

Divergent Experiences of Singaporeans during the Japanese Occupation

Daphne Goh | Karthic Harish

Introduction

The Japanese Occupation of Singapore was a harrowing experience for those who lived through it. Historical accounts of the Occupation often generalize and dramatize the catastrophic 44-month long episode, with frequent references to the Sook Ching Operation that left an indelible mark not only on survivors, but also the generations that followed. Following the discussions in class, we were inspired to seek first hand accounts that belied another viewpoint; for some, the Occupation was not as insidious as the history books suggest.

This essay aims to examine the uncommon experiences of Chinese and Indian survivors and, in doing so, identify the factors and reasons for their relatively better standard of living during the war than the masses. With the aim of uncovering uncommon experiences rarely found in history books, we interviewed Singaporeans who were, on average, at least 9 years old during the Japanese Occupation and obtained oral history interviews of Indian survivors (aged at least 15 during the war) from the National

Archives of Singapore. The essay is divided into four parts. Firstly, it discusses survivors who strategically took advantage of the black market during the war. Secondly, it explores the correlation between geographical locations and living conditions. Thirdly, it introduces testimonies from Indians involved in the Indian independence movement in Singapore in view of the preferential treatment they received from the Japanese. Lastly, it examines the value of the Japanese language which melted the barrier between the Japanese and Singaporeans and enabled them to even have friendly relations.

Wheel of Fortune: Black Markets

Soon after the British surrendered, the tables had turned drastically for most Singaporeans. “Many old ties of hierarchy were broken; many old truths seemed to fail. Making money was no longer so honourable and respectable as it had been before the war. Nor did possessing it confer security.” (Bayly & Harper, 2004). Clocks were set to the year 2062 and economic activity was disrupted by the introduction of ‘banana notes’. Yet, a particular line of business flourished - the black market. The existence of a black market during the Occupation allowed certain Singaporeans to capitalise on the inflated prices of common goods, make a fortune and live comfortably.

In his seminal autobiography 'The Singapore Story', Singapore's founding father Lee Kuan Yew explains how his shrewdness as a broker on the black market at Chulia Street allowed him to thrive during the Occupation while others withered under the burgeoning weight of banana notes and food scarcity. "Although I received the usual rations of rice, oil, other foodstuff and cigarettes, there were better and easier pickings to be had as a broker on the black market." (Lee, 1998) Mr Lee noted the process through which he made money as a broker on the black market: "I joined them in 1944, and learnt how to hoard items, especially small pieces of jewellery going cheap. I would buy them, hold them for a few weeks, and then sell them as prices inevitably went up. It was easy to make money if one had the right connections." (Lee, 1998)

Similarly in "A Chinese Farmer's Experience", historian Dr Pang Yang Huei details an oral interview with Mr Tang S.Y., a Singaporean farmer during Japanese Occupation. Mr Tang shared how he led a relative comfortable life by taking advantage of new opportunities. "Tang's lifestyle was buttressed by a complex matrix of shady dealings between supplier and middleman, all of whom profited greatly." (Pang, 2005). Mr Tang made a fortune through selling eggs and chickens in the black market where eggs could fetch the price of \$35 each.

Lee Kuan Yew and Mr Tang are just a few of many who profited from the thriving illicit trade. As Bayly notes in 'Forgotten Armies', "1943 would be remembered as the year when the black market began to overshadow the formal economy entirely" (Bayly & Harper, 2004). Indeed, those who seized the right opportunities had transmogrified their misfortunes to fortunes.

Safe Havens: Bugis & Geylang

Accounts of the Occupation often highlight an ubiquitous sense of suffering throughout Singapore, without delving into specific localities. However our interviews with survivors seem to suggest that some were relatively well off due to certain characteristics of the districts they resided in. This led us to hypothesize and investigate correlations between the geographical locations of the survivors' staying areas and their standard of living.

Mr Loh, an 84 year old Chinese, shared his experience living in Bugis where the presence of high ranking Japanese soldiers supposedly made it a safe place.

Daphne: Where did you live?

Mr Loh: I used to live in Bugis, it was the city area of Singapore. There was a Japanese canteen located near my house.

Daphne: Were you afraid to leave the house during WW2? Were the streets very quiet?

Mr Loh: No, not at all. We had the freedom to roam around the streets. We stayed in the city area where many high ranking Japanese soldiers were situated at so we were very sheltered. The soldiers were grouped by red flags and blue flags. The high ranking soldiers had the red flags.

Daphne: Were the Japanese very cruel? Did you witness any of the incidents?

Mr Loh: There was a Japan Street in Bugis. Many Japanese were living in that area. Hence, it was rather safe as there were little Japanese activities in my vicinity.

According to an article by the National Library Board, Bugis was teeming with brothels notorious for prostitution activities prior to World War 2. “Due to the large number of Japanese living in Bugis, it is also known as the *jit pun koi* in Hokkien, which mean “Japanese Street”.” (Ratnala, N, 2003). There is a high likelihood that the Japanese canteen near Mr Loh’s house may have catered to the officers in that area, who may

have kept the inferior foot soldiers off the streets and away from the comfort stations, resulting in a relatively peaceful district.

Mdm Yap, a 86 year old Chinese who lived in Geylang during the war, shared similar views on security.

Daphne: How was life under Japanese Occupation?

Mdm Yap: Life was relatively okay for me. There were very few Japanese soldiers roaming around Geylang area.

Daphne: Did you had enough food? What was the food that you mostly ate?

Mdm Yap: There were several tapioca farms in Geylang area during World War
2. Tapioca was my main staple of food, there wasn't any rice available that time.

A historical study of Geylang during the Occupation led us to a plausible reason reason for Mdm Yap's experience. When the Japanese were here between 1942-1945, "at least 5 comfort zones were situated around Singapore" (Fern, O. S, 2016). One of the comfort stations was located at "Tanjong Katong Road" (Fern, O. S, 2016), which is approximately 1.2km away from Geylang. The presence of a comfort station being a stone's throw away from Geylang could very well have captured the attention of the

Japanese soldiers. Perceiving it as a getaway to relax and enjoy, the Japanese soldiers may have let down their guards in favor of recreation. Furthermore, the Japanese had to rely on the local farms and stores for food supplies. Therefore, they were more likely to foster closer ties with people living in those area.

Danger Zone: Paya Lebar

Undeniably, there were many areas where people suffered from starvation and were cruelly treated by the Japanese. One such area was Paya Lebar Road. Mr Wen, an 82 years old Chinese, who lived in Paya Lebar shared his personal account of witnessing Japanese atrocities at the market.

Daphne: How was life under Japanese Occupation?

Mr Wen: The Japanese were very cruel. The Japanese killed and beheaded many oppositions. The Japanese would then line up the heads on the table in the market. I witnessed it myself when I walked past the market.

One of the darkest periods of World War II in Singapore was the Operation Sook Ching, in which anti-Japanese members of the Chinese Community were killed as a form of punishment for financially supporting China during the war. There were a

total of 5 Sook Ching Screening Centres in Singapore which were at “Jalan Besar Stadium, River Valley Road, Tanjong Pagar Police Station, Kallang Road and Paya Lebar Road.” (Pang, 2005) With the presence of the screening centre in Paya Lebar, Japanese soldiers were more likely to roam around the area which could have resulted in residents being more vulnerable to senseless acts of violence.

Blackburn mentioned that “The Japanese military was initially given five days to identify and exterminate 50,000 “anti-Japanese” chinese.” (Blackburn, 2000). Although the Sook Ching Massacre lasted only 5 days, the barbaric mentality associated with those locations may have been rooted in the Japanese soldiers deployed there afterwards. Hence it is not surprising that there was a consistently high level of senseless violence around those areas, as identified by our interviewee Mr Wen.

Indian Independence Movement

Another group that was sheltered from the harshness of the Japanese Occupation in Singapore were the Indians part of the Indian National Army (INA). As much as the Japanese doggedly persecuted Chinese in their ‘ethnic cleaning’ operation, they were equally passionate in their courtship of the Indians involved in the Independence Movement. Under the ‘Greater Asia’ initiative, the Japanese sought to drive the British

out of Asia by supporting the struggle against colonial rule in India. As a result, the Japanese were inclined to cooperate with members of the INA amicably and the Indians in turn received relatively better treatment.

In a 1984 oral history interview, Mr K M Rengarajoo, born on 27th September 1915, maintains that the Japanese treated his fellow Indians fairly. As a young man, Rengarajoo had co-founded the Indian Youth League (IYL), a social welfare organization for youths to partake in recreational and educational activities. As he became a valuable member of the Indian community in Singapore, an officer named Japanese officer named Otagaru spoke to him about the formation of an Indian Independence League (IIL) movement. Rengarajoo believed that Rash Behari Bose's leadership and relationship with the Japanese high command was instrumental in shaping Japanese' peaceful attitude towards them.

Interviewer: “You said who discussed with who about getting this movement on?”

RKM: “The Japanese, they went to Rash Behari Bose and Rash Behari Bose contacted almost all Indian leaders. That's how the arrangement was going on.”

Interviewer: “What you really worried about at that time was the leadership of this Indian independence movement?”

RKM: “Yes, we need a proper leadership.”

Interviewer: “But not the Japanese attitude or not the Japanese sincerity towards...?”

RKM: “If we have proper leadership, then we can manage with the Japanese.”

As one of the IIL’s top leaders, Rengarajoo also had to liaise with high ranking Japanese officers. He noted the difference in attitudes between 2 officers, Iwakuro and Fujiwara whom he’d interacted with. Indeed, this is the same Fujiwara Iwaichi who explained to Major Ozeki on 8 January 1942 that “Japan should adopt a policy of cutting India adrift from England, not through military means or Machiavellian policy but through **genuine assistance** to the Indian independence movement” (Lebra, 2008). His commitment to the independence movement is evident in his appeal to General Tanaka and Lieutenant Colonel Okamura “the Indian request to bring Subhas Chandra Bose to unite all Indians” (Lebra, 2008). Fujiwara was instrumental in working with Pritam Singh and Mohan to ensure the smooth functioning of the IIL in Singapore. Rengarajoo claims that while Fujiwara was compassionate, Iwakuro was apathetic and secretly harbored a desire to rule over the Indians. Nevertheless, Iwakuro inflicted no

harm on the Indians from the INA, as both the Japanese and the Indians were united under the same banner. Essentially, the Japanese had to stifle any qualms they had with the Indians.

Interviewer: “And what about this Japanese who handled the Indian movement here?”

RKM: “Openly they were very kind. But in action, nothing much.”

Interviewer: “But what about Iwakuro?”

RKM: “The Indian side was also not very much satisfied and he also was not very confident with us. He was also sort of moving....I mean somewhat indifferent towards all of us, but not Fujiwara. Fujiwara was very kind.”

Another member of the INA Mr Karuppiah Narayana had a similar opinion of the Japanese. Born on 18th July 1925, occupation survivor Karuppiah recalls in a 1984 oral interview that his first encounter with the Japanese was peaceful.

Interviewer: So when did you first encounter a Japanese?

KN: “When we went to Paya Lebar, on the way we encountered some Japanese.”

Interviewer: “What was your impression?”

KN: “At that time we didn’t know what they were talking. But they didn’t treat us badly. And we again encounter the Japanese on the way to Flower Road again”

Karuppiah, just like Rengarajoo, had only praises for officer Fujiwara:

KN: “And I got a book written by Fujiwara S Kikan. He was the liaison officer. He was a perfect gentleman.....He was very helpful to Indians.”

Members of the INA, on the other hand, didn’t have to worry about the food shortage. The scarcity of rice during the Occupation was undeniable. Rice imports to Malaya and Singapore “fell from 374, 670 in 1942 to 12,280 in 1945” (Kratoska, 1998). Multiple sources have elucidated how Tapioca became a staple food instead. The number of deaths resulting from poor nutrition recorded in Singapore “rose from 15,978 in 1941 to 35,330 in 1945” (Kratoska, 1998). Clearly the average Joe was far from meeting his daily caloric requirements. However during his instructors course in Azad school, Karuppiah elaborated on the conditions in the camp, which had catered adequately, if not generously, to his palate as well as his basic needs.

Interviewer:“Everyone had a bed or....?”

KN:“Yes, every one”

Interviewer:“What about other daily necessities? Were they all provided?”

KN:“What do you mean by that”

Interviewer:“Soap, towel, toothbrush...that sort of things”

KN:“Yes, they provided us.”

Interviewee: “Say, meat and vegetables?”

KN: “Sometimes we would get meat, some quantity of rice. And sometimes fish, vegetables and all those things, chapati and all those things.”

It seemed that if the Japanese had any predilection for a particular race, it would have to be the Indians. However, the next section compels us to believe otherwise.

The Forgotten Indians

While members of the INA were received politely by the Japanese, the local Singaporean Indians living in Kampongs felt the full brunt of Japanese cruelty. The testimony of Mr Nadarajah, who was discussed earlier in the ‘Negative Relations’ section, proves that at the lower rungs of society (mainly Kampong villagers), the

Japanese were egalitarian in dishing out punishments. Everyone, regardless of race, had to obsequiously obey them.

Born in 1928, Mr Nadarajah, K came to Singapore with his father in early 1942 to live in Kampong Bahru. He shared on his daily life in Kampong Bahru and events he personally witnessed.

Interviewer: You came to Singapore in early 1942, could you describe how did the Japanese run the day to day life?

Nadarajah, K: Hawkers was selling all kinds of food. As time went on, all these things disappear eventually. The hawkers had nothing to sell. As time went on, it became more and more difficult to get food. Rice was practically absent except for the little rice they gave us, even the rice they give in ration was not good rice. We were living on 3 meals of Tapioca a day by the time Japanese surrendered.

Interviewer: So food was not a problem for your family since you worked for the railway?

Nadarajah, K: Yes. In the sense that we at least had Tapioca. But there were a lot of people who did not have even that. They brought in workers from Indonesia. They were known as Romusha. They did not feed them properly so they ran

away from those camps and they came around begging food from us and we did not have food for them. These poor people died from starvation. I have seen it with my own eyes of bloated dead bodies lying on the Kampong Bahru Road. From time to time, a big lorry will come in and two men will take the bodies like a sack and throw them into the lorry. I have seen it myself that the lorry was full of dead bodies.

Survivor L M Mani details his first encounter with a Japanese foot soldier and how he was slapped for something trivial.

L M Mani: “So when the Japanese asked for well water I gave them my water.

The fellow don't want. He wants me to go and collect water from the tap which is about 1 km away you know.....I don't want to go but he slapped me”.

L M Mani: “The second time I said it's very far, I give you this water, he don't want. He slapped me.”

Many such incidents of sentries unfairly abusing the locals have been reported by historians and documentaries alike. Darker skin was not an advantage, but meeting the right Japanese soldier was.

Japanese officers tended to be civil and even approachable. Despite his horrible experiences with the Japanese, Mr Nadarajah admitted in his video interview that “some Japanese were educated, easy to talk to....it was the rank-and-file who were very rough people”. This is corroborated by one of our interviewees Mr Wen:

Mr Wen: Yes, I worked in the band as a drummer. We performed for the all the Japanese soldiers and troops. I met a few of the high rank Japanese soldiers. They will then reward us with banana notes after the performance. Even though there were fierce, they were very well-mannered. The young soldiers were very afraid of their superiors.

In a video interview, occupation survivor and former Singaporean actress Mary Paul also conceded that not all Japanese were brutes.

Mary Paul: “Not all Japanese were bad people. There were some very good ones also. One Japanese man came to the well. We had two big wells, one was about 50 yards away. Another one, by the side of the house. My mother asked the

Japanese man, 'Why do you people want to fight?'. The Japanese said, 'We don't want to fight. They sent us to fight.' That is the Japanese people's story."

The Power of Katakana, Hiragana & Kanji

There's one skill that transcends business relationships, geographical locations, political associations and social status to afford Singaporeans safe passage during their interactions with the Japanese: command of the Japanese language. During the occupation, knowing Japanese was a necessity and being able to communicate effectively was an added advantage that allowed some Singaporeans, like Mr Karuppiah, to be on friendly terms with the Japanese.

KN: I was interested in learning Japanese language.

Interviewer: Why?

KN: In order to survive during the Japanese Occupation. Everybody somehow or rather has to survive by speaking Japanese. There were a lot of demand for Japanese-speaking people during the Japanese Occupation. That's why.

Karuppiah's knowledge of Japanese came in handy when he was admitted to a local hospital on account of chickenpox.

KN: "Most of the doctors were local doctors except the chief, he was a Japanese.....So whenever the local doctors used to come and see me, they used to give me special treatment because when I could speak Japanese they thought I might be going and report to the Japanese. The local doctors were terribly afraid of the chief. And whenever the chief doctor, the Japanese doctor used to visit the ward, he used to come and see me first; he used to ask me "How do you feel?", "Ikaga desu ka?""

Karuppiah proceeds to reveal a discourse in Japanese between him and the doctor, which can be found in the Appendix.

At this juncture, Karuppiah offers a valuable insight that dispels notions of preferential treatment to a particular race. He sheepishly admits that he was treated differently at the hospital not because he was Indian, but because he knew Japanese.

Interviewer: “Could that be something to do with the Japanese generally treating Indians better than the Chinese at that time?”

KN: “No, no, no, no, no, not in that sense. Definitely not. Because being I could speak Japanese, particularly on that basis.”

Interviewer: “You thought so?”

KN: “Definitely, yes.”

To others, knowing Japanese was the thin silver lining between life and death. The founding father of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew explains the importance of knowing Japanese in his book ‘The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew’.

Lee recounts how a bunch of unkempt Japanese soldiers came to his house and occupied it for 3 days and “consumed whatever they fancied” (Lee, 1998). He was verbally handicapped and paid the price for it. “I had no language in which to communicate with them. They made their wishes known with signs and guttural noises. When I was slow in understanding what they wanted, I was cursed and frequently slapped.” (Lee, 1998). Lee quickly realized that “Knowing somebody in authority, whether a Japanese or a Taiwanese interpreter with links to the Japanese, was very important and could be a life-saver. His note with his signature and seal on it certified

that you were a decent citizen and that he vouched for your good character.” (Lee, 1998).

With immaculate foresight, Lee postulated that “If the Japanese were to be in Singapore as my lords and masters for the next few years, and I had not only to avoid trouble but make a living, I would have to learn their language. So in May 1942 I registered with the first batch of students at the Japanese language school the authorities had opened in Queen Street.” (Lee, 1998).

Soon after, Lee himself became a Japanese interpreter and managed to find employment with a Japanese propaganda department known as ‘Hodobu’, before becoming a broker on the black market as mentioned in the first section.

86 year old Mr Tan who lived with his family in Chinatown during World War II, shared similar pleasant experiences. His grandfather was a Chinese businessman who ran a mini mart business. Mr Tan shared how his grandfather, due to his knowledge of Japanese, was able to maintain friendly terms with the Japanese soldiers and live a relatively safer life during war.

Daphne: How was your life under Japanese Occupation? Did you live with your family in Chinatown?

Mr Tan: My grandfather ran a minimart in the Chinatown area. He was awarded 3 badges by the Japanese. However, he was not an informant. He was in good relationships with the Japanese soldiers. In the circumstance that someone who is living in this area was caught by the Japanese, they will contact my grandfather for help. My grandfather will look for the soldiers to save them.

Mr Tan: My grandfather had 10 sons and 10 daughters. Out of the 10 daughters, 3 worked as dancers in the night club. Hence, my grandfather was in good relations with the Japanese. My life was not as bad as my family members worked for the Japanese. I did not have to resort to eating sweet potatoes, there was rice available.

Conclusion

The Japanese Occupation, despite casting a dark bloodstain in Singapore's history books, was not a tragic experience for certain groups of people introduced in this essay. Through black markets, serendipitous geographic locations, independence movements or knowledge Japanese, numerous individuals managed to escape the harrowing adversities that most Singaporeans had to bear. Nevertheless, regardless of these

divergent experiences, the Occupation has taught Singaporeans valuable lessons. As occupation survivor Mary Paul eloquently puts it, “We have to forget and forgive them. Everything is finished.”

APA References

Primary Sources

1. Rengarajoo, K M. Interview by Tan Beng Luan, in Oral History Interviews @ Archives Online <[Weblink to Audio & Transcript](#)> 8 August 1984
2. Nadarajah, K. Interview by Nur Azlin bte Salem, in Oral History Interviews @ Archives Online <[Weblink to Audio & Transcript](#)> 26 December 2008
3. Nadarajah, K. Interview by RazorTV <[Weblink to Video](#)> 15 Feb 2017
4. Karuppiah, N. Interview by Tan Beng Luan, in Oral History Interviews @ Archives Online <[Weblink to Audio & Transcript](#)> 25 June 1984
5. Mani, L M. Interview by Jesley Chua Chee Huan, in Oral History Interviews @ Archives Online <[Weblink to Audio & Transcript](#)> 23 April 2010
6. Mary, Paul. Interview by RazorTV <[Weblink to Video](#)> 15 Nov 2017
7. Mr Lu S. Y. Interview by Daphne Goh, <[Audio File Link](#)> 26th April 2019
8. Mr. Wen J. S Interview by Daphne Goh, <[Audio File Link](#)> 26th April 2019
9. Mr Loh K. W Interview by Daphne Goh, <[Audio File Link](#)> 26th April 2019

10. Mr. Tan W.M. Interview by Daphne Goh, <[Audio File Link](#)> 26th April 2019

11. Mdm Yap K. L. Interview by Daphne Goh, <[Audio File Link](#)> 26th April 2019

Secondary Sources

1. Pang, Y. H. (2005). "A Tangled Web of Wartime Collaboration & Survival in Singapore: A Chinese Farmer's Experience." In Reflections and Interpretations: Oral History Centre 25th Anniversary Publication, pp. 227-247. Edited by Fiona Hu. Singapore: National Archives of Singapore, Oral History Centre, 2005.
2. Blackburn, K. (2000). The Collective Memory of the Sook Ching Massacre and the Creation of the Civilian War Memorial of Singapore. Journal of the Malaysia Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.
3. Lebra, J. (2008). The Indian National Army and Japan. ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute.
4. Lee, K. Y. (1998). The Singapore story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew. Singapore: Prentice-Hall.
5. Bayly, C. & Harper, T. (2004). Forgotten armies: the fall of British Asia, 1941-1945, pp. 315-335. London: Allen Lane.
6. Kratoska, Paul H. (1998). Food supplies and the Japanese occupation in South-East Asia. New York: St. Martin's Press
7. Ratnala, N. (2003, May 22). Bugis Junction (indoor streets of Bugis). Retrieved from http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_297_2004-12-20.html

8. Fern, O. S. (2016, January 19). A brief history of Japan's 'comfort women' controversy. Retrieved from <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/a-brief-history-of-japans-comfort-women-controversy>

Appendix

Appendix A:

Mr K M Rengarajoo (Born 27th September 1915)

Audio:

http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/oral_history_interviews/interview/000276

Worked for the Public Works Department and founded the Indian Youth League (IYL). With 25-30 members initially. Catered to the general public but most members were Indians.

Japanese officer named Otagaru spoke to him about the formation of an Indian Independence League (IIL) movement in Singapore. Japanese contacted Rash Behari Bose, who rallied the Indian leaders in Singapore. He believes that the Japanese were cooperative thanks to Rash Behari Bose's leadership and relationship with the Japanese high command.

TBL Or other Indian leaders, did they have any close contact with them and how did...?

RKM Except Rash Behari Bose, none of the Indians in Southeast Asia has any close contact with them.

TBL And how much did you understand [of] the Japanese attitude?

RKM Well, I can't be a capable man to understand these people. One thing, they are very cunning, that much we can't deny. But for their country sake, they are very sincere and loyal.

TBL When you say they are cunning, was it because their attitude towards the Indian independence movement or in what way?

RKM In general, the Japanese attitude. They are good industrialist but on the other hand, understanding people and all that, well, we don't have much experience to know these people more deeper.

RKM Yes, we need a proper leadership.

TBL But not the Japanese attitude or not the Japanese sincerity towards...?

RKM If we have proper leadership, then we can manage with the Japanese.

TBL At that time did you feel that the Japanese were trying to control the Indian independence league before Chandra Bose arrived?

RKM They didn't say openly they wanted to control but in a way we couldn't get much things [done] with them.

TBL Because Rash Behari Bose couldn't deal with the Japanese or the Japanese was not sincere about it?

Rengarajoo discusses the attitudes of the 2 officers who were in charge of the Indian independence movement in Singapore. First there was Fujiwara, then Iwakuro took over. Iwakuro's attitude towards Indians was like that of most other Japanese - polite yet indifferent. Fujiwara, however, was exceptionally kind.

RKM Yes, F K Khan had more facilities for Indians to get along with them, but Iwakuro, he was not fully confident by the Indian community also.

TBL Why?

RKM Because his way of dealing with the Indians not so well as Mr Fujiwara had earlier with these people. He had a set of people and he himself personally was very kind, all along he was getting on very well with these people, almost to Indians, you see.

TBL But what about Iwakuro?

RKM The Indian side also not very much satisfied and he also not very confident with us. He was also sort of moving... I mean somewhat indifferent towards all of us, but not Fujiwara. Fujiwara was very kind.

Appendix B:

Karuppiah Narayana (Born 18th July 1925)

Audio:

http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/oral_history_interviews/interview/000050

Father worked for PUB and was trustee of a Hindu temple.

“And I got a book written by Fujiwara S Kikan. He was the liaison officer. He was a perfect gentleman. So he was actually the liaison between the INA and the Japanese forces. So he’s the one who acted as the liaison officer. He was very helpful to Indians.”

First encounter with the Japanese:

TBL So when did you first encounter a Japanese?

KN When we went to Paya Lebar, on the way we encountered the Japanese soldiers.

TBL What was your impression?

KN When we saw them, they [said] "kura...kura...India... India ...India...gue...gue...gue...aichi bue...aichi bue...!" But at that time I didn't understand what they were talking. But later on actually what they said "Kura...kura..." means "oi...oi...oi ...come Indians...go...go...go...go...this side...go this side...!" - that's the meaning. But later on I know the meaning. At that time we didn't know what they were talking. But they didn't treat us badly. And we again encounter the Japanese on the way to Flower Road again.

Studied Japanese (Katakana, Hiragana and some Kanji) at a school on Queen Street. He wanted to learn Japanese to survive during the Occupation.

TBL So when you study the Japanese language, did you know much about the Indian Independence Movement?

KN We only heard, we only used to see the papers. At that time I was not interested in politics much. I was interested in learning Japanese language.

TBL Why?

KN In order to survive during the Japanese Occupation. Everybody somehow or rather has to survive by speaking Japanese. There were a lot of demand for Japanese-speaking people during the Japanese Occupation. That's why.

He received special medical treatment for knowing Japanese.

KNC While I was studying in the Japanese school, I feel sick, suffered from chickenpox. So immediately I went and joined myself without informing my father. From there I phoned up my father saying that I am suffering from chickenpox so I am in the hospital. So I was admitted in the second class ward. Most of the doctors were local doctors except the chief, he was a Japanese. So at that time I could speak few Japanese. I was not so expert as now. So whenever the local doctors used to come and see me, they used to give me special treatment because when I could speak Japanese they thought that I might be going and report to the Japanese. The local doctors were terribly afraid of the chief. And whenever the chief doctor, the Japanese doctor used to visit the ward, he used to come and see me first; he used to ask me "How do you feel?"

"Ikaga desu ka?"

"Genki desu ka?"

"Genki desu?"

"Kusuriyo tabe mashitaka"

"Hi, tabe mashita ka"

That was the meaning:

- How do you do?

- How do you feel?

- I am fine

- Have you taken your food?

- Did they give you proper medicine?

He used to ask me in Japanese. So at that time I was able to reply to him in Japanese itself. So he was surprised. And the other patients, my co-patients also were surprised. The doctors were also surprised. They gave me special treatment, fearing the chief doctor.

TBL But then what was your relationship with the non-Indians? Did you feel that they were looking at you with a very special type of attitude?

KN For knowing Japanese only, they gave me special treatment. Other than that they treat me equally with other patients. They

He also shared that the Japanese didn't treat him better because he was Indian. It was only cuz he knew Japanese. So generally treatment was same.

thought that I may report to the Japanese doctor. But they treated me in a special manner, that's all.

TBL Could that be something to do with the Japanese generally treat[ing] Indians better than the Chinese at that time?

KN No, no, no, no, no, not in that sense. Definitely not. Because being I could speak Japanese, particularly on that basis.

TBL You thought so?

KN Yes, definitely.

This guy was fiercely patriotic and wanted to join the INA against his Father's wishes. He joined the interpreters' class at the Azad school.

Talks about living conditions:

TBL What about accommodation and food and uniforms?

KN Uniforms were supplied by the Indian Army. Food was supplied by them but we didn't get salary. We were paid only a few dollars for pocket expenses. We didn't have any grudge because we wanted to join. We wanted to fight for the independence sincerely. We didn't expect anything in return as salary. And what Bose told us, "We don't have sufficient funds to pay you sufficient salary. You'll get only pocket expenses. But after the attainment of independence, you'll get all your salary in one shot". So we didn't bother. We didn't join INA for salary.

TBL What about the accommodation?

KN Accommodation was also in the building itself. We had some quarters. It was overcrowded, but of course during war time we cannot expect all the facilities. Those were really the hardships. The food was also very poor food, not up to our present standard. But we didn't bother, we were not worried. At that time our aim was India's independence - nothing, but India's independence. We were not worried about the food or facilities, I mean, accommodation or anything.

TBL How bad was the food and the facilities?

KN How bad? I cannot exactly tell you. It was not tasteful. It's a common food, that's all. We ate what is available only.

Basic necessities were provided for and the food was generally okay. Definitely not as bad as general standard of living; most Singaporeans lived on Tapioca and were poor?

TBL: "Was it sufficient for each meal?"

KN: "More or less it was sufficient"

TBL What about the bedding?

KN Bedding, oh yes, we had some beds, common bedding.

TBL Every one had a bed or...?

KN Yes, every one.

TBL What about other daily necessities? Were they all provided?

KN What do you mean by that?

TBL Soap, towel, toothbrush...that sort of things.

KN Yes, they provided us. Not to the present standard. To some extent they provided us.

Food in Japan:

Karupiah was sent to Tokyo for training and recounts that the food there was bad too! So the Japanese weren't much better off than the Singaporeans. If the Indian guests were fed so poorly, imagine the average Japanese on the street.

training by various teachers - Japanese language, politics, and various other subjects. One, we were taken to the War Ministry and there was one general [who] gave us a lecture. We were present before him, he was a Japanese general. But now I have forgotten his name. After that, we came back to the Kamikitazawa we were studying there for about six months. And then while we were studying there, Bose visited once to our place. He came to Tokyo for a discussion with the ministers. He visited our place where we were studying.

And at that time, actually when he came to our place, most of the Japanese ministers were there. And the Japanese food was meagre and very little quality. The curries were also very little and poor. We were half-starving when we were in Japan actually. It was war time and the training was severe. Actually the Japanese when they heard that Bose is going to visit to our place, they wanted to prepare special food for that day itself. But Bose told them, "You must prepare the same quantities, the same type of food as you have been supplying until now to everyone of us!" At that time Bose, Giani and Chatterji - the photo is there, in his group photo, that photo was taken on that day. He was there.

So what he did you know; he asked the officers to sit among us. He was sitting in the first row with the Japanese ministers. On that day, they supplied little more quantity, small bowl..and little more quantity. The curry slightly better. So while the other officers were sitting among us, he asked us, "Is this the same quantity which you had been eating all these days?" "Yes Sir. Today, the quantity is a bit more but the curries look better, that's all. But the quantity also a little more. That's what we told them. And he also took the same food. He looked down at his food and everything and he felt sorry. By looking at his food we came to know that he's feeling sorry.

Appendix C:

Nadarajah, K (Born 1928)

Audio:

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

Video:

<https://www.razor.tv/video/surviving-the-japanese-occupation-k-nadarajah/4802324433001/5323995653001>

Transcribed from 32:20-42:00:

Nadarajah, K: Japanese transferred my father to Singapore and we came to Singapore. We lived with my uncle as my father's house was not vacant.

Interviewer: Where was this?

Nadarajah, K: It was in Kampong Bahru. The flats are now demolished and there's a railway there.

Interviewer: Can you describe the area in Kampong Bahru?

Nadarajah, K: Kampong Bahru road goes over the railway. Just after you passed the bridge, it was our block of flats. Opposite side of Kampong Bahru Road was Silat Kampung. Silat Kampung subsequently when the Buddhist came and bombed. The bomb fell on the Kampung and it was burned. Further down, there were more flats. And opposite of the flats, there were a General Hospital that was set up.

Interviewer: Was it mixed neighbourhood or was it dominated by a certain race?

Nadarajah, K: Nope, there were all kinds of people there. There were Malays, Indians in the blocks. As time went on, there was a space that we would play around. However, the Japanese brought in a group of people.

Interviewer: Who was the atmosphere felt like when you settled at Kampong Bahru?

Nadarajah, K: We used to walk around and able to pick the guns and granite. But we did not dare to bring home. It was left behind by the soldiers and local defence force. When Japanese came, they took off their uniforms and drop their guns to pose off as Singaporeans if not they will be caught.

Interviewer: You came to Singapore in early 1942, could you describe how did the Japanese run the day to day life?

Nadarajah, K: For me, it was something unusual as I came from KL where they were not traffic. However, in front of my flat there was a traffic. And there was a newspaper seller will shout and sing song, selling the Syonan newspaper which was in English. We saw buses with the opening at the back which can up and down from the back. Similar to the buses in England where you get in and out with the same entrance. Hawkers was selling all kinds of food like mee that was not seen in KL. As time went on, all these things disappear eventually. The hawkers had nothing to sell. As time went on, it became more and more to get food. Rice was practically absent except for the little rice they gave, even the rice they give in ration was not good rice. We were living on 3 meals of Tapioca a day when the Japanese surrendered. Luckily we were in living in the railway and our friends will put the tapioca in the train and we will take it. Vegetables used to come from Johor and people will steal from them.

Interviewer: So food was not a problem for your family since you worked for the railway

Nadarajah, K: Yes. In the sense that we at least had Tapioca. But there were a lot of people who did not have even that. They brought in workers from Indonesia. They were known as Romusha. They did not feed them properly so they ran away from those camps and they came around begging food from us and we did not have food for them. These poor people died from starvation. I have seen it with my own eyes of bloated dead bodies lying on the Kampong Bahru Road. From time to time, a big lorry will come in

and two men will take the bodies like a sack and throw it into the lorry. I have seen it myself that the lorry was full of dead bodies.

Appendix D:

Mary Paul, former actress (Born 1937)

Video:

<https://www.razor.tv/video/the-lives-they-live-surviving-the-japanese-occupation/4800266888001/5647160622001>

She acted alongside Phua Chu Kang

“Not all Japanese were bad people. There were some very good ones also. One Japanese man came to the well. We had two big wells, one was about 50 yards away. Another one, by the side of the house. My mother asked the Japanese man, ‘Why do you people want to fight?’. The Japanese said, ‘We don’t want to fight. They sent us to fight.’ That is the Japanese people’s story.”

“We have to forget and forgive them. Everything is finished.”

Appendix E:

L M Mani

Audio:

http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/oral_history_interviews/interview/003509

Mani details his first encounter with a Japanese foot soldier and how he was slapped for something trivial.

Transcribed from 35:30-37:00

L M Mani: “So when the Japanese asked for well water I gave them my water. The fellow don’t want. He wants me to go and collect water from the tap which is about 1 km away you know.....I don’t want to go but he slapped me”.

L M Mani: “The second time I said it’s very far, I give you this water, he don’t want. He slapped me

Appendix F: Face to Face Interviews at Chinatown

Interview Transcript 1: Mr. Lu S. Y, aged 90 (13-15 years old during war)



Mr Lu: We came from China, Guangxi. I was 13 years old when I came.

Interviewer: How was life under Japanese Occupation? Was it tough?

Mr Lu: It was very tough. There was a lack of food supply and it was very limited in options. We only had to eat tapioca and sweet potatoes.

Interviewer: Did you attend the Japanese school?

Mr Lu: Yes, there was Japanese schools. I was studying in the Chinese school before the invasion of Japanese. I did not attend the Japanese schools.

Interviewer: Was there curfew imposed at night?

Mr Lu: Yes, there was the presence of curfew. As the night approaches, the streets became very quiet and people were afraid of leaving their homes.

Interviewer: How was food sold during the wartime? Did you use the banana currency?

Mr Lu: There were presence of banana notes in certain areas. They sold some food on the streets. However, I did not use the banana notes as the area I was living in did not have it.

Interviewer: Were there jobs available?

Mr Lu: Yes, there were jobs available. However, the salary was very low. I worked as a disciple under a technician for several years. I also drove big trucks to the village to fetch workers to work. It was approximately an hour ride to the village.

Interviewer: What did you think of the Japanese? Did you witness any incidents of the Japanese soldiers killing or beating up people?

Mr Lu: Japanese were very ambitious, they wanted to conquer the whole world. They attacked Germany, China and United States. Many Japanese were killed during wartime. If we were to see the Japanese soldiers on the street, we had to bow and salute to them. During the Japanese Occupation, some of the soldiers were good and some were bad. Some of them started killing people once they reached Singapore. At the start, they also kidnapped and rape girls. However, things became better and everything was peaceful after the first year of invasion.

Interviewer: Thanks for your time.

Interview Transcript 2: Mr. Wen J. S, aged 82 (5- 7 years old during war)



Interviewer: How old are you? Were you when the Japanese invaded Singapore?

Mr Wen: I am 82 years old this this year. Yes, I was living in Singapore in Paya Lebar.

Interviewer: How was life under Japanese Occupation?

Mr Wen: The Japanese were very cruel. The Japanese killed and beheaded many oppositions. The Japanese would then line up the heads on the table in the market. I witnessed it myself when I walked past the market.

Interviewer: How was the food supply during war?

Mr Wen: There were very little white rice, I only got to eat stale yellow rice. We had sweet potatoes and tapioca also.

Interviewer: Did you attend Japanese schools? Were you given food if you attended the schools?

Mr Wen: Yes, I attended the Japanese schools and studied the Japanese books. I had to learn the Japanese songs. However, I can't really remember what I learnt. The Japanese did not enforce that all children had to go to school. It was optional. They did not give us food even if we attended the school.

Interviewer: Since there wasn't any incentive, why did you still attend the Japanese school?

Mr Wen: If we were to graduate from the Japanese schools, they will hire us to work for the Japanese.

Interviewer: Did everyone worked during war?

Mr Wen: People mostly stayed at home; they will call you if they needed you to work. We were living in fear and the streets were quiet. Banana notes or rations will be rewarded weekly if you worked for them. Some people in the tofu, coffee factories.

Interviewer: Comparing between the British Colonialism and Japanese Occupation, which did you prefer?

Mr Wen: Both were about the same for me. Life was not as bad as it seems under the Japanese Occupation. British took away most of the valuable assets. During the invasion, the British left money and food on the train as they were trying to flee from the bomb attacks. I stole the money and food in the midst of the chaos.

Interviewer: Did you had to bow and salute to the Japanese soldiers when you see them on the street?

Mr Wen: Yes, we had to salute to them. If not, the Japanese soldiers would slap us. The Japanese soldiers were very well-mannered.

Interviewer: Did you expect that the Japanese will lose and surrender the war?

Mr Wen: No, we did not know much thing and merely followed with the flow. Thanks to the 2 atomic bombs which led to the end of war.

Interviewer: Were there newspaper during that time? Were you allowed to listen to the radio?

Mr Wen: There were presence of newspaper in both Chinese and Japanese. We were allowed to listen to the radio which was in both languages as well. News were reported but it was mainly reporting positive things about the government. There was presence of entertainment at the clubs as well. English songs and anti-Japanese songs were not allowed to be sung.

Interviewer: Did you work during WW2?

Mr Wen: Yes, I worked in the band as a drummer. We performed for the all the Japanese soldiers and troops. I met a few of the high rank Japanese soldiers. They will then reward us with banana notes after the performance. Even though there were fierce, but they were very well-mannered. The young soldiers were very afraid of their superiors.

Interview Transcript 3: Mr Loh K. W., aged 84 (7-9 years old during war)



Mr Loh: I am born in Singapore. I am 84 and was around 7 years old during WW2.

Interviewer: Did you only get to eat sweet potato and tapioca during WW2?

Mr Loh: We had all types of food. I got to eat everything. I lived in the kampong area and my grandmother was a farmer. We grew our own food so we had the supply for food.

Interviewer: Where did you live?

Mr Loh: I used to live in Bugis, it was the city area of Singapore. There was a Japanese canteen located near my house.

Interviewer: Were you afraid to leave the house during WW2? Were the streets very quiet?

Mr Loh: No, not at all. We had the freedom to roam around the streets. We stayed in the city area where many high ranking Japanese soldiers were situated at so we were very sheltered. The soldiers were grouped by red flags and blue flags. The high ranking soldiers were had the red flags.

Interviewer: Were the Japanese very cruel? Did you witness any of the incidents?

Mr Loh: There was a Japan Street in Bugis. Many Japanese were living in that area. Hence, it was rather safe and the Japanese did not really bully us.

Interviewer: Did the Japanese treat the Chinese and Indians differently?

Mr Loh: Initially when they first entered into Singapore, they killed many Chinese. The Indians and Malays often get away from the massacre.

Interviewer: Were there newspaper? How did you know that the Japanese surrendered?

Mr Loh: There were newspaper around during that time. I did not know how to read but my parents read it to me. News were spreading really quickly and we were aware of the event that happened.

Interview Transcript 4 : Mr. Tan W.M. , aged 86



Mr Tan: I lived in Chinatown. I am 86 years old this year.

Interviewer: How was your life under Japanese Occupation? Did you live with your family in Chinatown?

Mr Tan: There were a gambling den and headquarter presence during the area. The Japanese will torture them by putting a water hose through the mouth and throw them down the building. They will then hang the corpses at the hilltop.

Mr Tan: My grandfather ran the minimart in the Chinatown area. He was awarded 3 badges by the Japanese. He was not an informant. He was in good relationships with the Japanese soldiers. In the circumstance that someone who is living in this area was caught by the Japanese, they will contact my grandfather for help. My grandfather will look for the soldiers to save them.

Mr Tan: When Japan invaded Singapore, my mother sold her house for 3 bags of banana currency. However, the banana currency soon grew to be worthless. Hence, my

mother could not accept it and was not emotionally unstable. She was locked in a room near the death street for 3 years throughout wartime.

Mr Tan: My grandfather had 10 sons and 10 daughters. Out of the 10 daughters, 3 worked as dancers in the night club. Hence, my grandfather was in good relations with the Japanese. My life was not as bad as my family members worked for the Japanese. I did not have to resort to eating sweet potatoes, there was rice available.

Interviewer: Were the life very tough?

Mr Tan: Yes, it was very tough. There wasn't enough food, rations cards were issued to some people to buy rice and cigarettes. There were vegetables sold in the market as well. Most people ate sweet potatoes and tapiocas if you do not have the ration cards.

Interviewer: Did you attend the Japanese school?

Mr Tan: I attended Chinese schools near my house. I did not study Japanese, we only learnt Chinese. There weren't any laws that were imposed on us.

Interviewer: Were there newspaper during that time?

Mr Tan: Yes, there was newspapers sold. Very few people will buy it and they could not afford it. Even if they could, they were not able to read as well.

Interviewer: How did you know that the Japanese surrendered?

Mr Tan: We knew that Japanese surrender as a siren was rang. We all hid underground. There was a family who was living 7 units away from my house did not escape in time and was killed by the bomb. There was another bomb that landed near my window, but it did not explode. Hence, I was saved.

Interviewer: Were there other races living in your area?

Mr Tan: Most of the people living in Chinatown were Chinese. The Malays lived in Geylang.

Interviewer: Were there many Japanese soldiers around your area?

Mr Tan: Yes, I was living near the headquarters. Hence, there were many Japanese soldiers patrolling around the area. I did not stay at home much when I was young. I could walk and play around the streets near my house. If I were to meet a Japanese soldier on the streets, I had to salute to them. If not, the Japanese soldiers would slap me. Even children were bullied and beaten up if they did not salute to them.

Interviewer: Did the Japanese robbed your food supply?

Mr Tan: No. As long as you did not commit any crimes, they will not catch you.

Interviewer: How about the Japanese soldiers?

Mr Tan: The low rank soldiers were very bad. They often capture girls and rape them. Girls were not allowed to dress up and wear make-up.

Mr Tan: People living in Chinatown did not live such as tough life. We had clothes and there were food available as well.

Interview Transcript 5: Mdm Yap K. L. , aged 86

(No Audio Recording as she did not want to be recorded)

Interviewer: Were you in Singapore during World War 2? Where were living at?

Mdm Yap: Yes, I was born in Singapore. I lived in Geylang during war period.

Interviewer: How was life under Japanese Occupation?

Mdm Yap: Life was relatively okay for me. There were very few Japanese soldiers roaming around Geylang area.

Interviewer: Did you had enough food? What was the food that you mostly ate?

Mdm Yap: There were several tapioca farms in Geylang area during World War 2. Tapioca was my main staple of food, there wasn't any rice available that time.

Interviewer: Did you attend the Japanese school?

Mdm Yap: Yes, I attended the Japanese school where they taught us how to read the characters and we had to sing the Japanese songs too.