

Sample 2: HSI Write-up (2022)

'A Lion's Heart' – Surviving the Brutality and Suffering of Japanese Occupation

The Japanese Occupation which lasted until 12 September 1945,¹ is historically significant to Singapore as it is one of our darkest times in history. Historical accounts of the Occupation often show the catastrophic events that occurred between 1942-1945, with frequent references to the Sook Ching Operation that left an indelible mark on not only the survivors, but also the generations that followed. Everyone, regardless of race, had to obsequiously obey them in order to prevent themselves from getting killed and/or tortured by the Japanese.² We hope that through the brutality and suffering observed, it is the will of those who survived and found a way to make some meaning from their horrific circumstances, is what we ought to remember.

The brutality by the Japanese had caused a lot of trauma and fear among the people. Following the fall of Singapore, General Yamashita had ordered the elimination of all "anti-Japanese elements" from the Chinese population. Some Chinese came together and form a voluntary corp to fight the Japanese.³ "Some might have fought against the Japanese, while others might have been innocent. I know of this guy... he was taken away during this operation... He told us that dozens of people were taken to an area around Lau Pa Sat and their backs sprayed with machine guns," said Mr Chia, a friend of a survivor of the operation. Despite the Chinese being the main targets of the Japanese, other races were also not spared from the brutality of the Japanese.⁴ They would punish anyone who disobeyed, regardless of race. The *Kempeitai* would round up many local Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasian civilians, in order to torture them into giving information on any acts of sabotage towards the Japanese.⁵ The Malays and Indians, who lived in the kampongs, often felt the full brunt of Japanese cruelty too.⁶ "Japanese soldiers they come at night and try to rape young people.

¹ "Japanese Occupation of Singapore", Wikipedia.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_occupation_of_Singapore

² Daphne Goh and Karthic Harish, "Divergent Experiences of Singaporeans during the Japanese Occupation", Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences Dept. at the Singapore University of Technology and Design.

<http://seajapaneseoccupation.hass.sutd.edu.sg>

³ Mr Chia Yee Kwan, "Japanese Occupation", National Archives.

<https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/>

⁴ Ismail Bin Zain, "Japanese Occupation of Singapore", National Archives.

https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/oral_history_interviews/record-details/f6367b5a-115d-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad?keywords=Japanese+brutality&keywords-type=all

⁵ "Japanese Occupation of Singapore", Wikipedia.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_occupation_of_Singapore

⁶ Nadarajah, K, "Japanese Occupation of Singapore", National Archives.

https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/oral_history_interviews/interview/003378

So, some of the young women hide somewhere,” shared Ismail, who experienced the Occupation.

Notwithstanding the many problems faced during the Occupation, the only way to survive was to have a positive outlook and make the best of the situation. “You can’t live especially during the Japanese time. And we were all getting poorer,” said Ismail, “whatever we can sell, we sell because in order to make ends meet. I must find a job.” This proves that it is important for the locals to keep on persevering despite the hardship they were facing.

However, not all the Japanese were seen to be the aggressors. There were minority reports of Japanese civilians, who had lived in Singapore prior to the invasion, providing protection and assistance to local Singaporeans who withstood the ill-treatment and violence of the Japanese invaders.⁷ Despite facing prosecution by the Japanese soldiers, these Japanese civilians had the courage to help those in need without much hesitation.

To sum up, we commemorate Singapore's 80th anniversary of the occupation not because we want to remember the brutality and suffering of our forefathers. It is how they anchor to the core values, and make it a pushing force to motivate them to do what they ought to do with the right action and conduct. Thus, their ability to have ‘a lion’s heart’ and make a change out of the challenges is something worth emulating today.

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⁷ Minoru Kawaguchi, “Tracing My Roots As a 4th Generation Japanese-Singaporean”, CNA Insider. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6QeyqF4de0&t=948s>

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