



**Gregg Huff, Shinobu Majima, eds. and trans.** *World War II Singapore: The Chōsabu Reports on Syonan*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2018. 520 pp. \$60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-981-4722-62-9.

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When Singapore fell in February 1942, control of the island city, along with the rest of British Malaya, fell into the hands of an inexperienced and unprepared Japanese occupation force. The unique conditions of Singapore, as noted by Gregg Huff in his introductory essay, made it “probably the most formidable of any of Southeast Asia’s major cities” for the Japanese administration (p. 3). To help combat this overwhelming difficulty, the Chōsabu, or Department of Research, was sent to the region to report on the social and economic issues facing the new administration. In *World War II Singapore: The Chōsabu Reports on Syonan*, Huff and Shinobu Majima collect in English the surviving reports issued by this research group between April 1943 and April 1945 and offer their own conclusions as to the utility of these reports and the importance of the Chōsabu in understanding wartime Singapore’s struggles.

The Chōsabu, formed by the Tokyo University of Commerce, was ordered to “conduct research on how best to extract the natural resources essential to national defense, to ensure economic stability in the occupied areas and to give guidance to the various ethnic communities in the region” (p. 51). Majima argues that the majority of Chōsabu members—professors and scholars rather than colonialists—took this opportunity to conduct research in the field as a primarily academic en-

deavor. Yet as the reality of the military administration’s overenthusiastic economic reporting mixed with growing privation in the face of total war, the Chōsabu found itself more involved in policy development and implementation.

Singapore, or Syonan as the occupation renamed it, presented numerous seemingly unsolvable problems to the young academics of the Chōsabu. Japan’s wartime policy argued that occupied cities should be able to feed themselves using only local production, with excess naturally going to aid in the war effort. Singapore, having grown up as a trading port, did not produce anything close to enough food to support its population nor did it have enough of an industrial base to afford much else to Japan’s shaky empire. In addition to a lack of food, Huff notes, Singapore was “too globally oriented, too Chinese and too much the product of individual enterprise for the Japanese approach of restriction, regulation, and self-sufficiency to work” (p. 4). The administration and several fanciful economic reports conducted before the arrival of the Chōsabu only succeeded in placing more strain on the city’s dwindling reserves and drove more residents toward hawking and black markets.

Chōsabu members, including Akamatsu Kaname, known for his failed attempts to secure autonomy for the Malaya people, were forced to

interact with the development of policy in Singapore primarily through the reports that they issued. The Chōsabu was strict in adhering to empirical and consistent methods for data collection, and used these, and the subtle manipulation of the written reports, to advocate for dramatic shifts away from the administration's less than effective policies regarding food shortages. While its time actively writing about and influencing Singapore was relatively brief, Huff and Majima make it clear, the Chōsabu was an important force in the city's wartime struggles.

While *World War II Singapore* contains two narrative chapters, one exploring the occupation of Singapore in relation to the Chōsabu and the second exploring the Chōsabu members as individuals, the majority of the work remains the translated and organized reports themselves. Topics run a wide gamut of economic concerns and reflect the worsening reality of life in occupied Singapore. Each chapter is organized thematically. Chapters 3 through 6 focus primarily on population, labor supply, and industry. Chapters 7 and 8 tackle the problem of price inflation and rationing, a consistent issue within occupied Singapore as the military printed scrip or "banana money," named as such both for the picture of a banana tree on the ten-dollar Malayan note and for its uselessness, to spend on required goods. As a result of this practice and the isolation of Singapore, between February 1942 and July 1945 money supply rose by a factor of 15 while prices increased by a factor of 150 (pp. 25-26). Finally chapters 9 through 11 focus on the constant struggle to procure enough food for Singapore, including methods on increasing production in Singapore and the acquisition of food from abroad through resident Chinese traders. Chapter 12 concludes with a report on the lowest levels of living organized by ethnic group.

Each chapter presents the relevant data and tables in a clear and organized manner. Tables are easy to read and a thorough index allows for easy

searching in what is quite a large volume. The excellent production quality extends to hand-drawn schematics, such as one for the proper dimensions of a sweet potato ridge, that have retained their legibility in the transfer into the book. Also included are several photos of Singapore, its people, and the researchers of the Chōsabu to help situate the often quite dense economic content of the work.

*World War II Singapore* is a fascinating labor of love by Huff, Majima, and their team. The efforts of the Chōsabu to accomplish its tasks while wrestling, both internally and on paper, with the military administration in Singapore is well worth exploring for historians of the "home fronts" of the Second World War and Japan's brief empire and for those interested in the intersection of wartime restrictions and economic development. Every library should have access to this work purely based on the sheer volume of economic data collected within it. Of course, economic historians who wish to delve into the depths of price control, rationing, and living standards of what the Japanese called the "Radiant South" might consider saving space on their shelf for this volume. There will be nothing quite like it, and those with the right expertise might draw many exciting conclusions as they delve deeper into *World War II Singapore*.

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