

## 【書評】

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## 『第二次世界大戦中のシンガポール』

— 占領期「昭南」に関する軍政調査部報告書 —

*World War II Singapore: The Chōsabu Reports on Syonan* Translated and edited by Gregg Huff and Shinobu Majima, Singapore: NUS Press, 2018.

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In February 1942, Singapore, which is a globally influential city-state today, was occupied by the Japanese army, renamed 'Syonanto', and the island was ruled by Japanese military administration for the next three and a half years. Singapore was regarded as an important base for Japanese military operations in Southeast Asia and the establishment of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, which was advocated by the Japanese government as wartime propaganda. Specifically, on the basis of Singapore's entrepot function, which had been built up since its foundation as a British port in 1819, Southeast Asian primary goods, such as rubber, tin, and petroleum were expected to be supplied to the Japanese wartime economy. It is well known that the Japanese occupation of Southeast Asian countries resulted in dire consequences. Thousands of the locals suffered from scarcity of goods, inflation, and forced labour, and in the worst case, a number of Chinese residents in Singapore were purged by Japanese troops. Thus, the Japanese occupation ended Western colonialism in the region but brought in other hardships for the locals. However, the actual state of local socio-economic life, such as the demography, living standards, and social structure has remained unclear due to a lack of sources. Most documents of the Japanese military government were allegedly destroyed immediately after the surrender of Japan in August 1945. Nevertheless, a limited number of contemporary materials survived, including the Chosabu Reports compiled by researchers from

the Institute of East Asian Economies at the Tokyo University of Commerce (current Hitotsubashi University). From the extensive reports, the editors of the book identified the relevant sources of socio-economic circumstances in Singapore under the Japanese occupation and translated them into English.

First, we must mention the significance of the Chosabu Reports for filling the gap in historical statistics regarding Singapore. As mentioned, because most of the documents recorded during the Japanese occupation were destroyed during the cover up, it is quite difficult to understand exactly what happened to Singapore during World War II, particularly to the life of the inhabitants. That is, while we recognise the difficult circumstances of Singapore residents under Japanese rule, such as the oppression of the Chinese, the intense inflation caused by the excessive issue of military scrip, and severe lack of daily necessities due to trade restrictions, it was not clear how much these issues deteriorated wartime Singapore economy in comparison with the pre- and post-war periods. Thus, it was difficult to assess the Japanese occupation's impact on Singapore's long-term economic development due to the lack of objective information. However, the publication of the Chosabu Reports now enables us to examine the socio-economic conditions in wartime Singapore academically. The book offers a lot of statistical information detailing various aspects of Syonan Municipality (Singapore under Japanese ruling), particularly private sectors, such as occupational patterns, trade, price movements, and food supply, as well as descriptive information observed by investigators. The international publication of selective reports regarding Singapore during World War II made the basic sources available for empirical investigation to approach the reality of wartime Singapore.

Furthermore, the disclosure of the socio-economic reality of Japanese-ruled Singapore is expected to contribute to the research that has attempted to reconstruct the long-run development of the Singapore economy. Since gaining self-governing status in 1959, the Singapore

government has published national statistics, such as vital statistics, trade statistics, and GDP. Some scholars have attempted to reconstruct historical statistics of Singapore over the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, particularly regarding international trade, living standards, and GDP, and have challenged to connect them with the national statistics after around 1960 (Huff 1994; Sugimoto 2009). The statistical accounts of Singapore were recorded from the early 1820s, which is earlier than those of other Southeast Asian regions and provides researchers with long-term historical data. Therefore, we recognise that the Singaporean sources contribute to enriching the historical statistics of Asia, which have been utilised as a significant data for economic history projects with a long-term perspective, such as the *Maddison Project*, the *Global Price and Income History Group* led by Robert Allen, and the *Asian historical Statistics Project* organised by Hitotsubashi University. The publication of the Chosabu Reports facilitates filling the gap in the economic data, which had remained untouched due to the lack of sources, for Singapore during World War II. More consecutive and consistent long-term economic data will therefore be available for Singapore.

Next, the book shows us that the abnormal circumstances that occurred during the war highlight the essential characteristics of Singapore's economy, which had been built based on free trade policy and multilateral trade relationships. For example, the first two chapters from the editors repeatedly highlight the importance of food supply for ruling Singapore. That is, to feed city inhabitants and mobilise the labour forces efficiently, the Japanese military administration sought to control the food provision for the inhabitants in the Syonan Municipality through trade regulations, a home-grown food campaign, and rationing, but the attempt did not go well. Food shortages prevailed across the city, and the black market was rampant, resulting in severe inflation; moreover, the population was increasing due to the influx from adjacent regions, further exacerbating the need for food. Eventually, the Japanese administration had no choice but to abandon the tight

control over rice imports and turn to Chinese rice importers to feed the city by establishing the *Syonan Rice Import Association*. Since its foundation in 1819, Singapore developed as a commercial city so there was little agricultural production and manufacturing industry on the island. Daily necessities were provided by neighbouring Asian countries; in particular, a large amount of rice was imported from Burma, Siam, and French Indochina through Chinese trading businesses. As well as feeding the inhabitants of Singapore, most was reexported to the Malay Peninsula, the Dutch East Indies, and British Borneo in exchange for imports of industrial raw materials. As one of the editors of the book, Gregg Huff, argues in another paper, rice functioned as a medium of exchange for regional trade through the chain of Chinese mercantile activities centred in Singapore (Huff 1989). Hence, the Japanese martial economic policy that cut off the regional commodity circulation underlying Singapore's economy was destined to fail. Singapore prospered as the centre of economic growth of modern Southeast Asia, particularly as the regional trading hub. However, the city was simultaneously vulnerable to the turmoil of external trade because its economy was heavily dependent on the imports of consumer goods from neighbouring countries. From the details of the abnormal socioeconomic conditions of wartime Singapore found in the reports, we can uncover the uniqueness of the city's economy that formed throughout its history and continues to date.

Finally, to use the reports for academic study, the context of their compiling should be noted. That is, because the Chosabu research group was organised and delegated to Southeast Asian countries including Singapore in response to the Japanese military's request, we cannot rule out the possibility that the reports were written in favour of the authority. We assume that the investigators may have been pressured to go along with the intentions of the authoritarian military administration, and the authority may have attempted to use the reports to justify its rule. Therefore, we must pay careful attention to the background of the abnormal situation for the investigators and scrutinise the accuracy of sources from an

objective viewpoint. Addressing this issue, the second chapter written by one of the editors, Shinobu Majima, details the process of the Chosabu research team's establishment and the chief researchers' specific careers before joining the delegate and after the war. The chapter suggests that while the official documents of Syonan Municipality lacked empiricism and included a lot of arbitrary information, the Chosabu researchers attempted to introduce empirical methods of investigation and provide an academically accurate verdict on the wartime economy. However, the chapter also points out that some of the Chosabu Reports proposed a practical plan for policy implementation, which was at request of the military administration that faced difficulty ruling Singapore. The introductory chapters help us understand the historical context and characteristics of the

Chosabu Reports compiled under the Japanese occupation. Without acknowledging the historiographical background, we cannot rely on the information in the Chosabu Reports to fill the gap in the history of Singapore during World War II.

#### References

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