

## A SURVEY ON JAPANESE POLICY ON ISLAM AND MUSLIMS COMMUNITY IN MALAYSIA

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**Accepted date:** 2 December 2017

**Published date:** 14 April 2018

### To cite this document:

Mohamad Firdaus. & Fauziah Fathil. (2018). A Survey on Japanese Policy on Islam and Muslims Community in Malaysia. *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)*, 3(8), 27 – 40.

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**Abstract:** *Japanese occupation of Malaya is considered to be a departure point in Malaysian history which marked a shift of colonial rule from British to Japanese. In the context of Malaya, following the successful Japanese subjugation of the land in February 1942, the High Command in Tokyo had issued a number of directives to be implemented in the occupied areas including Malaya. The High Command in Tokyo, among others had specified that regional commanders need to respect the indigenous' religion and folk customs in the occupied areas. As far as Islam is concerned, the Japanese Military Administration in Malaya seemed to have departed from Tokyo's orders in its dealing with Islam and Malay-Muslims as a whole. It seemed that the Japanese had no well-planned policy on Islam and Malay-Muslims in Malaya, nor were they sensitive to Islam and relevant issues concerning Islam and Muslims in the country. Rather, Islam was used in various occasions for propaganda purposes in order to mobilize popular support towards Japanese rule.*

**Keywords:** *Japanese occupation, Islam, Malay-Muslims, Malaya, policy*

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### Introduction

During the Second World War, Japan had conquered many countries in Southeast Asian region including Malaya and Indonesia or East Indies. To facilitate their rule over the region, Malaya and East Indies were merged under one administration. As with other occupied areas, Malaya and East Indies were to supply the much needed resources for Japanese war campaign at that time. Malaya for instance, was rich with minerals and forest produce while Indonesia with bauxite and oil. Japan successfully entered Malaya through Thailand and their swift action caught the British by surprise. By early 1942, the Japanese army was able to pin down the British troops in Malaya, resulting in the total surrender of the latter in February of the same year.

Having secured Malaya, the Japanese now had to administer the country left vacant by the British and at the same time to deal with the local Muslims who made up the major proportion of the population. This paper will look at the Japanese policy towards the Malay-Muslim community in matters related to Islam and Islamic practices such as the issue of observance of daily prayers i.e. Friday prayer, Muslim religious festivals such as *Eid al-Fitri* and *Eid al-Adha*, as well as marriages and divorces among Muslims. It is interesting to see to what extent was the policy subject to a greater aim of the Japanese occupation, that is to garner popular support from the locals to their rule in Malaya, and whether the implementation of the policy towards Islam and Muslims in the country was in any way effective and systematic.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In ruling Malaya, there seemed to be an inconsistency in the Japanese policy intended for the Malay-Muslims population. This was reflected in the changes of policy's direction. Unlike the early years of Japanese administration where the policy on Islam and Malay-Muslims was restricting and less accommodating, by the early 1943 onwards, the policy had been somewhat relaxed mainly due to difficult war situations faced by the Japanese in the occupied regions including Malaya. Another inconsistency observable during the Japanese occupation was in between the official policy of Japanese central high command and the actual implementation of the policy on the ground. While the former maintained a non-interference policy on matters concerning Islamic religion and Malay customs, the implementation of the policy by Japanese officials stationed in Malaya however, as will be demonstrated in the paper, was merely declarative and superficial where it was occasionally altered depending on the force of circumstances and changes involving Japanese military personnel in Malaya throughout the war period.

### **Literature Review**

The most significant literature is an article written by Yoichi Itagaki and Koichi Kishi entitled *Japanese Islamic policy-Sumatra & Malaya*. One of the authors of this article, Yoichi Itagaki used to serve as one of the research department's personnel attached to the Japanese administration in Malaya. Fundamentally, the research departments (*Chosabus*) were founded in July 1942 following a notification from the vice war minister to the Southern Army (*Nanpogun*) dated 31 July 1942 that "a decision had been made to organize *chosabus* attached to Southern Army Headquarters to serve its newly established *Gunsei* Superintendent's Office (*Gunsei Sokambu*) and *Gunsei Kambu* in the occupied southern territories".

The creation of *Chosabu*, in the context of Malaya, was primarily to compile necessary information about "the overseas Chinese, the Islamic religion and its customs as well as statistics and ordinances of British colonial government" which would then be used by *Malai Gunsei Kambu* (Malayan Military Administration) in policy-planning in Malaya. Yoichi Itagaki served as the Deputy Head of Ethnic Affairs Section which was attached to *Chosabu* administration and one of the staffs of the General Research Department. In this respect, he is the most authoritative person to refer to in investigating this topic. Together with Koichi Kishi, Yoichi Itagaki has written an important literature in this field based on his knowledge and experiences having involved in the Japanese Military Administration in Malaya.

Another crucial literature is a book by Yoji Akashi entitled *Japanese Military Administration: Its formulation and evolution in reference to Sultans, Islamic religion and Moslem-Malays, 1941-1945*. This book is fundamentally based on the author's analysis of the existing

Japanese documents on the occupation of Southeast Asia and Malaya in particular. This book is indeed instrumental in providing relevant information on the topic under study. The author, having the expertise and substantial knowledge of the Japanese occupation of Malaya elaborates quite extensively on matters pertaining to the Japanese policy towards Malay Sultans and Islamic affairs.

That being said the researchers, however, found that in his study, Yoji Akashi did not employ a sufficient number of local records as compared to few writers like Abu Talib Ahmad whose works deal with the impact of Japanese occupation on the Malay-Muslim population. In writing his works, the latter used various records from the Department of Religious Affairs of selected states in Malaya. Accordingly, there was insufficient information in Akashi's study especially on issues related to social development of Malay-Muslims during wartime period. Most importantly, the researchers found that Yoji Akashi did not provide adequate facts on matters pertaining to Japanese policy-making nor methods used by the Japanese authorities in executing policies or directives concerning Islam and Muslims in Malaya.

Furthermore, there is another significant article or literature written by Akashi Yoji together with Yoshimura Mako entitled *New Perspectives on the Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore 1941-1945*. The researchers found that this work is very substantial in providing the necessary information regarding the war efforts of Japanese in Malaya and Singapore including their policy in administering both areas. This work also revealed the official thinking of Japanese authority towards the Malay-Muslims and Malay Sultans in order to secure their support and cooperation. In writing this work, both authors have utilized a variety of primary sources i.e. official documents and oral sources (interviews with eyewitnesses during the war period) which are available in Japanese and English languages. These primary materials are obtained from archives in Japan, Britain, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, USA and India. Nevertheless, the Japanese policy on Islam and Malay-Muslims was not discussed in depth possibly because one of the authors, namely Akashi, has discussed the issue quite extensively in his other mentioned work, *Japanese Military Administration: Its formulation and evolution in reference to Sultans, Islamic religion and Moslem-Malays, 1941-1945*.

Moreover, a work by Abu Talib Ahmad entitled 'Japanese Policy towards Islam in Malaya during the Occupation: A Reassessment' was also essential in writing this paper. The article is useful in the sense that it provides a kind of survey on Japanese policy in the occupied areas towards Islamic practices of Malay-Muslims and the position of Islam itself. The article principally relies on the existing local records found in Religious Affairs Departments of several Malay states. It also examines some social issues prevalent among the Malay-Muslim population during the occupation period such as the rate of divorce and the issue of absenteeism during Friday prayer. The researchers, however, found that Abu Talib's study did not use a satisfactory number of Japanese sources, perhaps due to language barrier, which contributes to the lack of external consistency regarding the information on the Japanese policy in Malaya.

Another noteworthy work written by the same author is "The Impact of Japanese Occupation on the Malay-Muslim population", in a book edited by Paul H. Kratoska, '*Malaya and Singapore during the Japanese Occupation*'. In writing this article Abu Talib relied greatly on records of the Johor Religious (Affairs) Department to discuss matters concerning Islam in Malaya and this explains the lack of comparative analysis in regards to the Malay-Muslim practices in other states that might be different from those in Johor. Furthermore, Abu Talib's article provides a very brief discussion on the possible factors for the lack of consistency

shown by the Japanese authorities in its policy towards Islam and the Malay Sultans. A basic understanding regarding the shift of Japanese policy before and after 1943, which was characterized by at first 'hard-line policy' and then 'relaxed policy', as a result may not be able to be clearly understood. The author also fails to mention about the impact of Japanese occupation upon Islamic education which has been an integral aspect of the Malay-Muslim population even before the Japanese occupation of Malaya.

Another relevant work by the same scholar is *Malay-Muslims, Islam and the Rising Sun: 1941-1945* in which he stretches the discussion on Japanese policy towards Islam and the Malay-Muslim population including educational development of Malaya during the occupation such as the teaching of Japanese language or *Nippon-go*, and Islamic religious instructions that were permitted to be taught to Malay children at schools. Such information was absent in his earlier works. Another aspect adequately addressed in this book is the religious life of the Malay-Muslims during the wartime which include their laxness in religious matters such as attending Friday prayer and the issue of increasing divorce rate among Muslims. However, no further clarification is provided on how and what kind of directives imposed by the Japanese administration on religious teachers who were given the freedom to continue with the teaching of Islamic subjects in schools.

Like the other work, Abu Talib (2003) also heavily focuses on the religious life of Malay-Muslims in Johor like marriage and divorce patterns rather than providing adequate survey in comparison to other states in Malaya. On his part, the author argues that the lengthy discussion on Johor is because it is the only state where data on marriage and divorce during the occupation is still available, although incomplete. Given the over emphasis on Johor, a generalization of the religious life of the Malay-Muslims in Malaya cannot therefore, be established. The author also has not adequately addressed the organizational set-up and the areas of jurisdiction of the Religious and Education Department or *Bunkyo-ka* formed by the Japanese. These aspects are indeed crucial in order to determine the extent of Japanese interference on Islamic religious matters.

Another no less important work in this field is a paper written by Saliha Haji Hassan entitled *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmi, 1911-1969*. In this work the author discusses the background of Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmi, a renowned Malay nationalist in the 1930s and 1940s Malaya, including his education, his characters and personality, as well as his political involvement in Malaya's politics. The work mainly deals with political matters where the author classifies Dr. Burhanuddin's involvement in Malayan politics into two phases; the first phase from 1939 till 1950 and the second phase from 1955 till 1969. With respect to the topic under study, the author mentions that Dr. Burhanuddin had been appointed as Japanese Advisor on Malay culture and customs and that he was somewhat involved in certain incidents or matters related to Islam and Muslims during the Japanese occupation of Malaya. In writing this work, she has extensively utilized a number of oral sources which include interviews with Dr. Burhanuddin's family, relatives and friends. Moreover, the author has also made use of his speeches and writings in order to assess Dr. Burhanuddin's political ideas and views during the period of pre-independent Malaya.

In appraisal of this work, this writing owed its origin to the author's working paper presented at *Seminar Biografi Malaysia* held at the University of Malaya, from 26-28 April 1986. Using a limited number of official documents available in Kuala Lumpur and London, the paper is essentially a biographical work as reflected in the title of this paper. Given the nature of the article, accordingly, there is insufficient information pertaining to the Japanese rule in

Malaya. Only a brief explanation was given on the position of Dr. Burhanuddin in the Japanese administration during the occupation period without details on the extent of his role and influence with respect to Islam-related matters.

Last but not least, Nabir Haji Abdullah has also written an article on a religious figure named Ustaz Abu Bakar al-Baqir who, as with Dr. Burhanuddin, was appointed as an Advisor to the Japanese administration on Malay culture and customs. In writing this article entitled '*Ustaz Abu Bakar al-Baqir Dalam Kenangan*', the author has utilized various primary sources for instance, interviews with the subject, his relatives and friends, as well as local newspapers. In relation to the topic of study, the author mentions that apart from acting as the Advisor to the Japanese, Ustaz Abu Bakar together with other Muslim individuals within the Japanese administration had successfully organized Islamic Conference in 1944. Nevertheless, the bulk of this article has been devoted to Ustaz Abu Bakar's roles in developing and fostering education in Malaya, specifically the Islamic religious education besides his involvement in few prominent political parties during the occupation and post-war period in Malaya. Therefore, there is only scanty information available with regard to the role of Ustaz Abu Bakar as the Advisor to Japanese administration on Malay custom and Islamic religion.

### **Methodology of Study**

Essentially, this paper is a qualitative study in nature. As a historical research, this study employs a wide range of primary sources and substantial number of secondary sources. Among the primary sources are government records and documents, and personal accounts in the form of memoirs or diaries. These materials are relevant and indispensable as they provide significant information on the administrative structure of Malaya under Japanese rule and socio-economic features of the Malayan population. Among the primary materials include the official publication of the British government such as "Malayan Basic Handbook: Malaya and its Civil Administration Prior to Japanese Occupation" published by British War Office based in London, "A Memorandum on the Behaviour of Public Servants during the Japanese Occupation" produced by the British military administration immediately after the end of Japanese rule in Malaya, and last but not least an intelligence report entitled "Political and Economic Changes Effected by the Japanese in Malaya, 1 December 1943", published by Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch, US Department of State, Office of Intelligence Research.

Other types of primary documents are memoirs such as *Memoir Mustapha Hussain: Kebangkitan Nasionalisme Melayu sebelum UMNO* [Mustapha Hussain's Memoirs: The Rise of Malay Nationalism before UMNO] edited by Insun Sony Mustapha and *Japanese Invasion of Malaya and Singapore: Memoirs of a Doctor* written by T.J. Dhanaraj. Moreover, the authors have also made use of interviews with a few scholars in the field notably Prof. Dr. Khoo Kay Kim and Prof. Abu Talib Ahmad. Lastly, this study also utilised library research methods by searching and gathering various materials available in both electronic and printed repositories.

### ***Japanese Policies: Aims and Objectives***

The slogan 'Asia for Asians' showed that the Japanese in their campaign favoured Asians rather than Europeans and at the same time portrayed the image of Japan as a saviour of the Southeast Asian countries from the clutch of Western colonial rule. This slogan formed part of Japanese propaganda activities in the occupied areas including Malaya. While the slogan

promoted a noble objective that is to liberate the colonized Asian countries, the Japanese authority also utilized the slogan to justify its imperialistic aim i.e. to turn the Southeast Asian region into the so-called 'Greater East Co-Prosperity Sphere' in which Japan would be the leader. Having established their rule over Malaya by early 1942, it was time to devise and impose suitable policies in the occupied areas while making sure that the locals supported their rule.

Regarding the Japanese policy towards Islam and Malay-Muslim population in Malaya, one notable scholar in this field, Yoji Akashi (1969) suggests that initially there was no serious attempt on the part of the Japanese High Command in Tokyo to formulate a workable policy. However, the situation changed considerably by 1943 when the tide of war turned against Japan, thus compelled them to design what that turned out to be a relatively feasible policy on Islam and the Malay-Muslim community.

In this regard, the first evidence of Japanese consideration regarding the issue of Malay Sultans and Islamic religion in Southeast Asia could be traced in a paper devised by a three man study group set up by the First Bureau (Operation) of the Army General Staff. Formed in February 1942, this study group was chaired by Colonel Obata Nobuyoshi, who was at that time Chief of Staff of the Imperial Guard Division entrusted with the military conquest of Northern Sumatra. The other two fellow members were Lt. Col. Nishimura Otoji and Lt. Col. Tofuku. Lt. Col. Nishimura was the one who drafted the section on Malay Sultans and Islam in Malaya before he went to serve as chief of the General Affairs Department, Military Administration in Java, in 1944.

The work plan formulated by the group in March 1941 is called "Principles for the Administration of Occupied Southern Areas". According to this proposal, Malaya was to be positioned under the authority of the Japanese administration and formed a part of the Japanese Empire. The proposal stipulated that "Sultans are to be left alone" and that as symbolic rulers, they would be supervised by the military government which shall be substituted with a consultative body once public order has been restored. Plus, it also maintained that "strict measures must be taken to respect the freedom of religion and belief as well as customs in order to win the hearts of the local inhabitants". Akashi (1969), however, observed that Japan's consideration of the Islamic religion was relatively recent that it went back to the mid-1920s and that the main Japanese interest in Islam and Muslims was essentially restricted to the region of the Middle East until the occurrence of the Pacific War.

In line with the above principles contained in the proposal, the High Command in Tokyo can be said to be essentially a 'non-interference policy' in matters concerning the Malay customs and Islamic religion. However, throughout the Japanese occupation, one can observe that the Japanese military commanders in Malaya had the liberty to make own decisions regarding the manner in which the policy on Islam and Malay-Muslims was to be implemented hence, resulting in Islamic-related issues being treated in a similar fashion with other administrative matters. This situation was particularly visible in the Japanese Malayan Military Administration under the leadership of Col. Watanabe Wataru. Due to his strict and bold leadership, Yoichi Itagaki and Koichi Kishi (1969; 4) maintained that:

Strictly speaking, there was no Islamic policy proper under the Japanese Military Administration and that which was called the Islamic policy formed in fact only a part of those administrative measures which were taken for the purpose of obtaining control over the occupied people as a whole.

Moreover, in order to understand the overall attitude of the Japanese authority in Tokyo and in the Malay Peninsula towards the Muslims and Islamic religion, one may look at a number of essential policies which were laid down before 1943, that is before the Japanese was forced to become defensive in their war against the Allied forces. These policies are (1) “*Nampo Senryochi Gyosei Jisshi Yoryo* (Principles Governing the Administration of the Occupied Areas)” of November 1941 which outlined the central codes of Japanese military administration, and (2) “*Gunsei Sokan Shiji* (Instructions of the Superintendent General of Military Administration)” of 1942 which provided the detailed regulations that need to be implemented in the occupied areas. Moreover, in the early half of 1942, the following regional rules for administration were drawn up by Japanese military forces in charge of the occupation [in Malaya and Sumatra], such as “*Dai-Nijiugogun Gunsei Jisshi Yoko* (Principles for Enforcing Military Administration by the 25<sup>th</sup> Army [Malaya and Sumatera])” and “*Marai Oyobi Sumatora Tochi ni Kansuru Shiji* (Instructions on the Administration of Malaya and Sumatra)”.

Yoichi Itagaki and Koichi Kishi (1969) mentioned that the *Gunsei Sokan Shiji* (Instructions of the Superintendent General of Military Administration) of 1942 basically called for deepest respect pertaining to any indigenous religious customs and refraining from compelling the local people to embrace Buddhism or other religions. Furthermore, a similar gist prevailed in the *Dai-Nijiugogun Gunsei Jisshi Yoko* (Principles for Enforcing Military Administration by the 25<sup>th</sup> Army [Malay and Sumatera]) whereby its clause on religion mentioned that, “we should protect existing religions and try as far as possible to respect folk customs based on the religions”, and that “in doing so we should put the people at rest and persuade them to cooperate with our administration and policies”. These directives essentially demonstrate that the central attitude of the Japanese military authority was that of non-interference policy, with the aim to ensure support from the people of the occupied areas. Following the occupation of most of Southeast Asian countries, in March 1942 the above policy was confirmed in a top confidential position paper, named “Fundamental Principles Relative to the Execution of the Military Government of Occupied Areas”.

In relation to the religion of Islam, the issue of Malay Sultans also occupied a central position in Japanese policy given the traditional role of Sultans as the head and symbol of Islam. As outlined in the order of the central Japanese High command in Tokyo, the Sultan’s religion position was to be respected since this too would facilitate the Japanese in securing support from the Malays. As mentioned by Akashi Yoji (1969) “sultans offered at least in transitional period of the occupation years, a convenient utility value to the military for pacifying and winning the indigenous Malay Muslims”. That said, within the ranks of Japanese military administrators in Malaya, there were different interpretations on the role of the Malay Sultans which only shows the lack of knowledge among the officers of Malay culture and tradition. A few Japanese commanders perceived “Sultans as only secular leaders and neglected their religious authority”. Given the different understanding of the socio-political aspect of the Malay society, it is no surprise that this led to the inconsistency in the implementation of the general policy emanated from the Tokyo government.

### ***Measures and Implementation of Policies***

In terms of implementation of policy towards Islam and Muslim population in Malaya, the Japanese showed lack of organisation or well-designed plan. For instance, as noted by Yoichi Itagaki and Koichi Kishi (1969), there was no particular *Shumubu* (Religious Affairs

Department) in the Japanese military administration office in charge of Islamic or Muslim affairs. Consequently, the Religious Departments established in Malay states during the British era were maintained and it was these bodies that regularly dealt with Islamic-related matters. In order to ensure that the States' Religious Departments did not involve in any unwanted activities that might jeopardise the interests of Japan, the so-called Japanese Advisors were appointed to oversee the proceedings conducted and matters discussed at the Religious Departments.

Attached to *Bunkyo-ka* or Religious and Education Section of the Japanese Military Administration, the role of the advisors was consequently viewed by some Muslims as interventionist, hence contradictory to the official Japanese policy of 'non-interference' in matters related to Islam and Malay customs. Abu Talib (2003) in his study on Islam and Muslims in Johor remarked that the state's Religious Department during the occupation had to deal with the "a new intruder", referring to a Japanese advisor who also acted as "the chief of *Bunkyo-ka* (religious and education section) within the Johor's state administration". Not only did the advisor attend a number of important meetings held at the department, his *Bunkyo-ka* office was also involved in the screening "of all important speeches, including those of the Sultan of Johor".

In an interview with Prof. Khoo Kay Kim, he maintained that one possible reason for a Japanese advisor to be present in the meetings of the States' Department of Religious Affairs, like in the case of Johor, was because the Japanese authority wanted to ensure that no effort or attempt made by the Malay religious leaders to arouse anti-Japanese sentiment, hence threatened Japanese interests. One notable advisor appointed by the Japanese to render advice was Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy. He was chosen as MMA's (*Malai Military Administration*) advisor on Malay customs and religion, and stationed at Taiping. It is possible that the appointment of Dr. Burhanuddin was not merely a result of his knowledge of Malay culture and customs but more importantly, due to Japanese effort to keep a nationalist like him busy with some administrative tasks. By doing so, the Japanese could easily monitor his action thus preventing him from involving in any activities geared towards or related to independence movement.

Another person appointed as a Japanese advisor similar to that role of Dr. Burhanuddin was Ustaz Abu Bakar al-Baqir, who according to Saliha (1997) and Nabir (1976) was attached to the Japanese Military Headquarters in Taiping. To what extent the post had a weight on the policy concerning Islam and Muslims, Abu Talib (2002) maintained that the position of advisor as held by Dr. Burhanuddin, Ustaz Abu Bakar was simply as an intermediary "of conflicting interests", namely between the Malay Sultans and Japanese authorities. The conflict can be seen for instance during one occasion where Dr. Burhanuddin was demanded by the Japanese Military Administration to petition Malay rulers to abolish the five daily prayers incumbent upon Muslims. This consequently led to uneasy feeling among Malay Sultans and masses alike.

Meanwhile, regarding the role of *Bunkyo-ka* in the administration of Islamic or Muslim affairs, Abu Talib (2002) maintained that there was no evidence as to indicate that the *Bunkyo-ka* influenced directly or indirectly the ways through which the Religious Department discharged its work, particularly over the writing of Friday prayer's sermons though some sort of screenings were made from time to time. In Johor, a few imams were reported to have prepared their own sermons and instead of submitting the sermons to the Japanese authorities for checking, they were required to submit the copies to the Johor' Religious Department.



Nevertheless, he mentioned that in several other states such as Terengganu and Kedah, the Japanese authority had paid a close attention on the imams though it is unclear whether the prepared sermons were screened or not for inappropriate materials.

As to whether the implementation of Japanese policy towards Islam and Muslims in Malaya was effective or systematic, evidences so far suggest that it was not. Akashi (1969), commented that there was no uniformity in the Japanese policy on Islam and Muslims as a whole as its implementation differed from one state to another. Part of the problem stemmed from the lack of knowledge about Malay custom and tradition among the Japanese military administrators. The central military command in Tokyo had specified some general codes for the Japanese Military Administration in Malaya to implement. In implementing the policy however, Akashi (1969) asserted that each Japanese military commander had his own interpretation and own way in carrying out the policy. This consequently resulted in different orders and instructions concerning Islam and Muslims in different Malay states. In addition, Yoichi Itagaki and Koichi Kishi (1969) have also asserted that there was no specific department formed by the Japanese to cater for a variety of issues concerning Islam and Muslims in Malaya, plus there were no Japanese individuals who were experts on Islam-related matters despatched to Malaya from Tokyo to advise the Japanese administration on such matters.

By the mid of 1943 some changes in the Japanese policy could be noted. Not only was the Japanese administration seen trying to be more accommodating towards the Malay-Muslim population, but also friendlier in their treatment of Islam and Muslim affairs. One such change was the formation of consultative organs in some Malay states and cities, as announced by the Japanese authorities on October 2, 1943. Abu Talib Ahmad (1995; 2001; 2002; 2003; 2007) also noted that the Japanese implemented a number of the so called 'positive measures' such as by showing respect to the fasting month of *Ramadan*, permitting Malay-Muslims in government service to finish their working day two hours earlier than normal time, conceding breaks to Malay civil servants to celebrate *Eid al-Fitri* and *Eid al-Adha* as well as paying one month's salary in advance to the workers so that they could prepare for the religious festival.

The same moves were noted by Akashi (1969) who stated that the Japanese authority in September, 1943 had recognized and expected decline in the productivity of Muslim workers employed in the Japanese government agencies during the fasting month of Ramadan. Such accommodating attitude was also displayed by highest-ranking Japanese military administrator in Malaya, Colonel Watanabe who issued an instruction to governors and mayors whereby he asked them to pay the Muslim employees' salaries "for the month of October, along with bonus before October 10, because October 12-13, 1943 was their religious holidays". Moreover, other 'positive measures' affected by the Japanese include for instance, the presence of Japanese officers at mosques "during certain religious festivities" to provide moral support, authorizing the Sultans "to hire religious officials such as *kathis*, and reopening of Quranic classes in religious schools", the formation of state religious councils, and last but not least the organisation of two Islamic conferences, first held in Singapore (April 1943) and later in Kuala Kangsar (December 1944).

On top of all these changes, the Japanese military administration had also inaugurated the observation of Muslim holidays from March 21, 1943 onwards. These were as follows; "the Islamic New Year (January 7), January 16<sup>th</sup> of tenth day of the New Year, Prophet Mohammad's Birthday (March 18), the ascension Day of Prophet Mohamad (July 30), *Hari Raya Besar* or *Eid al-Fitri* (September 30), and *Hari Raya Haji* or *Eid al-Adha* (December

7)". Akashi (1969) described these positive gestures as signs of a more rational policy on the part of the Japanese which paved the way for the improvement of "the organization of Mohammedan Law, Mohammedan religious courts, religious education and religious authority". He also observed that the changes also affected the Malay Sultans that they recovered back some of their religious and political authority. At the same time, the Japanese administration initiated the program of re-training Islamic religious functionaries at a Japanese training school, which modelled after the re-educational activity of the Islamic *kiais* which had been ongoing in Java.

Akashi (1969) observed that the shift in the policy, which was evident from 1943 onwards, also saw the restructuring of the Japanese military administration, a process which appeared however, more superficial than real. It involved the transfer of personnel at the top leadership in the months of March and April 1943. Specifically, The *Tomii* group (25<sup>th</sup> Army division) was moved to Sumatra, while the *Oka* Group army was entrusted with the responsibility of supervising Malaya under direct control of SEF (Southern Expeditionary Forces). MMA'S director-general, Watanabe was also replaced by Major General Fujimura Masuzo in March 1943. Fujimura was not regarded a politico-military officer as his predecessor, and he was willing and prepared to get along with local civilians. He further mentioned that following the removal of strict Japanese Military Administration under what could be called as "the Watanabe Gunsei era" and the initiation of some reforms, the newly established administration embraced a more constructive but cautious move in support of the Islamic religion in Malaya.

To understand why the favourable changes were introduced by the Japanese authorities, one cannot but to assess the general situation at that time namely, in mid of 1943. The Japanese who had previously been victorious in the early war campaigns had now suffered from successive attacks by the Allied Powers. Consequently, they needed undivided support from the people of the occupied areas to sustain their rule and that required some relaxation in their policy towards the local population. This also applied to matters related to Islam and Muslims in Malaya where favourable policy would likely result in greater support to the Japanese rule.

However, it should be noted here that amidst the introduction of more friendly policies, some precautionary measures were implemented by the Japanese government. For instance, while Muslims were allowed to celebrate religious festivals they were required to obtain beforehand permits from the Japanese authorities. Abu Talib (2003) further asserted that any religious official, who wished to give any public talks, whether at mosque or other places, was required to secure prior approval from the Japanese administration. While the acquisition of permits and approval from the Japanese government ensured that such public events would not involve any anti-Japanese elements, there were also instances of the Japanese being sheer insensitive with regard to Islamic practices, which leads one to question their sincerity in introducing the more friendlier policies. This can be seen in the case cited by Abu Talib (2002) where Dr. Burhanuddin was ordered by the Japanese during the late period of occupation to petition Malay rulers to abolish the obligatory five daily prayers. Furthermore, Abu Talib (2002) asserted that in a previous case in Selangor, the Japanese authority through *Hodosho* (Office of Help-and-Guide), which comprised of important local Malays including Pak Samad, yet was headed over by the Japanese governor, tried to acquire an approval for Malay-Muslim soldiers in the service of Japanese forces to be exempted from fasting during *Ramadan*. However, this demand was politely declined by the Malay-Muslim members of the *Hodosho*.

More indications of the shift in Japanese policy towards Islam and Muslims are the Conferences of Muslim leaders held in Singapore and Kuala Kangsar in 1943 and 1944 respectively. In relation to these events, Akashi (1969) observed that the conference held in Singapore on April 5-6 and attended by representatives from Malaya and Sumatra was made to look as if it was planned by the Muslims themselves, though in actual fact, it was organised and sponsored by the Planning and Education sections of the Japanese Military Administration. The aim of this meeting was to secure the confidence of Muslim public through Muslim leaders, to instil the Japanese interpretation of the world into the people's thoughts, and to tie "all religious groups, including Mohammedans, Christians, Buddhist and Hindus" into one large community under Japanese rule.

The agenda of the Japanese was clear. This is reflected in the opening remark of Major General Isoya Goro, a new Director of the Japanese administration during the conference who reiterated the respect that Japan had for that "local religions, customs and cultural heritage" and called the Muslims "to share the burden of the war to its end and share difficulties of food shortages and daily necessities". It appeared that the conference did arouse some satisfactory and positive comments from the participants and religious leaders of both Malaya and Sumatra. Akashi (1969) mentioned that one of the participants expressed his disbelief that he could actually join the event attended by high-ranking Japanese officials, since the locals had never been invited to participate in such an event under the colonial administration, either of the British or the Dutch. The meeting was said to have been successful enough even to encourage some of the Japanese officials to take a more positive step in mustering the people's confidence by allowing the Malay-Muslims to have more voice in matters concerning their politico-religious affairs.

The second conference held in 1944 in Kuala Kangsar was attended by religious leaders of different Malay states (except Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu-that had been transferred to Siam and former Straits Settlements of Penang, Melaka and Singapore). At this conference, the Muslim religious elites elaborated on the following points, namely "the need for uniformity regarding the Muslim calendar for all states"; the necessity "to establish a 'national' committee of Islam for the whole of Malaya"; and "provisions allowing religious authorities to take legal action against Muslims in Melaka, Penang and Singapore (the former Straits Settlements where there were no Malay rulers) who openly defied Islamic laws". In addition, the representatives also discussed the necessity of allowing religious authorities to punish Muslims, who were involved in vice such as gambling; the need to put pressure on the MMA to permit Muslims in the army to fast during *Ramadan*; and a proposal on "approval for teachers to conduct religious classes among army/police personnel". Lastly, the Muslim religious authorities did also forward their suggestion for Muslims to be allowed adequate lunch time so that they could perform their Zuhur and Friday prayers.

It is noteworthy that during the conference, the Muslim religious delegates decided to ask their fellow Malay-Muslims to cooperate with Japan in order to accomplish the final aims of the Greater East Asian war by:

- (1) requesting donations for war needs (something the Pahang religious elites did energetically in early 1945);
- (2) instructing people to collaborate wholly with *Dai Nippon*;
- (3) persuading people to increase food production;
- (4) safeguarding the law and order continuously so as to remain effective in Malaya; and

(5) praying for the speedy end of the war with victory for Japan

Abu Talib (2002) observed that it was something uncertain whether these resolutions had been accepted by the MMA, although he noticed that some State Islamic Councils later became more active in administering numerous aspects of pre-war Islamic enactments, bringing to Shariah court a number of individuals who were absent during the Friday prayer without any legitimate reasons, and charging Muslims who were found to be involved in gambling activities. Abu Talib (2002) also noted that in the aftermath of the conferences, there were less signs of MMA's intervention in Muslim religious matters although Japanese officers still constantly attended State Islamic Councils' meetings in various Malay states. For example, in Pahang, there were six Japanese representatives including the Japanese Governor of Malaya, Hashigawa, who attended the council meeting on 25 July 1945, sitting at the same table with the Sultan and the Tengku Besar of Pahang (who was in charge of the Department of Religious Affairs for the State of Pahang). In this meeting, there were only three state religious officers present, namely the State Mufti, the Kathi of Pekan, and an officer named Haji Muhammad Daud.

Apart from the deteriorating wartime circumstances, Akashi (1969) asserted that the shift of Japanese policy was probably due to the increasing difficulty faced by the Japanese authority in their pacification of anti-Japanese elements within the county, spearheaded by the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), and the growing grievances among the locals who started to voice complaints against the Japanese Military Administration following "economic difficulties, spiralling inflation and scarcity of daily necessities".

In calling for support from the locals, it is noteworthy that the Japanese also attempted to accommodate Islamic teachings with Japanese ideas. Following the Conference of Sultans in January 1943, Abu Talib (2002) observed that the Japanese commander (*Gunshireikan*) had mentioned three key issues in a lengthy speech, which according to him, resembled a Friday sermon. These three issues were namely, the real teachings of the Quran, the similarity between Islam and Shinto, and the Greater East Asian war as a holy war. Emphasizing on the commonality between the Japanese and Islamic beliefs, the *Gunshireikan* expressed to the delegates that "in essence all religions were the same, and the teachings of the Quran were similar to those of Shinto, Japan's indigenous religion".

Abu Talib (2002) further added that in this occasion, the Japanese Commander concluded by highlighting a strong similarity between the Quranic revelations and the character of the *Tenno* (Japanese emperor), which according to Japanese belief, originated from the sun goddess or *Ameterasu Omikami Sama*. Abu Talib (2002) mentioned that the representatives would definitely have found these declarations hard to accept, for at times the *Gunshireikan's* descriptions were equal to an act of blasphemy, particularly when he linked Japan's war efforts to the Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) *jihad*. However, on that occasion no one, as noted by Abu Talib, was courageous enough to refute his speech. This not only illustrates the ignorance on the part of Japanese officials of Islamic teachings or principles, but also how the Japanese were mainly concerned with, above all, their own propaganda in order to ensure support for their rule.

## Conclusion

In retrospect, one may observe that the Japanese policy on Islam and Malay-Muslims in Malaya was rather politically and economically motivated that is, it was mainly designed to serve the Japanese's war aims. They realized the fact the Malay-Muslims made up a substantial number of Malayan population and therefore, to secure their support and cooperation was a matter of grave importance for the Japanese authority in Tokyo and Malaya. From the above discussions, one can observe the inconsistency of the Japanese policy towards Islam and Muslims in Malaya where it was altered depending on the changing situations during the war years. For instance, notwithstanding the clear orders by the Japanese Central High Command in Tokyo that due respect was to be paid to the local customs and religions in the occupied territories including Malaya, in various occasions, interference by the Japanese administration in the affairs of Islam and Muslims did take place. They did so, however, in a subtle way making use sometimes, of particular local leaders to persuade other Muslims or to elicit approval from relevant Islamic bodies. Instead of making sure that Japanese administrators in Malaya implemented the policy of non-interference in matters related to Islam and Muslims, they were left to own devices on how to work out and implement the directives coming from Tokyo, resulting in eventually unsystematic and to a certain extent, insensitive policy towards the local religion and population. Apart from the lack of coordination and enforcement by the Tokyo government, the changing war situations also contributed to the irregularity in the Japanese policy. As the course of war changed unfavourably against Japan, it forced the Japanese authority in Malaya to alter their way of dealing with Islam and Malay-Muslims that is, to be more accommodating and obliging than before. This further demonstrates that the Japanese had no conclusive policy towards Islam and Malay Muslims during their occupation of Malaya. It also proves that for the Japanese, Islam and Muslim-related matters were above all, just part of war-time propaganda in securing their own interests and gaining the local support to sustain their war campaigns.

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