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A Glimpse of Civilian Life in Sarawak Under the Empire of The Sun

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ABSTRACT

Sarawak was occupied by the Japanese Imperial Army for close to 4 years during World War II. This study aims to paint a picture of civilian life during the Japanese Occupation through an archival analysis of artefacts sourced primarily from civilian sources. This study found the existence of a systematic societal framework that combined elements of the Brooke dynasty and the prevailing Japanese societal structure of the 1940s. This finding is significant as it provides evidence of how Sarawak differed from other territories occupied by the Japanese at the time. This discovery contributes to the wider study of Sarawak's past during World War II.

Keywords: Sarawak, Japanese occupation, archival research, Empire of the Sun, World War II



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INTRODUCTION

The Japanese Imperial Army occupied Sarawak from December 1941 to September 1945 (Reece, 1998). Very few studies have been conducted on the governance of Sarawak during this time (Lim, 2005; Ooi, 1990 and 2011; Reece, 1998). The lack of relevant documents and artefacts is the main challenge faced by scholars, historians, and researchers (Reece, 1998). Interestingly, the current study is able to rely on previously unpublished documents to provide a glimpse into civilian life under the Japanese Occupation. Through the examination, interpretation and analysis of such documents, the study follows the chronological sequence dictated by the documents to construct the lived experience of those living under the Empire of the Sun in Sarawak.

The analysis and interpretation of different documents allow the researcher to piece together events and during a specific time in history. The value of this approach lies in the traceability of the origins of the research findings. It provides tangible visual references that support the soundness and credibility of the findings, a challenge for many studies of this nature (Lim, 2005; Reece, 1998). The author hopes that the findings of the current study would provide new perspectives on how Sarawak was governed by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II. It aligns with other studies that have looked into the Japanese's governance of her occupied territories. The findings would also offer a glimpse into civilian life in Sarawak over a diverse range of activities including official communications, banking, commercial transactions, funding, and other relevant activities. This is a unique approach only made possible by the availability of the documents utilised in this research. The study, therefore, contributes to the conversation on an important chapter in Sarawak's history.