

NOTES ON THE THAI-BURMA RAILWAY PART II: ASIAN ROMUSHA; THE SILENCED VOICES OF HISTORY

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The slimy track we had followed to Konyu Camp was the only way through the jungle and it linked the sixty or so labour camps dotted along the path of the railway... The track was littered with bits of abandoned tracks, great broken branches covered in thorns... and, frequently, the abandoned corpses of unfortunate Tamils and Chinese "recruited" from Malaya, who had got no further than this on their way to the promised dream job. (The Japanese amassed the vast Asian labour force that was necessary for this railway work by offering the incentive of a six-month contract under ideal conditions: splendid food, lots of money - and bring your families. Many did bring them and it was sickening to see women and small children passing through with bewildered-looking groups of Tamils and Chinese, to a miserable death).

-former British POW & artist, Ronald Searle: "To the Kwai - and Back; War Drawings, 1939-1945" (Collins, 1986)

INTRODUCTION

As if the immeasurable sufferings of the Asian labourers (romusha) used in the construction of the Thai-Burma Railway was some sort of fictive dressing, the movie "The Bridge on the River Kwai" heaped indignity upon misery in its passing and off-hand reference to Asian labourers. It is on this issue that the movie deserves serious criticism and even condemnation. The one and only reference to Asian (in the movie's setting, Thai) labour occurs after the Force 316 commando group is parachuted into Thailand in order to demolish the bridge. After the leader, Major Warden, has approached the village headman of a Thai jungle village, the following dialogue takes place:

Shears/William Holden : Who's going to lead the way?

Warden/ Jack Hawkins : Guy (the Thai village headman) himself. He hates the Japanese. They've taken all his men for railroad work, which means we shall have to use women bearers.

Shears/Holden : Women bearers?

Warden/Hawkins : Oh, they're very capable, I'm told!

That the local Thai guides and porters for the Force 316 group were women is another departure

from Pierre Boulle's original book, in which the local guides are male "Siamese partisans." The point behind this seemingly minor alteration in the movie script is, of course, that, by the inclusion of village women as the party's porters, the normal and expected tinges of heterosexual romance (without which no Hollywood production of the time would be a success!) could be portrayed; and, indeed, the young Lt. Joyce/Geoffrey Horne is depicted in just such an amorous relationship and the irrepressible "Commander" Shears/William Holden has a field day! While querying the degrading picture of women that this fiction produces, it must be stressed that, in effect, the movie has totally dismissed the horrific experiences of Asian romusha as a mere ploy to introduce women into an otherwise more-or-less male script! Thus was the success of Hollywood's "blockbuster" movie, "The Bridge on the River Kwai", assured!

While dead men can tell no tales, so illiterate men can write no diaries. Many of the Asian romusha were illiterate; poor, helpless peasants mostly forcibly conscripted - or callously lured by false promises of riches - and unaware of their ultimate destinations. While it is a matter of dispute as to whether Japan ever made any efforts to observe the Geneva Conventions on POWs (certainly the experiences of the POWs led them to believe that the Conventions were being deliberately ignored), the records kept of POW movements - for example from Singapore's Changi prison to Thailand, or from Thailand to Japan proper - suggests that at some perhaps higher levels, the intention of Japanese bureaucrats (as opposed to military staff on the ground) was, indeed, to keep accurate records of the POWs' fate as obligated under the Conventions. However, no such Geneva Conventions existed to govern the impressing or treatment of civilian labour; few official attempts were made to record the fate of Asian romusha. This lack of official (Japanese) documentation, coupled with the absence of almost any written records by the survivors themselves, has allowed the situation of Asian romusha to be minimised or even ignored. Other sources do exist; namely the published diaries of the Allied POWs and the researches of Asian (including many dedicated Japanese) scholars who have attempted to rearticulate the romushas "silenced voices". A cursory examination of such evidence suggests that the Asian labourers' conditions were considerably worse than has hitherto been imagined; that the extent of the actual use of labourers has probably been greatly underestimated; and that, likewise, the casualty and death rates of the romusha have been insufficiently appreciated.

THE POW DIARIES

Perhaps surprisingly, a great deal of information on the situation of Asian romusha can be gleaned from Allied POW diaries, although such information - being of secondary importance to the writers'

main intentions - is rather disorganised and haphazard. Again, even more surprising is the fact that most POW diaries generally agree that the situation of Asian labourers was considerably worse than that of the POWs themselves; for, unlike POWs, the Asian romusha had no disciplinary structure of their own so essential to maintaining morale in adverse conditions and - perhaps more devastating - neither doctors nor other medical personnel of their own; and certainly no language interpreters. They were haphazardly assembled from the poor, largely uneducated section of their respective populations, totally disorganised and unable to converse in each others' languages, much less in Japanese or English.

Australian POW, Hugh Clarke introduces the sections on "Conscript Asian Labour" of his work, "A Life For Every Sleeper; A Pictorial Record of the Burma-Thailand Railway", as follows,

"The Japanese at the end of 1942 resorted to many ruses to recruit an additional labour pool of over 270,000 civilian labourers. They included Chinese, Burmese, Thais, Indians, Malays and Eurasians. As POWs began moving north the Japanese placed advertisements in Malayan newspapers seeking labourers for work periods of up to three months in Thailand. Free rail travel, housing, food and medical services were offered together with pay at a rate of one dollar a day. The response was negligible so the Japanese resorted to press-gang methods. Free picture shows were advertised at various theatres around Malaya and when full, the doors were locked and all males in the audiences put aboard trains and railed to Thailand. Later, as all civilians had to register to receive their rice rations the Japanese were able to assess the male population and began demanding 50 to 70 per cent of males in villages for their labour force... As pressure for the completion of the railway built up it became increasingly difficult for the Japanese to replace people dying in Thailand. Java was then exploited with even more attractive rates of pay promised, as well as advances of up to 100 dollars for the three-month-contract. Similar methods were used in Burma. Needless to say, three-month contracts proved valueless as no labourers returned to their homes during the first 18 months. Once they reached Thailand and Burma they found themselves herded into unhygienic, half-built camps with no medical facilities, inadequate rations and yoked to a relentless grind in which nothing mattered but completion of the railway."(1)

British POW Doctor Robert Hardie's "Secret Diary" has some of the most graphic accounts of the Asian romusha. Dr. Hardie had been a plantation manager in Malaya, was an admirer of Malay culture, and seems to have been more sensitive than most to the plight of the people, whether Malay, Tamil or Chinese. Summarising an entry on Asian labourers of 4th. August 1943, he mentions,

"When one hears of these widespread barbarities, one can only feel that we prioners of war, in spite of all the deaths and permanent disabilities which result, are being treated with comparative

consideration." (2)

The diary contains several lengthy entries describing the Asian camps, usually of those workers from Malaya where Dr. Hardie had previously resided. The first such entry bears the date 6th. July 1943, "A lot of Tamil, Chinese and Malay labourers from Malaya have been brought up forcibly to work on the railway. They were told that they were going to Alor Star in northern Malaya; that conditions would be good - light work, good food and good quarters. Once on the train, however, they were kept under guard and brought right up to Siam and marched in droves up to the camps on the river. There must be many thousands of these unfortunates all along the railway course. There is a big camp a few kilometres below here, and another 2 or 3 kilometres up. We hear of the frightful casualties from cholera and other diseases among these people and of the brutality with which they are treated by the Japanese. People who have been near the camps speak with bated breath of the state of affairs - corpses rotting unburied in the jungle, almost complete lack of sanitation, frightful stench, overcrowding, swarms of flies. There is no medical attention in these camps, and the wretched natives are of course unable to organise any communal sanitation." (3)

The lack of medical care and prevalence of disease in the Asian camps is a recurring theme throughout the diaries but Dr. Hardie's perceptive comments spell out most dramatically the ghastly conditions prevalent among the romusha. A further note of 21st. July 1943 reads:

"The conditions in the coolie camps down river are terrible, Basil says. They are kept isolated from Japanese and British camps. They have no latrines. Special British prisoner parties at Kinsaiyok bury about 20 coolies a day. These coolies have been brought from Malaya under false pretences - 'easy work, good pay, good houses!' Some have even brought wives and children. Now they find themselves dumped in these charnel houses, driven and brutally knocked about by the Jap and Korean guards, unable to buy extra food, bewildered, sick, frightened. Yet many of them have shown extraordinary kindness to sick British prisoners passing down the river, giving them sugar and helping them into the railway trucks at Tarsao. " (4)

Women and Children

That many of the Asian labourers, believing in the Japanese promises of a workers' paradise, brought wives and children with them is borne out by the remarks of British POW artist, Ronald Searle, quoted at the head of the article. One of Searle's sketches, entitled "Natives 'going up' Thailand jungle. August 24, 1943", clearly depicts an Asian woman (possibly a Tamil?) with a young child accompanying the labourers. Other hurried jottings of Asian workers also include women. (5). A British POW who was

severely tortured, Eric Lomax, in his moving personal record, "Railway Man", published much later (some 45 years after his own experiences) notes,

"At about the same time the first civilian labourers arrived. At first there were thin columns of Asians; Chinese, Indians, Malays, Indonesians, struggling along the main road from Ban Pong towards Kanburi (Kanchanaburi). Later on there was a flood, a tide of unhappy men, and sometimes even women and children streaming towards the upper reaches of the Kwae Noi and the most distant camps on the railway route... Unlike the POWs, however, the labourers had no organisation. They were individuals, or families, with no structure or chain of command. It was possible even then, with my small knowledge of the scale of events overtaking all of us, to guess that these pathetic labourers would die in enormous numbers and be the biggest victims of the railway." (6)

Japanese Atrocities

The presence of women (wives) among the Asian romusha may well have created further "complications". British POW Charles Fisher in his memoir, "Three Times a Guest", makes the following alarming observation,

"By comparison with the behaviour of the Japanese forces in China,... their record in the prisoner of war camps along the Siam-Burma Railway was in some respects recognizably less appalling. Most obviously this was because in such exclusively male communities as POW camps, the opportunity for committing the kind of pathologically obscene atrocities which were perpetrated by the Imperial Japanese Army in occupied China did not arise. However, such opportunities did exist - and were seized with a vengeance - in the 'civilian labour camps' whose unprotected inmates comprised both sexes, and children as well as adults. And there the record was every bit as outrageous as that in Nanking and elsewhere in China, the only significant difference being that the numbers involved in the civilian labour camps were smaller." (7)

Unfortunately, Fisher does not mention the details of atrocities committed against the Asian workers, which presumably he himself saw or heard from other POW witnesses, but clearly there must have been such incidents that led him to write the above blanket condemnation. After the war, Fisher travelled to Japan on two occasions; once as a guest of the Japanese government, the other as a guest of Hiroshima University, where he encountered the devastation of the atomic bombing (hence his book's title, "Three Times a Guest"). He seems to have become fairly sympathetic to Japanese attempts to rebuild their nation following defeat in the war and been relatively understanding of attempts to explain

Japan's wartime past (during which he had first been a "guest" of Japan as POW on the Thai-Burma Railway). He appears to have been able to form meaningful friendships with Japanese on these subsequent visits and this fact may have deterred him from recounting the stark details of the Japanese military barbarities to which he alluded. His comparisons with Japanese wartime activities in China appear to have been prompted by his reading of the influential account of Japanese wartime atrocities by Lord Russell of Liverpool in his book, "The Knights of Bushido." (8)

Some details - but sparsely noted - do occur in other POW accounts. Dr. Robert Hardie's diary notes under 29th January 1944, "More authenticated accounts of savagery to coolies by Jap guards, crucifixion, drowning, blinding and other atrocities". (9). A disturbing note occurs in an Australian POW account written from the Burma end of the railway;

"The (Japanese) commandant was an enigma. On some days he was, as many said, almost human. However, where sex was concerned he was responsible for a vicious murder of a Burmese woman who had refused to hand over her twelve-year old daughter to the Japanese personnel." (10)

Disease

The most harrowing accounts in the POW diaries, however, are those of the disease, sickness and ultimate deaths in the Asian romusha camps (in no small measure due to the complete lack of medical personnel and facilities). One of the sketches by another British POW artist, Leo Rawlings, is entitled "Dying natives"; it depicts several Asians slouched under trees, lying prone on the ground or in makeshift shelters, near to death. In the foreground, an Asian figure is crawling on hands and knees trying to beg food from nearby Western POWs.(11). In particularly vivid descriptions of Asian labourers, in his memoirs, "And The Dawn Came Up Like Thunder", Rawlings records,

"(We) were duly despatched to a transit camp. It was teeming with dying natives, all in the throes of dysentery and cholera. Coloured and white slept together in the same huts. Clad in rags or even naked, we huddled together during the cold wet nights. Natives and POWs alike unable to control themselves, emitted vomit and excretia everywhere. Each day a number of POWs who could still walk were detailed to carry out those men and natives who had died during the night. The smell of death was everywhere, an almost sweet, sickly smell that defied description" (12) while of a later camp transfer he continues, "In this new camp were many natives; Indians, Malays, Chinese etc., dying from dysentery. Our Jap guard told us that to help or feed them would be death to us (although by his gun or the disease he did not say). These poor wretches crawled to our feet when the Jap had gone begging for food and water. There are no cooks in this camp but a quantity of rice

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and a few vegetables. Two others in our party and myself set to work to make a crude meal. We made more than was needed for ourselves and then distributed the remainder to our native fellow sufferers. At night we slept alongside them, oblivious of any fear of contaminations, simply dead weary and exhausted. By morning many of our native companions were dead. That was the only time I ever cooked rice - I hoped it was my last." (13)

Such meagre medical attention as was afforded the Asian labourers appears to have been provided entirely by the medical staff among the Allied POWs. Dr. Hardie's entry for 22nd. July 1943 reads;

"More stories filter in about the coolie camps, where, at least in some, British medical officers are working. Before a coolie can report sick at all to the British medical officer he must obtain permission from the Japanese guards, who do not of course often give it. Even when he sees the medical officer, generally very little can be done for him, as the medical officers are not supplied with drugs or dressings. But at all events the man goes into the hospital hut, where what can be done for him is done. He stays there for as long as necessary, or until the Japanese guards think it time that the hospital cases should be weeded out - by them. The medical officer has no authority. Men with cholera are taken out to makeshift shelters in the jungle and left there. If they have friends who will look after them, these do what they can. If they have not, so much the worse. A fatigue of officers at Kinsaiyok goes each morning to the Tamil lines and carts away for burial anyone who has died during the night." (14)

Hugh Clarke mentions that it was not until June of 1943 that, at last recognising the seriousness of the situation in the romusha camps, the Japanese authorities formed two teams of medically proficient Allied POWs - doctors, medical orderlies etc. - from among the POWs held in Changi Prison in Singapore. Known as "K" and "L" Forces, they were sent up to the railway camps (after having had to pass a curious "test", the details of which are outlined in Clarke's book),

"The role of both these parties was to provide belated medical care for survivors of the army of civilians then working and dying on the railway.... The force was then dispersed among Asian labour camps along the railway where disease in all forms was rife, particularly cholera, dysentery, malaria and tropical ulcers. The average civilian camp at this time was a tumble-down conglomeration of shelters in a sea of mud, excreta and food refuse. Attached in ones and twos to civilian camps the men of 'K' Force embarked on a soul-destroying period of improvisation and daily toil from dawn to beyond dark. In spite of their dedication, the Asian labourers continued to die in hundreds." He also adds, " (The Asian labourers) were appreciative of any efforts made to help the sick and showed great generosity with gifts of food and items from their piteously few

possessions. Through their kindness the majority of 'K' Force escaped the more extreme forms of vitamin deficiency." (15)

Like Dr. Hardie, Sir Edward ("Weary") Dunlop, (an Australian POW surgeon who - after the war - became something of a national hero in Australia), met colleagues from these medical parties and notes in his diary on 30th. July 1943,

"These are all acting as MOs (medical orderlies) to the Tamil camps without medical stores and presumably with little to do except to make hygiene rules and bury the dead." (16)

Live Burials

The Japanese military seems to have entertained a pathological dread of contacting cholera. Sir Edward Dunlop notes in his diary entry of 14th. June 1943,

"Okuda came up to our lines to tell us that there was a serious outbreak of cholera in one of the coolie camps. 200 cases. The Nipponese are in a flat-tailed spin about cholera and some are actually walking about the camp in masks.... Jack Clarke and Billie Wearne saw Kanomi at Konyu today and intimidated him with talk of 'chorrera', causing him to sweat freely each time the word was mentioned." (17)

Dunlop does mention in his account instances of cholera vaccine being made available to POWs, but it is clear that none was ever given to the Asian romusha. The Japanese dread of the disease, however, can hardly excuse the frequently reported occurrence of victims (usually, but not always Asian labourers) being buried alive, presumably in an effort to escape contagion). The most horrifying description occurs in Dr. Hardie's "Secret Diary" entry of 4th. August 1943,

"A British bombardier, Royal Artillery, who has arrived at this camp after being in a POW party cooking for the droves of Tamil and Chinese labourers being marched up the river under guard to work, told me this morning of the terrible treatment these poor wretches get from the Japanese. Many are contracting cholera; often of course it is quickly fatal, but if there is any delay in a man's dying, the Nips try to get the British POWs to bury them before they are dead. On one occasion they forced them at the point of loaded rifles to lay them in shallow graves; but the British (they were only a handful of other ranks, no officers) steadfastly refused to do any more. The bombardier reported that the Japanese themselves - terrified as they are of going near cholera cases - covered the bodies. Other dying men were taken out into the jungle and dumped there to die, the Nips compelling other coolies to do this act at the point of the bayonet. At another camp a tentful of sick and helpless coolies was left behind in heavy rain, the Nips compelling other coolies to

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remove the tent from over them before leaving. At Rintin, the bombardier said, helpless coolies as well as dead were carried on stretchers to the cemetery and all dumped there among the old crosses. He said he himself had seen one old Indian struggling to his knees before a cross and holding up his hands in prayer before collapsing. He says that at Kinsaiyok men are sometimes compelled at the point of the bayonet to brain coolie cholera cases with a hammer. At all the camps cholera cases are treated as untouchable (except by British POWs, who are heavily sprayed with disinfectant before they are allowed to approach the Nips again), and the permanent camps which are sometimes quite near are not allowed to do anything for the wretches. There is no-one to give them water. They are left to rot, their bones a memorial to the arrival of the New Order and a comment on the attitude of the Japanese to their fellow Asiatics of other races."(18)

Sir Edward Dunlop reports a similar live burial - this time of a Western POW - in his diary entry of 27th. June 1943,

"A Nip in Lt.-Col. Oakes' camp apparently took the cholera to heart with such thoroughness that he endeavoured to bury a soldier alive the other day. He was first felled by blows with sticks and spades before being pushed into the hole. The Nip then insisted on the hole being filled in, thus burying the lad alive with this potential infection. The soldiers with the party refused to comply with the burial order and many were struck. Eventually the 'corpse' was rescued." (19)

The overall picture of the Asian romusha's situation as described by Allied POWs above, is thus - at the risk of understatement - one of unmitigated suffering. It should be borne in mind that the POWs themselves considered their own treatment quite horrific and the fact that these POW accounts agree that the Asian labourers were in an even worse situation than themselves, can only attest to the severity and barbarity of the romushas' treatment.

THE EXTENT OF ROMUSHA UTILISATION

A frequently-used ploy of contemporary revisionist Japanese historians is to dispute the estimates of numbers of victims involved in the various atrocity incidents committed by the Imperial Japanese Army; the allegedly "inflated" figures indicate a "lack of common-sense" (in that it is considered axiomatic that no self-respecting Japanese could possibly have indulged in such regular barbarities) and, therefore - so the argument runs - the incident has been grossly over-estimated; a line of reasoning which is then developed to suggest that the incident itself may not even have occurred at all, but is rather an imaginary fiction created by certain (foreign) persons whose real motive is to blacken the reputation of the Japanese army and create a cause for demanding (financial) compensation from the

present Tokyo government. (The obvious example is the violently disputed figures of victims of the Nanking Massacre in 1937). It is, therefore, with considerable intrepidity that this article continues by addressing the problem of estimating the numbers of romusha involved to suggest that there is considerable evidence indicating precisely the opposite; namely that the numbers of Asian labourers used in construction of the Thai-Burma Railway may have been grossly *underestimated*.

That this could be possible is, of course, in no small measure due to the fact (already mentioned) that there were no international obligations on the part of belligerents to account for civilian victims of ill-treatment or atrocities, and that no comprehensive attempt seems to have been made by Japanese officials to record such civilian victims. Such sparse records as do exist are clearly incomplete. Indeed a Japanese NNN Documentary about the railway broadcast on Kansai's Yomiuri Television channel on July 23rd 1995, claimed that the Japanese military had purposely burned all documentation on Asian labourers at the war's end. Professor Yoshikawa Toshiharu in his pioneering study "Thai ni totteno Taimen Tetsudo" (The Thai-Burma Railway from a Thai Point of View) (20) quotes figures of workers reported by the Japanese military to the Kanchanaburi Prefectural police office on 3 dates, (15th.Sept. 1943, 27th. Sept. and 25th. Nov. 1943). Such reports were probably considered a mere formality by the Japanese and it is doubtful whether much effort was spared to ensure any accuracy. The total figures of romusha are not great (42,770; 67,480 and 52,079 respectively) but the reports span only one month. Moreover, the breakdown of the romusha figures into categories does not include any (Indian) Tamils, no Indonesian and no Vietnamese. The small figures for Burmese (2,870; 2,400 and 4,000) is due to the fact that only those Burmese working within Thailand would have been estimated. (The number of Burmese working on the railway in Burma would obviously not be reported to the Thai Kanchanaburi police). The category of "Mon" is also something of a puzzle (1,600; 1,600 and 2,050 respectively). It is not clear how the category is defined and whether the figures represent Mon workers from Burma or Mons from Thailand (possibly from the Three Pagoda Pass and Sangkhlaburi areas). (21) There are no figures for Thais and the meaning of the "Chinese" category is unclear (12,000; 22,910 and 9,075 respectively). The Kanchanaburi police figures of romusha do not, therefore, convey an accurate picture of the true extent of the romusha presence.

Australian POW, Hugh Clarke estimates the total number of romusha at "over 270,000 civilian labourers" and quotes the Australian official war history, "The Japanese Thrust", as "estimating the civilian death toll at between 70,000 and 90,000". However, even these figures could be underestimates, for the figures of Burmese labourers alone may provide nearly half of that total.

Burmese Romusha

Ba Maw, the Prime Minister of Japanese-sponsored "independent" Burma, claims,

"According to the figures we kept, the total number of labourers sent to the construction area was roughly 65,000." (23)

But this figure is highly suspect, for it was clearly in Ba Maw's interests to minimise romusha figures to the greatest extent possible. In an unpublished PhD thesis of 1971, Won Zoon Yoon quotes a Japanese military document,

"To build the railway the Japanese employed a total number of 84,738 Burmese labourers plus 269,948 labourers (mostly Tamils, Malaysians, Javanese and Chinese) from the Japanese-occupied territories." (24)

Zoon goes on to mention that the railway construction was completed "on October 17, 1943 at an expense of immeasurable suffering and 30,000 Burmese lives", a casualty figure - it should be noted - that was again taken from Ba Maw, this time from his evidence at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal (IMTFE), and again a figure which Ba Maw had every personal reason to minimise.(25) Former Kempeitai (Japanese Military Police) official, Nagase Takashi, in his book "Crosses and Tigers" writes,

"As for the Southeast Asian labourers, the figure is unknown. Mr. Rinyon Tintsuwin, a Burmese writer and a former laborer on the railway, said a total of 180,000 people had been put into the construction of the railway from Burma." (26)

The discrepancy in figures is probably in part due to the immense number of romusha who fled from the construction sites but, as they subsequently often died from diseases contacted in the romusha camps, they should be legitimately included in the totals.

Javanese Romusha

The number of Javanese (Indonesian) romusha is even more difficult to ascertain. M. C. Ricklefs in "A History of Modern Indonesia" notes,

"In October 1943 the Japanese ordered the recruitment of 'economic soldiers' (romusha), primarily peasants drafted from their villages in Java and put to work as labourers wherever the Japanese needed them, as far away as Burma and Siam. It is not known how many men were involved, but it was probably at least 200,000 and may have been as many as half a million, of whom not more than 70,000 could be found alive at the end of the war." (27)

An Indonesian writer, Nugroho Notokusanto, notes,

"(Romusha) were employed without pay to build airfields, fortifications and other infrastructure for

(the Japanese war) effort. Thousands of them were sent abroad, especially to Burma and Thailand to build the Burma railway where many died of malnutrition and maltreatment." (28)

The problem of the numbers involved on the Thai-Burma Railway is complicated by the fact that romusha mobilisation in Java for work both within and outside Java was of truly enormous proportions. Sato Shigeru writes,

"Nonetheless the Japanese romusha mobilisation certainly involved many millions of people and its impact on Javanese society was much greater than Ricklefs' figures suggest.... Assuming that, during the twenty months between January 1944 and August 1945, each temporary worker worked for about two months, the total number of people who were mobilised as temporary romusha accounts to nearly 10,000,000." (29)

Again, how many of this vast number were sent overseas is difficult to estimate and the subject of much debate. The category "overseas" is itself obscure (it presumably includes Indonesian islands other than Java, as well as Burma and Thailand). Bearing in mind the problematical interpretation of "overseas", the following comments by Sato are of interest,

"Sending of Javanese labourers overseas was done mostly within the 1944 fiscal year. Like other commodities, the supply of labourers from Java fell below the levels set in the initial plans due to shipping difficulties.... Yamamoto Moichiro stated that the total number of Javanese romusha sent overseas was between 140,000 and 160,000.(30) Considering that the target figure for the 1944 fiscal year, 165,000, was not achieved, and the number of romusha sent out before and after that year was comparatively small, Yamamoto's estimation, particularly the larger figure, seems reasonably close to the reality. The actual number might have been larger but it was most probably less than 200,000." (31)

Further clarity in numbers might be possible from the repatriation figures of romusha returned to Java after the war, but again the categories are confused. For example, the same writer goes on to note,

"In November 1945 in Singapore, the Dutch established a body called the Nederlandsch Bureau voor Documentatie en Repatriëring van Indonesiers (The Netherlands Bureau for Documentation and Repatriation of Indonesians, or NEBUDORI) in order to register, care for, and repatriate displaced Indonesians, most of whom were Javanese romusha. The repatriation of the Dutch began in May 1946, and by April 1947, a total of 52,117 Javanese romusha had been repatriated from Singapore, Malaya, Thailand, Indochina, Borneo, Celebes, New Guinea, the Moluccas and Lesser Sunda islands. At the end of April 1947, there were still 1,137 romusha at the camps in Singapore awaiting departure.... Some Japanese ships were also used for romusha repatriation under British

command. According to Miyamoto, 18,559 men were thus repatriated by the Navy marine transport section." (32)

Given the normal shipping routes dependant on colonial Southeast Asia's countries' boundaries it is unlikely that repatriated romusha from other Indonesian islands could have passed through Singapore, but (besides the romusha from the Thai-Burma Railway) those from the British colonies on North Borneo (today's Sarawak, Sabah and Brunei) would be included in the Singapore figures. As NEBUDORI was also a documentation center, however, some of the 52,117 mentioned may not have actually passed through Singapore. The repatriation figures, moreover, take no account of those Javanese romusha who returned to Java before the end of the war; those few who certainly returned by their own individual efforts; nor those who were repatriated subsequent to April 1947, a process which, albeit now in very small numbers, has continued until quite recently. Nevertheless, we do have a record of repatriations to Java of just over 71,000 against which can be measured the somewhat earlier statement of K. A. de Weerd to the International Military Tribunal for the Far East in December 1946,

"The correct figures of those who were transported outside Java as romusha... are not known; the official estimates of the Japanese after the capitulation mention the figure of 270,000 men, of whom not more than 70,000 have been recovered since the war." (33)

Sato Shigeru's overall thesis on Javanese romusha claims (rightly) that the overall figures for Javanese romusha have been grossly underestimated, but that the numbers of those sent to Thailand have been exaggerated. This latter part of the conclusion is based on the rather flimsy evidence of the memories of former Japanese officials on Java; people the most likely to have wished to minimise the dislocation anyway. Sato himself fails to note the surprising coincidence in the much higher figures of Ricklefs and de Weerd (both mentioned above). Murai Yoshinori avoids overall estimates and rather notes one specific instance,

"Kasmijan Yosoprpto, a railway technician, was sent to the Burma-Thailand railway as a technician. According to him, about 15,000 Javanese romusha went to Thailand with him in March 1943. After completion of the railway they had to continue to work; they cut trees for the fuel of trains." (34)

The importance of this instance is that it clearly indicates - as do many of the POW diaries - the presence of Javanese workers on the railway in 1943, a year before the statistics presented by Sato Shigeru for the year 1944. It may be inferred that not inconsiderable numbers of Javanese romusha had arrived in Thailand before 1944.

Romusha from Malaya and Singapore

The British colony of Malaya (which then included Singapore) was comprised of several different peoples, the largest distinct communities being those of the Malays, Chinese and Indians. It is clear that romusha were drawn from all three ethnic groups, but again the precise figures are confused by a lack of clear specification of the ethnic categories involved. According to an article by Abu Talib Ahmad, there were approximately 60,000 labourers drafted from Malaya, "including Chinese and Indians." (35) Nagase Takashi states,

"According to a Japanese concerned in Bangkok, 80,000 were brought from Malaya." (36)

On the other hand, reading from Japanese military administration statistics, a Japanese scholar, Akashi Yoji, writes,

"The second instance (of unrealistic desk-planning) is a demand by the military staff to supply 120,000 labourers for the construction of the Thai-Burma Railroad and the Kra Isthmus Railroad. It was impossible for the Malay Military Administration to meet the demand because Malaya had always suffered from a manpower shortage, which was alleviated by Chinese emigrants from Southern China." (37)

Besides giving a far greater target figure for the Malaya romusha, Akashi's article also indicates the difficulty of distinguishing the destinations of the respective labourers. The Kra Isthmus Railway was constructed to link the Eastern Thai port of Chumphon on the Kra Isthmus with Victoria Point in Burma to the West. The railway terminated at Ban Khao Fa Chi (village) on the River La Oun, after which goods were trans-shipped along the River Kra to Victoria Point in Burma. The railway was some 90 kilometers long and completed within six months during November 1943, by drafting labourers only from Malaya, including ethnic Malays and Chinese. The Railway was abandoned after less than a year's operation due to heavy Allied bombing and disused after November 1944. (The construction of the Kra Isthmus Railway and the truly appalling conditions of the Chinese and Malay workers will be the subject of a future article). (38) The point of importance here is that there were, in fact, two railways constructed by the Japanese linking Thailand with Burma and that the labourers of one, the Kra Isthmus Railway, were drawn exclusively from Malaya and that, moreover, the figures provided by the Japanese administration of romusha drafted from Malaya include workers sent to both railways; the respective numbers sent to each railway are not distinguished. This may partially explain why estimates for the number of romusha from Malaya sent to the Thai-Burma Railway also vary considerably.

A further complication is that (Indian) Tamils in Malaya are apparently sometimes included, and at other times excluded, from the "Malaya" statistics. The Tamil community was probably the hardest hit

by Japanese railway labour demands and something of their distressing situation as romusha is described in the POW diaries quoted above. Yet further difficulties are presented by the work of Roger Beaumont in "The Hidden Truth; A Tribute to the Indian Independence Movement in Thailand", an account based on the recollections of an INA (Indian National Army) sympathiser and organiser, Darshan Singh Bajaj,

"There was also a small settlement of Tamils in Bangkok, who had originally been brought by the British to be labourers on the railway link from Malaya to Bangkok. The Tamils were also extensively used as coolies on the Death Railway at Kanchanaburi, where thousands died." (39)

From the above statement it is clear, first, that the Japanese authorities would be keen to draft any Tamils who had previously had railroad-construction experience under the British and, secondly, that Tamils from Thailand - as well as Tamils from Malaya - were impressed as labourers on the Thai-Burma Railway. Again, the figures do not differentiate. Michael Stenson in his pioneering study, "Class, Race and Colonialism in West Malaysia" writes,

"In the course of 1942-43, about 80,000 Indian males volunteered or were coerced into joining labour gangs to build the infamous 'death' railroad from Thailand to Burma, of which it is probable that only half survived to return to their families. Nevertheless, there remained over 200,000 estate workers, many of whom stayed on the estates with irregular and inadequate employment.... A measure of the harshness of the impact of the occupation on Indian labourers in particular is the fact that the Indian population (in Malaya) fell by up to 100,000 or nearly 7 per cent."(40)

Even if the Indian figure of 80,000 is acceptable (the overall population decrease suggests that the figure may have been larger), and in view of the fact that the existence of Malays and Chinese from Malaya is frequently noted in the POW diaries, then the overall Malaya figure must be larger than 80,000. Moreover, even if the 120,000 target figure was never reached (as Akashi Yoji claims above), then it must be assumed that a very probable minimum figure of labour impressed from Malaya was at least 100,000.

Chinese Romusha

Finally, the category of "Chinese" (reported variously as 12,000; 22,910 and 9,075 in the Kanchanaburi police statistics mentioned earlier) is also quite undifferentiated with regard to country of residence. The Chinese were, in fact, impressed from Malaya, Singapore and Thailand, as well as possibly from South China itself. In "Syonan-My Story" former Japanese administrator of Singapore,

Shinozaki Mamoru states in his chapter entitled "Death Railway,"

"The recruitment of labour from Singapore was short-lived. Of the few who worked there, many escaped and returned to Syonan (the new name for Japanese occupied Singapore)." (41)

British POW, E. J. H. Corner who during his internment worked in the Raffles Museum and the Singapore Botanical Gardens, records details of Japanese attempts to impress workers for service on the railway,

"Dr. Furtado (A Goanese botanist at the Botanical Gardens) (1897-1980) was put in charge of local staff and labour at the Gardens, which became an unhappy lot. In 1943, by military order, Municipal departments were compelled to provide a portion of their labour force for despatch to Thailand, to work on the railway to Burma. The onus of deciding who should and who should not be sent from the Gardens fell on Dr. Furtado who suffered the squabbles, intrigues, maledictions and enmity not only of the unlucky ones but also of their dependants.... Bribes (to the Japanese responsible) found their way, some well-earned, as when affixing the Museum seal of office to fallacious documents which would exonerate some Chinese supplicant from conscription and death in the 'free labour force'." (42)

Corner does not mention numbers, but the general tone of his writing suggests that there were rather more romusha from Singapore/Syonan-to than Shinozaki cared to remember. That the Chinese from Malaya were widely drafted for the Kra Isthmus Railway is detailed in interviews with villagers by Praphan Phonsawek. (43) Moreover, that Chinese from Thailand were drafted in considerable numbers was first mentioned by G.W. Skinner in his renowned work, "Chinese Society in Thailand,"

"The Japanese pose of benevolence toward the local Chinese was badly shaken, however, by the treatment accorded forced Chinese labour on defense and communications projects in Thailand. The largest of these was the railway constructed from Ban Pong to the Burmese border, begun at the end of the 1942 monsoon and completed in October 1943.... But early in 1943.... several tens of thousands of Chinese labourers.... were employed, the bulk of whom were Hokkiens from Malaya.

It is conservatively estimated by Allied personnel that 50, per cent of them died before the year was out.... Other Japanese installations in Siam used conscript labor, part of which consisted of Chinese from South China as well as Malaya.... Defense considerations not unrelated to the Japanese campaign in Burma caused the Thai government in late January 1943 to apply its prohibited-areas policy in the north. Six whole jangwats (provinces) - Chiangmai, Lamphun, Lampang, Chiangrai, Phrae and Uttaradit - were declared out of bounds for aliens, and thousands of Chinese had to evacuate by April.... Some of the evacuees from Phrae went to Nan - Nan and

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Maehongson, both remote and underdeveloped jangwats, were not included in the prohibited areas - but most went south, especially to Phitsanulok, Sawankhalok, and Bangkok. Many of the refugees who poured into Bangkok in April 1943 were induced to sign contracts for work on the Railway of Death. Recruitment was carried on by Japanese and Thai authorities through the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. "(44)

Many Japanese have claimed since the war's end that Thai labourers were never impressed as romusha, due to Thailand's being a "friendly" country, but such assertions are clearly false. Not only was the Japanese military road from Chiangmai to Burma built exclusively by Thai labour (45), such Thai labour was also recruited for construction of the Thai-Burma Railway's first section, from Nong Pladuk to Kanchanaburi. "It was the only section that Field Marshall Phibun Songkram's Government agreed that Thais would work." (47) Murai Yoshinori also writes,

"The number of Thai romusha is unknown. For the construction of the railway between Nong Pladuk and Kanchanaburi about 5,000 romusha were registered (September and October 1942). In Kanchanaburi prefecture about 700 romusha were hired by the Japanese (October 1942). On 18 December 1942 Thai romusha and some policemen attacked the Japanese military base of Ban Pong. After this Thai people became very reluctant to become romusha." (48)

Vietnamese Romusha

Details about the final group of romusha, the Vietnamese, have not been adequately recorded at all. To celebrate the completion of the railway, the Japanese Imperial Army erected a monument which still stands today on the banks of the River Kwae Noi, not far from the bridge at Tha Makham. The monument was bombed during an Allied raid on the bridge and one inscription was destroyed (never to be replaced). The missing inscription was probably in Burmese. The surviving inscriptions, besides Japanese, are in English, Thai, Tamil, Chinese, Malay/Indonesian and Vietnamese. A translation of the latter reads,

"A memorial to the spirits of the Vietnamese romusha who died constructing the Thai-Burma Railway." (48)

For the Japanese Army to make such an inscription, many Vietnamese must also have perished, and yet there are few surviving records related to Vietnamese romusha.(49) That the Japanese did, indeed, impress labourers in Vietnam for various military projects is clear from Col. Tsuji Masanobu's account of the preparations in French Indochina for the successful Japanese invasion of Malaya and Singapore,

"The most urgent business was preparation for the forthcoming operations, so we at once got ready for use the aerodromes in French Indo-China. But Tokyo restricted the funds available for the work, which slowed down progress, and we were further delayed by negotiations with (Vichy) France.... The work was wholly dependent on coolie labour - not even one motor-powered machine was available. Crowds of lazy, gregarious Annamese coolies wielded shovels, and thousands of them were not a match for even one bulldozer. Several times I accompanied the Army Commander on tours of inspection to see the conditions of the work and the progress being made, but the spiritless operations were not at all satisfactory. They were in fact a failure." (50)

The attention of scholars of the Japanese occupation of French Indo-China, both Vietnamese and foreign, has been necessarily concentrated in researching the serious famine created in North Vietnam in 1945 due to Japan's requisitioning rice for shipment to Tokyo and elsewhere, and in which some 2,000,000 Vietnamese may have perished. (51) The famine was so severe and widespread that it was a major factor in securing the Viet Minh and Ho Chi Minh's ascendancy in the North at the end of the war. Understandable though this scholarly preoccupation may be, it is nevertheless regrettable that the issue of Vietnamese romusha, whether recruited for work within Vietnam or outside, has received such scant attention.

TOWARDS SOME CONCLUSION

The complications created by the clearly incomplete statistics that were recorded and have survived, coupled with the lack of precision in their designated categories, make an accurate assessment of romusha casualties impossible. The enormous gaps - particularly over Thai and Vietnamese workers and the clearly missing parts of the statistics for the Chinese categories render any such attempts at total figures at best highly tentative. For more accurate projections to be made an enormous and truly daunting task is faced by the researcher; the dispersion of such records as do exist over several distant countries (Britain, Australia, Holland, Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, China, India and Vietnam) and the great number of languages thus involved, make any attempt at discovery and collation a daunting enterprise.

At present, any attempt to offer casualty totals for romusha on the Thai-Burma Railway can always - and doubtless will be - attacked by contemporary Japanese revisionist historians as lacking in proof. For it is precisely in this lack of collatable documentary statistics that the very essence of the problem of recreating the "silenced voices of history" lies. Nevertheless, some attempts must be made to establish the actual extent and significance of the romusha problem. To avoid the issue merely

consigns the Asian labourers' suffering to total historical oblivion. Such a result would doubtless be widely applauded by the revisionist camp for, in effect, the Asian romusha on the railway would simply cease to exist as a "problem."

A cursory count of the statistics and impressions listed above, suggests that - if the construction of the Kra Isthmus Railway is included - the extent of Asian labour involved in the Thai-Burma railway projects must be a minimum figure of around 300,000 persons, but that - if all the various gaps are ever adequately filled out - the numbers could well be as many as half a million. The lower figure of 300,000 can be asserted with some confidence, but the upper possibility of some 500,000 may well always remain a matter of speculation; a figure adduced from interpretation of the known facts, coupled with intelligent guesses about those unknown. But the "memories" will remain; not only of the few dwindling numbers of the survivors, their relatives and descendants, but also the "communal memory" of the villages and areas affected by romusha recruitment. Such "memories" do exist, duly recorded in the school text-books of the various Southeast Asian countries concerned. Murai Yoshinori has offered a translation of one such extract from an Indonesian junior high-school text,

"The people who suffered the most painful experience during the Japanese occupation were Romusha. They were forcibly worked by the Japanese for the construction of military facilities such as airports, fortress, railways etc. Most of them were recruited from the rural area. They were made up of the uneducated people or those educated at most only in elementary school. At first they were induced by sweet words. But if this invitation was unsuccessful, in the end they were forced to be Romusha. Densely populated Java was able to supply many labourers... Hundreds of thousands of Romusha were sent to the outer islands (from) Java. Some of them were sent abroad to countries such as Malaya, Burma and Thailand." (52)

I myself use a similar Malaysian textbook in my own classes, "The Story of Japanese Soldiers in Our Country." (53) But what of casualty or attrition rates of Asian romusha? Despite the clear evidence of POW diaries that romusha deaths were far higher than that of POWs, some authors have mistakenly claimed that the Asian labourers' death rate was significantly less than that of POWs. (54) There is no clear explanation of how such figures are derived, and they are clearly contra-indicated by much other available evidence. Economic historian Peter N. Davies, writes,

"The overall figures show that, of the 61,806 Allied prisoners employed in building the railway, a total of 12,399, or just over 21 per cent died while engaged in this task.... Those relating to the coolies from Malaya, Java, Thailand and French Indo-china indicate that... 36 per cent died during their period (of labour) (55)... The overall death rate for (Burmese) personnel is not known, but the

records of the Japanese 9th Railway Regiment suggest that the figure for the 45,000 who were employed on the Thai side of the border was only 7 per cent. However, this figure relates to only an unspecified one year period and may have been selected so as to provide the most favourable impression. The same table shows death rates of 26 per cent for other labourers, 17 per cent for POWs and only 4 per cent for members of the Japanese Army." (56)

Lt. Col. Henderson provides a rather more dramatic estimate,

"Approximately 27% of the Allied soldiers and almost 50% of the Southeast Asian impressed laborers died working on the railroad. This compared to only 3% of Allied POWs who died in German and Italian prisoner of war camps." (57)

Although Henderson was not an academic scholar, his 50% death rate for romusha is the same percentage as that estimated by Skinner for the attrition rate of Hokkiens from Malaya, and Stenson's estimate of the death rate for Indian labourers (both quoted above). The nature of the evidence, again, permits of little certainty, but the truth probably lies somewhere between 36% (the low figure) and 50% (the highest estimated figure), However, this latter high 50% death rate was possibly restricted to areas particularly badly supplied in the remote areas along the track and most ruthlessly supplied. Returning to the lower figure of total romusha of some 300,000, the lower 36 per cent death rate produces some 83,000 casualties. (This accords with Hugh Clarke's estimate, namely a death rate of "between 70,000 and 90,000").

Even taking this minimal estimate of some 83,000 romusha deaths, it might be concluded without danger of exaggeration that - despite the contrary statement of former POW Charles A. Fisher mentioned in the earlier part of the article - that the experiences of Asian labourers on the Thai-Burma Railway represents a major tragedy not dissimilar to those more precisely recorded in Nanking or elsewhere in Japanese occupied China or Korea.



"A Memorial to the spirits of the Vietnamese romusha who died constructing the Thai-Burma Railway."

Vietnamese language inscription on the Japanese memorial at Tha Makham erected in 1943.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Hugh V. Clarke; "A Life for Every Sleeper: A Pictorial Record of the Burma-Thailand Railway" (Allen & Unwin, 1986), p.49.
- (2) Robert Hardie; "The Burma-Siam Railway: The Secret Diary of Dr. Robert Hardie, 1942-1945" (Quadrant Books & Imperial War Museum 1983), p.109.
- (3) Robert Hardie; op.cit.; p.102.
- (4) Robert Hardie; op.cit.; p.106
- (5) Ronald Searle; "To The Kwai - And Back: War Drawings, 1939-1945" (Collins, 1986), p. 116 .
- (6) Eric Lomax; "The Railway Man" (W. W. Norton, 1995), p.105.
- (7) Charles A. Fisher; "Three Times a Guest" (Cassell, 1979), p.251.
- (8) Lord Russell of Liverpool; "The Knights of Bushido" (London, 1958), passim.
- (9) Robert Hardie; op.cit.; p.133.
- (10) Leslie Hall; "The Blue Haze: POWs on the Burma Railway" (Kangaroo Press, 1996), p.61.
- (11) Leo Rawlings; "And The Dawn Came Up Like Thunder" (Rawlings, Chapman Publications, 1972), p.86.
- (12) Leo Rawlings; op.cit.; p.64.
- (13) Leo Rawlings; op.cit.; p.85.
- (14) Robert Hardie; op.cit.; p.108.
- (15) Hugh V. Clarke; op.cit.; pp.50-51.
- (16) Sir Edward Dunlop; "The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop: Japan and The Burma-Thailand Railway 1942-1945" (Penguin, Australia 1994), p.306.
- (17) Sir Edward Dunlop; op.cit.; p.281.
- (18) Robert Hardie; op.cit.; p.109.
- (19) Sir Edward Dunlop; op.cit.; p.289.
- (20) Yoshikawa Toshiharu; "Thai ni totteno Taimen Tetsudo"/The Thai-Burma Railway from a Thai Point of View/(unpublished resume, 1991), quoted in English by Murai Yoshinori in his article "Asian Forced Labour (Romusha) on the Burma-Thailand Railway" in Gavan McCormack & Hank Nelson (eds.); "The Burma-Thailand Railway" (Silkworm Books, 1993), p.62. Prof. Yoshikawa's work was subsequently expanded and published in book form, Yoshikawa Toshiharu; "Taimen Tetsudo: Kimitsu Bunsho ga Akasu Ajia Taiheiyosenso"/The Thai-Burma Railway: The Asia-Pacific War as Revealed in Secret Documents, (Dobunkan, Tokyo, 1994).
- (22) The Mon people are a substantial minority people in Burma and in Thailand. They formed the majority peoples of the early Mon kingdom of Pegu, militarily absorbed into the Burmese kingdom of Pagan in its

early days. The Mon King was taken prisoner to Pagan and, from that time, many Mons fled - a movement that still continues today - to Thailand around the present city of Ratburi. Mons in Thailand were active in the Ayutthaya trade and are referred to as "Peguans" in the old Thai and Western records of that era. Until quite recently, in modern times, the Mon armies opposed to the Rangoon government, created a liberated area within Burma across from the Three Pagoda Pass border with Thailand. Contemporary Mon migration has thus tended to be into the Three Pagoda Pass and Sangkhlaburi areas of Thailand (to escape Burmese oppression). Nevertheless, the labouring community of Prapadaeng, near Bangkok, has always traditionally had a large percentage of Mon workers. This substantial community still preserves many Mon traditions and is presumably being continuously replenished with new Mon migrants.

- (22) Hugh V. Clarke; *op.cit.*; pp.49 & 52.
- (23) Ba Maw; "Breakthrough in Burma: Memoirs of a Revolution, 1939-46" (Yale University, 1968), p.293.
- (24) Won Zoon Yoon; "Japan's Occupation of Burma" (New York University PhD Thesis, 1971), p.221. The figure of 84,738 Burmese labourers was taken from "Biruma Gunseishi Fuhyo," Appendix No.91; "Thai-Biruma Rensetsu Tetsudo Kensetsu Hoshitai Hensei Haken Yoryo" (Summary of Organising & Dispatching of the Labour Service Corps for the Construction of the Burma-Thailand Railway), issued by the Commander of the Hayashi Army Group, March 2nd. 1943. Some English translations of these texts appear in Frank N. Trager (ed.); "Burma Japanese Military Administration: Selected Documents, 1941-1945" (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971). The figure of 269,948 Romusha of other origin is taken from Charles F. Romanus; "China-Burma-India Theater, Stillwell's Mission to China." (Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington D.C., 1953). This is the figure on which Clarke's estimate (noted in the text) is presumably based, but Romanus' figure did not include Burmese romusha.
- (25) Won Zoon Yoon; *op.cit.*; p.225. The figure of 30,000 Burmese deaths is taken from International Military Tribunal for the Far East, Document No.406; "Summary of Questions & Answers of Former Burmese Prime Minister Ba Maw on May 22, 1946", p.9.
- (26) Nagase Takashi; "Crosses & Tigers" (Allied Printers, Post Publishing Co.Ltd, Bangkok, 1990), p.73. "Rinyon Tintsuwin" is Nagase's romanisation of Lin Yone Thit Lwin, author of "Yodaya-Myanma Miyhta-lan Kodwe Chwaydat Hmattan" (in Burmese; Duwum Sarpay, Rangoon, 1968). This document has been translated into Japanese by Tanabe Hisao; "Shi no Tetsuro: Taimen Tetsudo Birumajin Romusha no Kiroku" (Death Railway: Records of a Burmese Labourer on the Thai-Burma Railway), (Mainichi Newspaper Co., Tokyo, 1981). I have been unable to locate an English translation.
- (27) M. C. Ricklefs; "A History of Modern Indonesia" (London, 1981), p.193.
- (28) Nugroho Notosusanto; "The Japanese Occupation and Indonesian Independence", p.9. Quoted in Sato

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- Shigeru; "War, Nationalism and Peasants" (M.E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 155.
- (29) Sato Shigeru; op. cit.; pp.155 & 158. The mobilisation of Javanese romusha - of which those sent to the Thai-Burma Railway formed only a part - will be considered more fully in a future article.
- (30) Yamamoto Moichiro; "Watashi no Indonesia: Dai Jurokugun Jidai no Kaiso" (My Indonesia: Reminiscences from the 16th Army Period), (Nippon Indonesia Kyokai, Tokyo, 1979).
- (31) Sato Shigeru; op.cit.; pp.158,159. Army Maj.-Gen. Yamamoto Moichiro was the Army's Chief of Military Administration (Gunseikan) in Japanese-occupied Java. I have been unable to locate any English translations of Yamamoto's memoirs.
- (32) Sato Shigeru; op. cit.; p. 160. "Miyamoto" is a reference to Miyamoto Shizuo; "Jawa Shusen Shoriki" (The Termination of the War in Java), (Jawa Shusen Kankokai, Tokyo, 1973), p.367. Excerpts of Miyamoto's memoirs, including some details on Javanese romusha, have been published in English translation. See Anthony Reid & Oki Akira (eds.); "The Japanese Experience in Indonesia; Selected Memoirs of 1942-1945" (Ohio University Monographs in International Studies, South East Asia Series No. 72).
- (33) K.A. de Weerd; "Japanese Occupation of Indonesia," (IMTFE, Document No.2750), p.74. Quoted in Sato Shigeru; op. cit., p.159 and Note 26, p.259. The source for de Weerd's claim of 270,000 romusha sent outside Java is not mentioned, but Harry Benda also mentions a similar figure; "Hundreds of thousands were impressed into forced labour battalions. According to Muhammad Dimiyati 'Sedjarah Perjuangan Indonesia' (Djakarta, 1951), p.86n., the Japanese officially admitted that 294,000 romusha, or forced labourers, had been sent to work outside Java, many of whom died abroad." (Harry J. Benda; "The Crescent & The Rising Sun: Indonesian Islam Under the Japanese Occupation, 1942-1945"; W. van Hoeve Ltd., The Hague and Bandung, 1958; p.267, note 33. Also M. Dimiyati; "Sedjarah Perjuangan Indonesia"/History of the Indonesian Struggle; Widjaya, Djakarta, 1951).
- (34) Kurosawa Aiko; "Mobilization & Control: A Study of Social Change in Rural Java" (Cornell University PhD. Thesis, 1988) . Quoted from Murai Yoshinori in Gavan McCormack & Hank Nelson (eds.); op. cit.; p.64.
- (35) Abu Talib Ahmad; "The Malay Community and Memory of the Japanese Occupation" in P. Lim Pui Huen & Diana Wong (eds.); "War & Memory in Malaysia and Singapore" (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2000), p.54.
- (36) Nagase Takashi; op.cit.; p.73.
- (37) Akashi Yoji; "Bureaucracy and The Japanese Military Administration, with Specific Reference to Malaya" in William H. Newell (ed.); "Japan in Asia" (Singapore University Press, 1981), p.63.
- (38) A comprehensive and rare account of the Kra Isthmus Railway is, Praphan Phonsaek; "Thang Rotfai Sai khokhot Kra: Khwamphayam khong kong thap yipun nai songkhram krang thi song" (entitled in English

summary as "The Railway at the Isthmus of Kra") in Thai (Sinlapa Wathanatham/Art & Culture magazine; Vol.12, No.8, Bangkok, June 1991). I am grateful to Dr. Charnvit Kaset Siri of Thammasat University for locating this article and to Ms. Thanawalai Jaroenjandang of Chiangmai University for assistance in translation.

- (39) Roger Beaumont; "The Hidden Truth: A Tribute to the Indian Independence Movement in Thailand" (Minerva, London, 1999), p.140. The Indian National Army (INA) was an army sponsored by the Japanese military for the avowed purpose of achieving the independence of India from Britain. The INA was first under the leadership of Major Mohan Singh (an officer captured from the British Indian Army) and, later, the renowned Subash Chandra Bose. The INA accompanied and fought in the Imperial Japanese Army's disastrous invasion of Kohima and Imphal. Fuller details of the INA's impact on the Indian community in Malaya will be given in future articles.
- (40) Michael Stenson; "Class, Race & Colonialism in West Malaysia: The Indian Case" (University of Queensland Press, 1980), p.90. Stenson's figure of 80,000 Indians from Malaya on the Thai-Burma Railway is based on the researches of K.S. Sandhu; "Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of their Immigration & Settlement, 1786-1957" (Cambridge University Press, 1969). On the Indian population statistics, Stenson records in Note II; op.cit.; p.103, "The Indian population was estimated at 744,276 in June 1941 (file II4, series 203, War Office Records, Public Records Office, London). In 1947, it was enumerated at 599,616. Perhaps 45,000 may have left the country in the latter part of 1941 and in 1946-47."
- (41) Shinozaki Mamoru; "Syonan - My Story: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore" (Asia Pacific Press, Singapore, 1975), p.69.
- (42) E. J. H. Corner; "The Marquis: A Tale of Syonan-to" (Heinemann, 1981), pp.46 & 133,134.
- (43) Praphan Phonsawek; op.cit.; passim.
- (44) G. W. Skinner; "Chinese Society in Thailand" (Cornell University Press, 1957), pp.273-275.
- (45) See my previous article, "Japan's 'Burma Road': Japanese Military Activities in North Thailand" (Kiyomagazine, No.18, Kyoto, March 2000).
- (46) Lt. Col. Terry Beaton; "Hammer & Taps, Quarterly Magazine of the Hellfire Pass Memorial Museum", (No.2, Kanchanaburi,2000).
- (47) Murai Yohinori; "Asian Forced Labour (Romusha) on the Burma-Thailand Railway" in Gavan McCormack & Hank Nelson (eds.); op.cit.; p.62. The Ban Pong incident severely affected Thai-Japanese relations and will be considered in a future article.
- (48) I am indebted to Pham Van Thanh Dung for this translation. Fuller details on the significance of this monument will be recorded in a future article.

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- (49) A notable exception which does mention the existence of Vietnamese romusha, at least as numbers, is Hiroike Toshio; "Taimen Tetsudo: Senju ni Nokoru Hashi" (The Thai-Burma Railway: The Bridge Remaining on the Battlefield), (Yomiuri Newspaper Co., Tokyo, 1971), p.243, "In the 4th. Battalion of the 9th. Railway Regiment, the percentage of these groups was as follows: Malay 67 per cent, Thai 8 per cent, Chinese 25 per cent. In a platoon of the same Battalion it was: Malay 4.5 per cent, Indian 88.1 per cent, Thai 2.3 per cent, Vietnamese 1.7 per cent." Quoted by Murai Yoshinori in Note no.8, p.67 of his article in Gavan McCormack & Hank Nelson (eds.); op. cit.
- (50) Tsuji Masanobu; "Singapore, 1941-1942: The Japanese Version of the Malayan Campaign of World War II" (Oxford University Press, 1988), p.28.
- (51) See, for example, Ministry of Labor, War Invalids & Social Welfare; "Japanese Fascists' Crimes in Vietnam" (Hanoi, 1988?), or David G. Marr; "Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power" (University of California Press, 1995), passim. Also two articles by Nguyen The Anh and Furuta Motoo in Paul H. Kratoska (ed.); "Food Supplies and the Japanese Occupation in South East Asia" (MacMillan, 1998).
- (52) Murai Yoshinori's translation of Department Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (ed.); "Sejarah Nasional Indonesia Jilid III" (Balai Pustaka, Jakarta, 1977) included in his article in Gavan McCormack & Hank Nelson (eds.); op.cit.; p.59.
- (53) Milton Nandi; "The Story of Japanese Soldiers In Our Country" (Pustaka San Mingh, Cetakan Pertama; Penerbit Sanmin Sdn.Bhd., Perak, Malaysia, 1993).
- (54) See for example, "Nonetheless generally speaking, a 20 per cent attrition rate was probably an extreme case. The numbers of deaths divided by the total numbers of workers on the 'railway of death' were 14 per cent for Asian labourers and 24 per cent for Europeans." Sato Shigeru; op cit.; p.160.
- (55) Peter N. Davies; "The Man Behind the Bridge: Colonel Toosey and The River Kwai" (Athlone Press, 1991). Note 9 of p.196 quotes earlier statistics provided by Lieutenant C.C. Brett; "The Burma-Siam Railway" (SEATIC Bulletin No.246, Australia, October 1946. SEATIC is the South East Asia Translation and Intelligence Centre).
- (56) Peter N. Davies; op cit.; p.196.
- (57) Lt.Col. W. Henderson; "From China Burma India to the Kwai" (O.& B. Publishers, Leon Junction, Texas, 1991), p.82.