the Malay community, it is only fair to briefly assess reasons behind the pro-Malay attitude shown by the Japanese in the *Malai Shinpo* and *Syonan Shinbun*. As with the British, the Japanese too were counting the general support of the Malays who formed the dominant group in the country, and without whose support their rule in Malaya would be difficult to sustain. Unlike the Chinese and Indians, the Malays were viewed as people of the land and hence, anything to do with the group was worth paying attention to since this will help to promote amicable relations between the Malays and Japanese. Also unique about the Malays is the institution of Malay monarchy whose status command high respect from the Malay masses – to win the Malay Rulers or have the Malay Rulers appeared to be on the Japanese side would, it was thought, result in popular Malay support to their rule. The fact that the wartime situation in Malaya continued to deteriorate from the mid-1943 onwards made it even more important for the Japanese to obtain and maintain active support from the people of Malaya including the Malays.

5.4 Japan as Invincible World Power

Being heavily controlled vehicles for Japanese propaganda, naturally the *Malai Shinpo* and *Syonan Shinbun* went all out against Japanese enemies namely the Allied powers (British and Americans). The purpose was none other than to undermine and defame them in the eyes of the locals. Reports on a daily basis were provided in the press on the defeats of the Allied forces in the hands of Japanese army, navy and air force in various battles that took place in Southeast Asia and Indo-Burmese border, and how the enemies feared and had to admit the superiority of Japanese forces. Also recorded were problems facing the Allied forces in battlefields for instance, malaria, demoralization of troops, high toll of death and shortage of food,

as well as alleged disunity and discord among the Allied powers, hence, projecting the view of the enemies being unmatched to the mighty Japanese troops. At the same time, the press very often celebrated and highlighted the victories of the Japanese forces in battles, commenting again and again on the superiority of Japanese forces and Axis powers over the Allied powers.

To denigrate the Allied powers further, news about problems and difficulties confronting the British and American governments back home were reported in the press. Such news, include for instance, economic slowdown in Britain and the United States during the war years and protests by different groups over various issues against the reigning governments. For instance, in one issue of *Malai Shinpo* dated April 2, 1943, it was reported that British textile mills had to be closed down due to economic downturn, and in later issues published in April and May 1943 the United States government under Franklin Roosevelt was reported to have become unpopular among the Americans due to economic problems including slump of American dollar and industrial strikes. There were even cartoon competitions held by the press inviting the local Malaysians to ridicule leaders of the Allied powers. (*Malai Shinpo*, 1943)

Apart from the Allied powers, attention was also given by the press to British India, focusing on how unjust the British rule in India was by reporting on anti-British movement led by Indian leaders such as Gandhi, Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Subhas Chandra Bose, the outbreak of widespread riots against the British rule as well as incidents of British suppression of local Indians such as Amritsar Incident of 1943 (*Syonan Shinbun*, 1942; *Malai Shinpo*, 1943; 1944). The intention was not only to undermine the British but also undoubtedly to incite the Indians in Malaya to fight alongside the Japanese forces against the British in their campaign to take over India. Quotations by Indian leaders condemning the oppressive British rule in India were from time to time inserted in the press, and so were reports on the support given by various parties or groups in Malaya for the recruitment and training of Malayan Indians to be sent to fight the British. For instance, few reports stated that Indian community in Perak donated \$1 million and Indians in Penang \$2 million in supporting of the Japanese war campaign to liberate India from the British rule (*Syonan*

Shinbun, 1943). Looking at the contents of the press, one can clearly see that Japanese confidence in their own power and strength ran high particularly in the early years of the war that they believed that would be able to eventually take over India and even Australia and made them part of the Japanese empire.

Nevertheless, as with the press reports on socio-economic developments and progress, it was not long before the local readers became disenchanted with the continuous claims of Japanese victory against the Allied powers. As war dragged on into the mid-1940s, the people began to obtain the snapshots of the real situation on the ground, proving that the reports and stories contained in the press were nothing but merely war propaganda of the Japanese. Consequently, among the locals, a Malay phrase “*cerita-cerita Domei*” or (untrue of fairy) stories of *Domei* (Japanese news agency), was used to refer to the exaggerated news in favor of Japan as reported in the Japanese-controlled press (Turnbull, 1995) such as the *Malai Shinpo* and *Syonan Shinbun*. At the end of the war, however, as reality sank in, the press’ tone somewhat changed, reporting more truthful news since Japan was now on the brink of defeat. *Syonan Shinbun* for instance, in its report dated August 1945, downplayed the confidence of Japan by commenting on the victory of the Allied powers and reasons for Japanese defeat in various battles fought, and portraying more neutral image of the Allied powers compared to the previous image as oppressors and bullies of the Asian nations (*Syonan Shinbun*, 1945).

5.5 *Japanization of Malaya*

In ruling Malaya, there were deliberate attempts by the Japanese to assimilate the locals or get them to adopt Japanese spirit and culture for it was believed that this would result in Malaysians becoming loyal to the Japanese authorities. For that purpose, Japanese *seishin* (spirit) or culture as well as language (*Nippon-Go*) were taught to the people and one of the mediums used was the press. Consequently, the Japanese-controlled press such as the *Malai Shinpo* and *Syonan Shinbun* though were published in English had regular sections or columns containing Japanese words as language lessons to the readers and news on matters related to the teaching

and learning of the language. They also contained Japanese proverbs or idioms to impart Japanese ethics or virtues to the readers.

These efforts to assimilate the locals into Japanese culture or “Japanization” of the people were done as the Japanese deemed that it was only through the study of the language that the locals could understand how Japan could become a great and strong nation (*Syonan Shimibun*, 1943; Akashi, Yoji, 1991). The aim was to make Japanese as lingua franca in the Japanese empire, used by people of the occupied areas and to show how serious they were in achieving such aim, Japanese language was taught in schools for children and special Japanese lessons or classes for adults. Books written in Japanese as well as Japanese dictionaries were printed and published. In the press, apart from special columns on Japanese words and their meanings, regular announcements were made notifying readers about the opening of new Japanese language centres and upcoming Japanese dictionaries or text-books that could or would be used to learn the language. In addition, there were also regular announcements in both newspapers on *Nippon-Go Kaza*, Japanese radio lessons which readers could tune in to learn Japanese language. Occasionally, there were also language contests or oratorical contests in Japanese held by the press to incite readers to master the language (*Malai Shinpo*, 1943). While it is doubtful that the teaching of Japanese language had real impact on the people given the low level of its usage among the locals, the Japanese authorities, as shown in the press, put a great emphasis on the learning of the language. In one instance, as reported in *Malai Shinpo* dated June 1, 1943, an announcement was made that local civil servants in the service of the Japanese government must learn Nippon-Go otherwise, they might lose their jobs.

Another aspect of Japanization is by having the locals adopted Japanese ethics and values, and this found its way in the press. This emphasis on the need to embrace Japanese virtues such as bravery, heroic spirit, diligence, supreme endurance, loyalty, self-discipline, honesty, simplicity and self-sacrifice, according to the Japanese, was necessary in order for the locals to become superior race like Japan (Kratoska, 1998). For this purpose, in the case of *Malai Shinpo*, a special section was allocated for Japanese proverbs or idioms for readers to read. In the newspaper, the section was

called “Thought of the Day” in which a new phrase implying or referring to a certain positive value or attitude was inserted daily. Such examples include “Happiness is like a kitten’s tail – hard to catch, but there’s plenty of fun in chasing it!”, “Providence often puts a large potato in a little pig’s way” and “Get rid of wishing habit and replace it with decision and action” (*Malai Shinpo*, 1943).

5.0 CONCLUSION

The *Malai Shinpo* and *Syonan Shimbun* are two most notable daily Japanese-controlled newspapers published during wartime period in Malaya. In comparison to other newspapers, these two consistently served as official mouthpieces for Japanese propaganda, not only in garnering support from the locals but also in undermining the Allied forces right from the beginning of the Japanese occupation of Malaya i.e. early 1942 until the end of the war in September 1945. While it is difficult to assess the extent of influence that the newspapers had on the locals given the wartime situation and absence of any surveys or ballots on the people’s acceptance of the Japanese rule, the fact that the materials contained therein were largely of propaganda materials suggests the sense of urgency and desperation felt by Japan in getting support from the people in Malaya. Finally, in comparison to pre-war press, one salient fact is clear, that is the development of press in Malaya during the Japanese rule regressed or took a step backward; not only was lesser number of press allowed to operate, more importantly, instead of granting freedom of expression to the press, strict censorship and scrutiny was imposed and that their existence was mainly for the purpose of becoming propaganda tools of the Japanese authorities. That mentioned, the experience of having been controlled by the Japanese authority as wartime propaganda, nevertheless, has a lasting impact on the Malayan press in general in that it redefined the role of press in post-war Malaya to take up a more serious position by being involved in nation-building process or be supportive of government policies instead of covering issues of its own interests or mainly served as economic-driven medium (as in the case of some press) or commercial printing publicizing products and services like during the period before war.

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