

***Dai Nippon* Forced Labor Politics, 1943-1945: *Romusha* Rendezvous at Muaro Sijunjung Lane, Sijunjung Regency**

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Article history

Received : 2023-11-15

Accepted : 2025-04-20

Published : 2025-04-24

Keywords

Romusha,
Forced labor,
Japan,
Railway,
Muaro Sijunjung

Abstract: The regime changes from the Dutch Colonial to the Dai Nippon government initially brought good news for the movement leaders. However, within 3,5 years of its reign, it brought suffering to the Indonesian people. This article aims to analyze the process of Japanese entry into Indonesia, describe the beginning and course of the *Romusha* policy in Indonesia, and analyze the impact of the Dai Nippon government's miserable forced labor along the Muaro Sijunjung route. This article uses historical methods, including heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. One of the Dai Nippon government's policies towards society was the *Romusha*. The massive work of building a mass transport line connecting the point of Muaro Sijunjung to Pekanbaru and the ports on the East Coast of Sumatra was massive, requiring hundreds of human beings. The massive recruitment of human labor was carried out using various strategies and the propaganda of movement figures. The inhumane treatment and killing of *Romusha* workers were one of the various treatments they received from 1943 to 1945 in Muaro Sijunjung, West Sumatra.

Abstrak: Pergantian rezim dari Kolonial Belanda kepada pemerintah Dai Nippon, awalnya membawa kabar gembira, untuk kalangan tokoh pergerakan. Namun, dalam 3,5 tahun masa pemerintahannya, justru membawa penderitaan untuk rakyat Indonesia. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis proses masuknya Jepang ke Indonesia, menguraikan awal dan jalannya kebijakan *Romusha* di Indonesia, dan menganalisis dampak kerja paksa pemerintah Dai Nippon yang menyengsarakan sepanjang rute Muaro Sijunjung. Artikel ini disusun dalam metode sejarah, yang terdiri dari heuristik, kritik, interpretasi, dan historiografi. Satu dari sekian kebijakan pemerintah Dai Nippon terhadap masyarakat adalah *Romusha*. Pekerjaan besar-besaran membangun jalur transportasi massal yang menghubungkan titik Muaro Sijunjung menuju Pekanbaru dan pelabuhan di Pantai Timur Sumatra, adalah pekerjaan massal—yang membutuhkan ratusan manusia. Untuk merekrut besar-besaran tenaga manusia itu, dilakukan dengan beragam strategi dan melalui propaganda tokoh-tokoh pergerakan. Perlakuan yang tidak manusiawi dan pembunuhan terhadap tenaga *Romusha* adalah satu dari bermacam perlakuan yang diterima mereka sejak 1943-1945 di Muaro Sijunjung, Sumatra Barat.

INTRODUCTION

Dai Nippon's rule in Indonesia was the worst phase, especially regarding the forced labor policy applied in the colony. This grey record is certainly shown by the traces of violence that spread from Muaro Sijunjung in West Sumatra to Riau. No less than hundreds of thousands of human lives were lost to serve the Japanese military's need for mass transport. For mass transport. The length of the railway that the *Romusha* workers worked on was about 220 kilometers. (Tarling, 2001). Through propaganda and promised welfare, hundreds of thousands of workers were mobilized from Java, including around Sumatra. The Dai Nippon government pursued various strategies to recruit the nation's children as *Romusha* workers. Jawa Hokokai propaganda certainly has a leading role, especially in convincing the grassroots to be willing to help Japan.



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Looking further back, in the early 20th century, Japan had long observed the strategic importance of Indonesia, in terms of abundant natural resources and human resources that could be mobilized, for the benefit of the Asia-Pacific War. The Japanese were keen enough to deploy espionage, both men and women disguised as medicine men, toy sellers, and commercial sex sellers (Womack, 2006).

From their espionage, the Japanese had a clear picture of the Dutch colonial military strength, territorial boundaries, scattered companies during economic liberalization, population distribution, potential economic wealth, and more. In fact, before landing in Indonesia, the Japanese had already propagated the 3A and convinced the local elite to support them as *Saudara Tua*.

Not surprisingly, the Japanese landing in Indonesia had something to do with their success in convincing the people that they were the leader, protector, and light of Asia. The presence of Dai Nippon was, for most of the nation's children, a hope - one that would lead them to a golden age, before the Company set foot in the archipelago.

Instead of being favorable, the honeymoon soon ended when the Japanese introduced the *Romusha* and *jugun ianfu* policies. As soon as the stripes were exposed, 1943 *Romusha* was propagated in the villages through the "hands" of the Jawa Hokokai. From being given adequate food supplies, food rations were reduced, to being given bran that poultry could consume. The Japanese dream of building a strong economic structure and accelerating the distribution of natural resources on the East Coast of Sumatra failed. The destruction of two major cities in Japan in mid-August 1945 was the final cause of the forced labor policy that ended tragically.

The *Romusha* narrative and traces have been immortalized in the collective memory stored in Jorong Silukah, Nagari Durian Gadang, Sijunjung Regency. The traces of heritage that still survive are the former steam locomotive with the code CROP 1904, registered as cultural heritage by the Ministry of Education and Culture with ID PO2020032300001.

After Indonesia gained independence, records regarding former *Romusha* (forced laborers) returning to their respective hometowns show that, in the case of West Sumatra, only one individual returned to Java. The other eight chose not to return to Central Java and settled in Durian Gadang and Muaro Sijunjung (Haluan, 1982). Of all the *romusha* whom the Japanese relocated to other

regions, only one person from Kalimantan returned to Jember in 1952. In 1951, five individuals managed to return from Kalimantan. Meanwhile, a total of 1,426 others were declared missing, with no further information about their whereabouts (*Het nieuwsblad voor Sumatra*, 1953).

To discuss this paper further, three questions are asked: how was the process of Japanese entry into Indonesia? How was the beginning and course of the *Romusha* policy, and what were the consequences of the forced labor of the Dai Nippon government on *Romusha* workers along Muaro Sijunjung?. All of these questions will be answered in the following discussion. This article aims to analyze the process of Japanese entry into Indonesia, describe the beginning and course of the *Romusha* policy in Indonesia, and analyze the impact of the Dai Nippon government's miserable forced labor along the Muaro Sijunjung route.

The track record of writing about *Romusha* in Indonesia is extensive, with various professional backgrounds. Tokuma Melber (2016) *The Labor Recruitment of Local Inhabitants as Romusha in Japanese-Occupied South East Asia* explains that Japan mobilized thousands of workers in Southeast Asia during World War II. While the history of Allied POWs deployed as forced laborers on the Burma-Siam "railway of death" is well known, the forced labor recruitment of residents, called *Romusha*, remains an almost untold story. His article introduces *Romusha*, focusing on the Burma-Siam Railway, and presents the methods used by the rulers to recruit locals in Java, Malaya, and Singapore. However, in his writing, Melber does not mention the existence of *Romusha* in Sumatra.

Aiko Kurasawa in *Sumber Sejarah Masa Pendudukan Jepang di Indonesia Bibliografi Beranotasi* reveals the relationship between Japan and Indonesia over the historical period. The article, summarized by the Directorate of History of the Ministry of Education and Culture, discusses several important items, ranging from the existence of Islam, ethnic Chinese, diversity, identity, to the issue of relations between Indonesia and Japan (Lohanda, 1993). However, the article does not address the railway line construction originating from Muaro Sijunjung.

Kevin Baird (2016) in *War Crimes in Japan-Occupied Indonesia: Unraveling the Persecution of Achmad Mochtar* uncovering Japanese atrocities against the *Romusha* posed a serious threat to Indonesia. The facts of the *Romusha* programme provide a foundation for understanding the events in early August 1944 at a *Romusha* transit camp on the

outskirts of Jakarta. However, in his writing, he did not discuss *Romusha's* issue in Muara Sijunjung.

Aiko Kurasawa (1993) tells the story of the mobilisation carried out by the Dai Nippon government to realise its ambitions. All of Japan's policies were a combination of control and mobilisation, which resulted in a society experiencing unprecedented turmoil: the exploitation of economic resources led to widespread poverty, the recruitment of rural labor as *Romusha* resulted in the disruption of agricultural activities, the distance between various social groups sharpened, and the prestige of the traditional ruling class was seriously undermined. However, the discussion of *Romusha* in West Sumatra is limited.

Dai Nippon's politics of forced labor relates to the concepts of Karl Marx's theory of class conflict and Antonio Gramsci's hegemony. Karl Marx considered that a class conflict occurred due to differences in access to power. In this case, the access referred to by Marx is the facility of capital (money) that can create two classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Furthermore, Marx considered conflict to be a form of class conflict and then expanded it to the world to control weak groups and regions. Both class differences and social inequality in the world have led to prolonged conflict. The direct impact is that some groups/countries seem to dominate and some are dominated (colonized) only because of class differences to control their economic resources. (Marx, 1973; Marx, 2006; Wetherly, 1992).

Hegemony is a term that refers to the dominance or influence that certain groups or classes in society have over other groups. However, in Gramsci's view, hegemony is not only achieved through violence or physical control, but also through the control of culture, social norms, and ideology. According to Gramsci, the dominant group or class secures its hegemony by controlling and influencing social institutions, such as the media, education, religion, and intellectual groups. They create societal consensus by promoting their values, worldviews, and ideologies as widely accepted norms. In this way, the interests and values of the dominant group become the generalized interests and values (Grelle, 2016; Holub, 2005; Nemeth, 1980).

The initial hegemony exercised by Dai Nippon in Southeast Asia was to lead other social groups (the ruled) to act according to their wishes, ostensibly without coercion. They used agents from the ruled group to gain their trust, in the form of policies that seemed good for the ruled group/

country. When economic needs were pressing due to World War II, Dai Nippon imposed violent means to obtain economic resources by employing human labor to build railway lines. Violence, on the other hand, is an act of aggression that any person can commit that is necessary for survival. Violence includes actions such as restraining, reducing, or denying someone's rights, intimidating, slandering, and terrorizing others. This type of violence is also called indirect violence (Suryawan, 2010). All these concepts will be used to analyze the forced *Romusha* policy and its impact on Muara Sijunjung.

METHOD

This paper uses the historical method, which includes four stages: heuristics, source criticism, synthesis analysis (interpretation), and writing (Gottschalk, 1950; Kartodirdjo, 1992; Kuntowijoyo, 2003; Sufyan, 2017). The first stage is heuristics. Heuristics is the stage of searching and collecting historical sources. The sources used in this paper are archives produced by both the Dutch and Indonesian colonial governments. These sources are found in the National Library of Indonesia and the National Archives of Indonesia, among others.

Archives are obtained in the form of personal manuscripts that individuals still keep. Other sources that can be used are newspapers and magazines published during the Dutch colonial and contemporary periods. Newspapers acquired included *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, *De Indische Courant*, *Trouw*, *Het Parool*, and others. As for the archives obtained, there are records of testimony from sources.

The second stage is source criticism, which can be divided into external and internal criticism (Kartodirdjo, 1992). External criticism is conducted to find the authenticity of the obtained archives, documents, and newspapers. The step taken is to ensure that the sources obtained are seen from the dating and quality of the paper. Meanwhile, internal criticism is carried out on the contents of these authentic documents to obtain the validity of the data they contain. At this stage, researchers cross-checked that the data collected from newspapers and documents.

The third stage is data analysis and synthesis (interpretation). Facts obtained from written sources are analysed using processual and structural analysis (Lloyd, 1987). Processual analysis was used to find the relationship between the *Romusha* policy for the railway line connecting Muara Sijunjung and Pekanbaru and the impact that the *Romusha* policy had on the workers, such as the misery, hun-

ger, and death they faced. Structural analysis was used to analyze the policies issued by the Dai Nippon government, especially the railway construction and its impact on the people in Muaro Sijunjung.

The fourth stage is the writing stage (historiography). Writing in the form of local history, about the presence of the Dai Nippon government in West Sumatra, the issuance of the *Romusha* policy, and the mobilisation of massive human labor from Java, to complete the point from Muaro Sijunjung to Pekanbaru.

MUARO SIJUNJUNG AND ESPIONAGE REPORTS

During the Dutch colonial period, Muaro Sijunjung was often reported in local newspapers and the Dutch-language press. This strategic area was the link between Gemeente Padang and the Sawahlunto/Sijunjung *afdeling*. The importance of this area increased when coal was discovered on the banks of Batang Lunto.

The discovery of "black gold" deposits on the banks of Batang Lunto was initially made by C de Groot in 1858, then continued upstream in Batang Kuantan by a young geologist named Willem Hendrik de Greve in 1870. De Greve was known as a genius young geologist. Before being assigned by the Governor General of the Dutch East Indies, Pieter Mijer, he had conducted tin exploration on Bangka Island from 1864 to 1867.

De Greve conducted geologic research for two years and wrote down his findings in *Het Ombilin Kolenveld in de Padangsche Bovenlanden en Het Transportstelsel op Sumatra's Westkust* (Greve, 1871). Unfortunately, his research did not last long. The current of Batang Kuantan swept away this young geologist on October 22, 1872. His body was buried in Nagari Durian Gadang, Afdeling Sawahlunto/Sijunjung. (Het Vaderland, 1872).

The acceleration of exploration and the establishment of a giant mining company in Sawahlunto changed the face of Muaro Sijunjung. The largest coal mining company in Sumatra was named Landsbedrijf de Ombilin Steenkolenontginning, also known in history as Ombilin Mijnen (Erman, 2005; Narny & Sufyan, 2016).

The area became important when the railway connected the mine pits to Emmahaven Port. Massive exploration and massive mobility to Sawahlunto have transformed this small town into a metropolis. The Dutch colonial government sent laborers from Java, including prisoners, to explore the underground mines. Since the operation of



Figure 1. Railroad Construction in Sumatra Westkust (Source: <https://www.zwp-lbstudie.nl/ned-ind/4a-sumut/44-wkp/index.htm>)

Ombilin Mijnen, this small mining town soon became an attraction for urbanization and the availability of various jobs (Bataviaasch nieuwsblad, 1926).

However, the story of the government's success in building a mining town in the late 19th century also leaves a question mark for the mine workers, who were increasingly exploited by capitalism. The leftist movement led by the PKI *afdeling* Padang, and Sarekat Rakyat Silungkang, immediately voiced protests and resistance to capitalism and the miserable *belasting* on 16 November 1926 and 1 January 1927 (Sufyan, 2021b).

The resistance, which was launched at different times, failed. The premature revolution also sacrificed its children. Many died, some of the leading figures were sentenced to death, imprisoned in Cipinang Batavia, and banished to Boven Digoel (De Indische courant, 1927; Sumatra-courant, 1927). Amidst the failure of the resistance against the Dutch Colonialists, the Japanese entered as espionage, to look for weak points in the government and mineral mines controlled by the Dutch. When did they arrive in Indonesia?

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the Dutch East Indies government had applied double standards towards its citizens who were considered

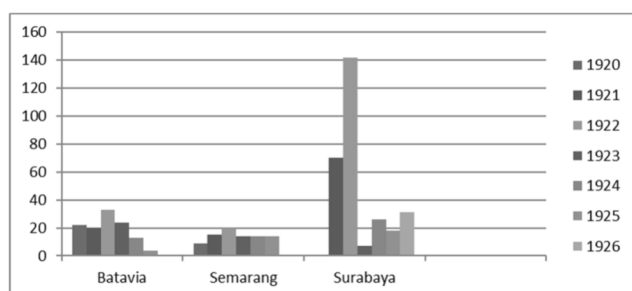


Figure 2. Trend in the arrival rate of Japanese entrepreneurs (Source: Extracted from Shiraishi, 1998.)

Far Easterners. This special treatment was given to Chinese, Riveters (Indians), Arabs, and Japanese. Moreover, the first wave of their arrival in Indonesia was recorded in 1912. The arrival of Japanese people to Indonesia began in the early 20th century, in 1912. The first wave of people who came to Batavia were generally travelling merchants and shopkeepers (Shiraishi, 1998).

In the first period of its arrival, the diplomatic history archive of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs writes that shopkeeping was Indonesia's main type of trading activity. In that year, there were 56 travelling merchants, of whom 38 sold medicines. An upward trend in the arrival rate of Japanese entrepreneurs was seen eight years later.

From Figure 2, the arrival of the Japanese to Java in large numbers started in 1920 and decreased from 1926. It is known that since 1920, Batavia has accommodated 22 Japanese people, and 7 people of Japanese origin were found in Semarang. Entering 1922-1925, each region again received migrants from Japan. Batavia has been visited by 20 Japanese (1921), 33 people (1922), 24 people (1923), 13 people (1924), and 4 people in 1925. In 1926, no Japanese were even found. The total number of Japanese in Batavia from 1920 to 1925 was 116 people.

In the Semarang area, 7 Japanese had settled in 1920, 15 in 1921, 20 in 1922, and 49 in 1923-1925. Thus, the total number of Japanese who stayed in Semarang was 84. In 1920, according to Shiraishi's statistics, there were no Japanese people

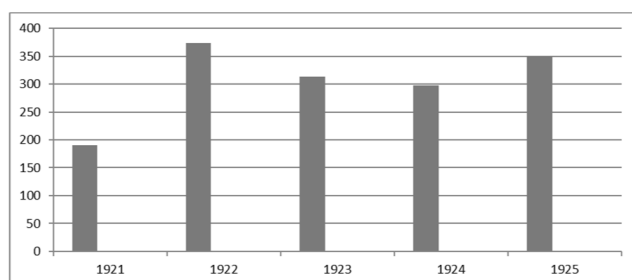


Figure 3. the arrival of Japanese people outside Java Island started from 1921 to 1925 (Source: Extracted from Shiraishi, 1998.)

in Surabaya. In 1921, 70 Japanese people settled in Surabaya, then jumped dramatically to 142 people, decreasing from 1923 to 17. Then 1924, there were 26 migrant arrivals, 18 people (1925), and again increased in 1926, as many as 31 people. The total number of Japanese who came to Surabaya was 304 people. Meanwhile, the arrival of Japanese people outside Java Island started from 1921 to 1925.

Figure 3 shows the fluctuating numbers of Japanese arrivals outside Java. In 1921, 190 Japanese migrants were dispersed, and in 1922 the number jumped to 374. In 1923, there was a decrease in the number of migrants scattered, namely 313 people, which continued to decline to 298 people and rose again in 1925 to 398 people. When calculated, the total number of Japanese who came to the islands outside Java was 1,275 people. So the total number of Japanese people who came to Indonesia in 1920-1926 was 1,779.

The statistics presented above, especially in 1925, are interesting to observe, because there was a stagnation in the number of migrants in Java and outside of it. I attribute this to a lack of willingness to abandon the old ways and to strive for progress. The old ways referred to here are the prostitution professions in which women predominate. This prostitution is mostly found in Medan City. Meanwhile, men living in West Sumatra and Riau mostly work as shopkeepers and photographers.

Unlike in Riau, Japanese espionage had taken control of the plantations. They were members of the Okuraesutêto company. This company processes coconut, rubber, and oil palm plantations. In addition, the company held contracts for raft crossing services that connected Riau with its neighboring regions.

In Siak Sri Indrapura, a businessman named Segawa bought 700 hectares of plantation land in Balai Kayang in 1939. He named his plantation company Baraikayan. The plantation was planted with rubber - the produce was exported to Singapore by KPM, which sailed every Sunday. The KPM returned to the East Coast of Sumatra loaded with rice, sugar, milk, sarongs, suits, shirts, and more (Asmuni, 1982).

DAI NIPPON MILITARY IN WEST SUMATRA

After Japan conquered the Malay Peninsula, the Allied alliance moved its personnel to Sumatra in December 1941. Firstly, British and Australian bombers were moved south of the island to recover from the defeat in the Malay Peninsula. In addition,

a convoy brought 3,400 Australian soldiers to Sumatra.

In a joint conference on 16 December 1941, the Dutch requested assistance to strengthen the defenses of Sumatra and Java. Furthermore, plans were made in Sabang to set up supply camps in Medan and Pekanbaru. However, these plans were revised on December 27, 1941, with the Pangkalan Benteng and Prabumulih airfields of South Sumatra chosen as the new headquarters' location to house the operational bomber relay.

The poor state of the airfield at Prabumulih forced the Dutch to relocate the field staff who arrived in early January 1942. Another airfield was located at Oosthaven Bandar Lampung. The lack of anti-aircraft guns was rectified by delivering six Bofors anti-aircraft cannons at each Palembang airfield.

The Dutch military was further overwhelmed when they ran out of ammunition. The Dai Nippon military had sunk their ammunition carrier. The first Japanese air raid on 6 February 1942 hit the Benteng Base airfield. They lost two Blenheim bombers and four Hurricanes.

Why did the Japanese attack Palembang? The Japanese intended to pre-empt Dutch plans to damage oil installations near Palembang. From Palembang, the Japanese army soon spread towards the south and north of Sumatra. In mid-March, more troops landed on the north and east coasts of Sumatra and moved rapidly southwards.

By land, the Japanese destroyed two Buffaloes. During the attack, the Allies could only shoot down one Japanese Nakajima Ki-43 aircraft. As a countermeasure, the Allies attacked at night against the Japanese demarcation line on the Malay Peninsula. This attack was also intended to protect a convoy of refugees from Singapore. What was the process of Japanese entry into West Sumatra?

Ahead of the entry of the Japanese, Dutch soldiers of Ambon, Menado, and Javanese ethnicity often patrolled up to the district level, sweeping for Japanese suspected to be still in the area. Sometimes, the patrols extended as far as the borders of West Sumatra and Jambi.

Other activities of the Dutch Government in West Sumatra included intensifying exercises such as the City Guard (*Stadswacht*), Nagari Management (*Landswacht*), Air Danger Guard (*Suchtbasher Min Dinst*), and Red Cross (*Rode Kruis*) exercises to deal with first aid in accidents. These exercises were intended to deal with emergencies. Once a week, for example, in the Sijunjung District, exercises are held to overcome the danger

of air raids. This exercise was prioritized for Dutch ambassadors and their families.

If an enemy flying boat passes by, or the sound of a serenade is heard, they are told to get into the hood of the cauldron and bite off a piece of rubber and cover their ears with cotton wool to prevent the enemy dropping bombs. Also, to avoid bomb fragments". (Munir Indra (93 years old), interview, 29 February 2020 in Padang City).

Aside from conducting training exercises, in the last moments of its rule, the Dutch employed more scorched earth tactics, rather than via the Dai Nippon army. These scorched earth tactics aimed at vital objects in West Sumatra, aiming to impede the movement of Japanese troops.

In February 1942, the Japanese conducted two air raids on Padang's Simpangharu railway station. These air raids destroyed workshops and railway parts storage. Not satisfied with their attacks, in mid-January 1942, the Japanese again deployed seven bombers to Padang. Munir Indra further said:

After circling several times over the city of Padang, it headed straight for the Teluk Bayur (Emmahaven) area and dropped several bombs on ships that were docked. As a result, three large ships were sunk, part of the dock was burned and the coal loading bridge to the ships suffered heavy damage (Jami'an (85 years old), interview, 25 February 2020 in Nagari Durian Gadang).

BUNG KARNO AS THE NATIVE'S MOUTH-PIECE FOR DAI NIPPON

In mid-February 1942, Dutch soldiers were increasingly pressed by the Japanese. The Dutch, who wanted to escape Soekarno from Benkoelen to Australia, had to wait for a ship to be prepared in Padang. A messenger was sent to pick up Soekarno in Bengkulu. Previously, Bung Karno was in Bengkulu as a political prisoner exiled by the Dutch East Indies Government to Benkoelen in 1938 (Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad, 1941). In May 1938, to be precise (De Indische Courant, 1941).

To access Padang, KNIL soldiers travelled overland from Bengkulu. Passing through villages and jungles to avoid being noticed by the Japanese. However, the Dutch learned that the Japanese had taken control of Padang. So that Soekarno and his family were not taken because Dutch officials and soldiers saved themselves respectively (Sufyan, 2018b).

The purpose of the KNIL soldiers was to rush

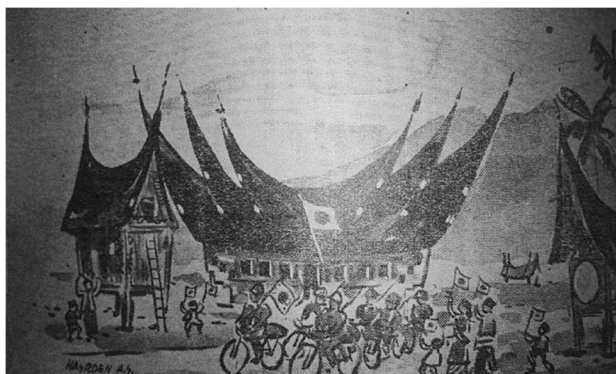


Figure 4. Nasroen AS's painting depicting the atmosphere of welcoming Dai Nippon soldiers in a nagari. Source: (Sufyan, 2018b).

Soekarno to Padang so that he would not fall into Japanese hands. The Dutch worried that the Japanese would use Soekarno for anti-Dutch propaganda. When the KNIL army group arrived in Painan, they heard that the Japanese army had arrived in Bukittinggi.

The Dutch changed their original plan by evacuating Soekarno to Barus and leaving Soekarno in Painan. At that time, Hizbul Wathan, which was based at the Ganting Grand Mosque and the People's Committee led by Samik Ibrahim, picked up Soekarno in Painan to be taken to Padang using a Japanese cart.

The failure of the Dutch to take Sukarno to Australia caused Sukarno to be stranded in Padang for the next five months. Soekarno and Inggit initially stayed at Egon Hakim's house. Then they moved to the house of an old friend from Manado, Waworuntu. Soekarno's whereabouts soon became known to Japanese intelligence. Several people were sent to meet Soekarno, one of them, Captain Sakaguchi, a Japanese Sendenbu (Propaganda Department) officer (Zed, Mestika, Edy Utama, 1998). Japan officially entered Padang Township on 18 March 1942. For the record, the 25th Army (Dai Nippon Teikoku Rikugun) fully captured Padang City and West Sumatra as part of the Greater East Asia War (Levine, 1992).

In March 1942, the Japanese military government in Padang City brought Soekarno to the highest Japanese military leader in Sumatra, based at Fort de Kock. It was from Fort de Kock that the strategic co-operation between the Japanese military leadership and the Indonesian political leadership began to be designed.

After the territory's handover, the military command was immediately placed under Colonel Fujiyama in Bukittinggi. Soekarno's arrival at Fort de Kock was welcomed by the commander of the F-Kikan Movement, intelligence that had infiltrated

Sumatra before the fall of the Dutch. In the dialogue that lasted two hours, Fujiyama told Soekarno to be willing to cooperate with Japan.

The main order of the Japanese military in Padang, by Law number 1, article 1, of 1942 - was only to organize military rule temporarily, as the newspaper of the time, *Ken Po*, reported in 1942, "The Nippon Army institutes temporary military rule in the areas that have been occupied, in order to bring about immediate and peaceful security".

Soekarno's presence in Padang (then to Fort de Kock) was strongly suspected of being known to Parada Harahap and Mohammad Hatta. This may have been because Parada Harahap and M. Hatta had collaborated with the Japanese since the Dutch era. In November 1933, Parada Harahap led the first group of seven Indonesians to Japan. This group included M. Hatta, who had just graduated from university in the Netherlands. Another important figure in the group was Abdullah Lubis, leader of the *Pewartu Deli* newspaper in Medan.

At first, the people of Padang panicked, as did the Dutch. However, with the 3A propaganda (Japan is the Leader of Asia, Japan is the Protector of Asia, and Japan is the Light of Asia), the people welcomed Japan back.

Soekarno saw the presence of Japan being hailed by the people. The people shouted "Merdeka, Banzai, Hidup Jepang!" on the streets. Soekarno felt the euphoria of the people welcoming the Old Brother who would liberate the Young Brother. While walking along the city streets, Soekarno also saw many people who were neglected, weak, and could not be protected properly. As a freedom advocate who had just been released from a Dutch prison, Soekarno resumed movement activities that had long been abandoned.

Soekarno understood the people's hopes, but he also knew that at any time, the cruelty of the Japanese army was inevitable. Soekarno chose to cooperate with the Japanese in the largest city on the west coast of Sumatra. Kahin (2008) Bung Karno heavily influenced events at the beginning of the Japanese occupation in Padang. During his two-month stay in Padang, Bung Karno acted as a spokesman for figures in West Sumatra, in negotiations with the Japanese military.

During his stay in Padang, Bung Karno showed his influence and cooperated. When PNI leaders held a meeting at the Bumiputra office owned by merchant Anwar Sutan Saidi, they were divided into pro and contra Japanese groups. As Director of the National Bank and its trading organizations, Anwar avoided politics and engaged in

economics to raise funds and weapons for the independence revolution. The other group, led by Tami-mi Usman, favored Sutan Sjahrir's non-cooperative, underground approach (Sufyan, 2021a).

Besides supporting Japan, Soekarno asked Captain Sakaguchi to cancel the order to lower the red and white flag. Even though he was rejected, he was increasingly seen by the Japanese as a representative of the people. He is increasingly present among other movement figures in West Sumatra.

Three days later, Sakaguchi met him, delivering a message from the Dai Nippon Sumatra Command based in Bukittinggi, on the way to Bukittinggi, the love of the people of West Sumatra for Soekarno thickened. At every railway station, he was welcomed like a hero. A year later, Bung Karno had a hand in moving hundreds of thousands of people into manual labor to help with giant projects, known in history as *Romusha*.

ROMUSHA, KILLERS OF HUMANITY IN MUARO SIJUNJUNG

Chronology of *Romusha* Policy and Recruitment

Romusha comes from the Japanese language, which means manual laborers. However, in Indonesian history, this term has a special meaning that reminds people of a bitter experience under the Japanese government. For Indonesians, *Romusha* means coolie laborers who were mobilised for manual labor under Japanese military rule and treated inhumanely. (Kurasawa, 1993).

According to Koichi Kimura (2007) The *Romusha* policy originated from the Greater East Asia policy and the escalation of the Asia-Pacific War, which was a headache for the Tenno Heika. To meet the need for labor, Tenno Heika instructed compulsory *Romusha* work to the population for various Japanese purposes, such as building roads, railways, bridges, forts, and protection tunnels. In addition, civil servants, merchants, school children, and residents who did not participate in forced labor were subjected to *kinro hoshi*, community service to collect river stones, sand, and gravel and transport them to the necessary places.

To meet the needs of mass transportation, a network of railways was built to mobilise natural resources for military industrial purposes, including oil, rubber, mining, and the plundering of natural resources. The military built a railway between Muaro Sijunjung and Pekanbaru to facilitate logistical distribution and exploitation of natural resources.

The railway construction from Muaro Sijunjung to Pekanbaru required a lot of labor. This

was a major problem for the Japanese because the number of local people along the railway was sparse.

If people were to work from Lubuk Ambacang to Pekanbaru, the Dai Nippon government only required male residents aged 16-45. This number was far from sufficient. The Japanese military government was forced to bring in laborers from Java to cope. At that time, Java was the most densely populated area. In addition, the Japanese occupation government also sought laborers from the island of Sumatra. (Sufyan, 2018a).

Romusha laborers were assigned to install railway tracks from Muaro Sijunjung to Pekanbaru. The largest recruitment centres in West Sumatra, especially in Sijunjung, were Muaro Sijunjung, Kumanih, Sumpur Kudus, and Silantai. The mode used by the Dai Nippon military in recruiting *Romusha* labor was relatively diverse, both in West Sumatra, Riau, and Java.

Through Japanese propaganda

In order to encourage the people to participate in becoming *Romusha* workers and to increase the spirit of work, the Sijunjung Fuku Gun government carried out various propaganda. Through its propaganda, Japan indoctrinated that this work was a noble service, appreciation, and respect for the *Romusha*. also expressed by organizing a large release ceremony at their departure. (Mardjani, 1977).

For those interested, the Japanese government promised a salary of 300 cents and an adequate supply of foodstuffs that were distributed free of charge. In addition, lodging plus work clothes were provided. Many young men aged 18 to 25 were interested in registering as *Romusha* workers.

Involving the local government

To further its propaganda efforts to recruit *Romusha* labor in Java and West Sumatra villages, the Fuku Gun government involved local officials. Through these officials, it was conveyed that this type of work was a mutual aid endeavor. According to Damhoeri in his testimony, "But if you refused, you were accused of being anti-Nippon. The official even said that he would be shot or persecuted by the Japanese Kampetai," explained Munir Indra (interview, 29 February 2020, in Padang City).

However, the *pangreh praja*'s efforts were less effective. The Dai Nippon government began to pursue a cunning strategy. They gathered young people under the pretext of training. After gathering at the Fukun Gan office, they were forcibly transported to Logas. They were generally employed

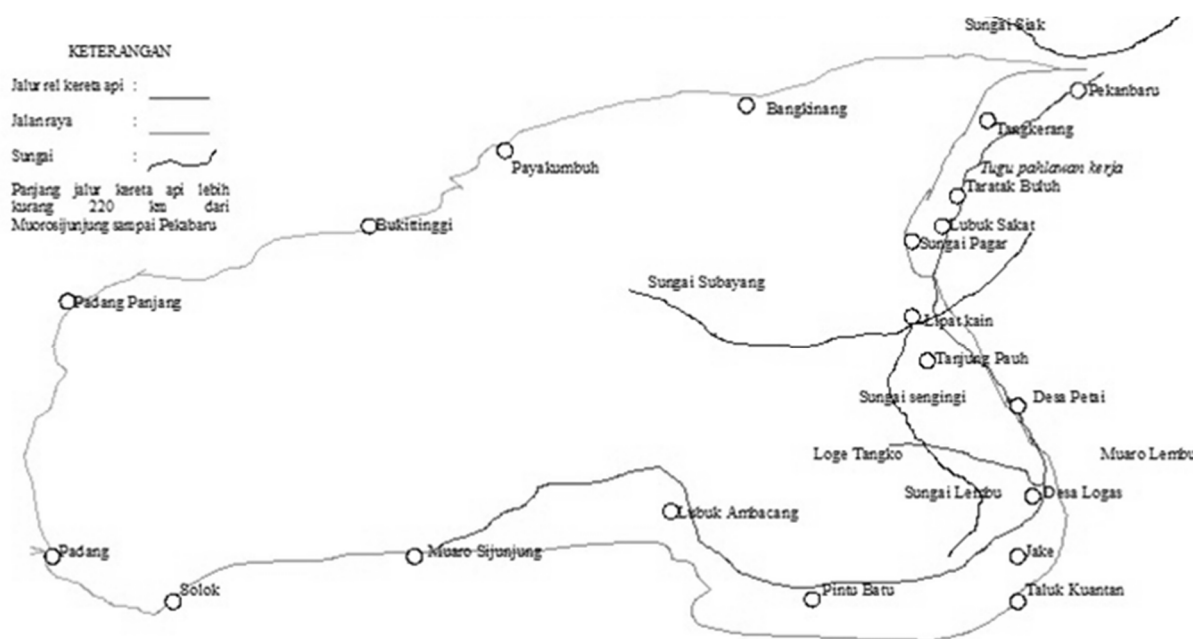


Figure 5. Railway Line from West Sumatra to Logas Village (Source: Processed from Food. Ration in Sumatera Military Administration, 1970.)

for approximately one month in shifts. Another case occurred in Riau, where the youth were taken in each Ku by force, as many as 100 people. These *Romusha* laborers worked on a short-term rotating system, called Kinrohoshi (Sufyan, 2022). In Fuku Gun Sijunjung, each *nagari* head was required to rotate laborers to Muaro Sijunjung and Logas. The workers were then collected in each *nagari* and sent to Pekanbaru.

By Force

As the saying goes, “as clever as it is to save a carcass, it eventually smells”. Likewise, the trickery of the Dai Nippon government was finally known to the public. The Dai Nippon government began to think about suppressing and threatening prospective *Romusha* workers. The Fuku Gun government ordered young men between 18 and 35 to come to the *nagari* and village guardian offices on the pretense of important business. However, some were forced to come after being “picked up” by Japanese soldiers. After being registered, they were not allowed to return to their homes. Then they were gathered at Fuku Gun.

The second tactic used by the Fuku Gun government was to conduct selections in the streets and markets and kidnap young men. Deception was also pursued through summonses. The third tactic was through invitations to the cinema. At that time, cinemas - especially those close to Fuku Gan (read: District) Sijunjung - were owned by the company *Hokkaido Tanko Kisen Kabushiki Kaisha*, or

now known as Bukit Asam Coal Mining Company - Ombilin Mining Unit (PTBA-UPO) Sawahlunto (Narny & Sufyan, 2016).

When they showed the film of Japan's heroic battles in the Asia Pacific in the cinema, dozens of Japanese military trucks were waiting in the parking lot. Dozens of young men were rounded up and put into the trucks, and their lives as *Romusha* laborers in Muaro Sijunjung and Logas were transformed.

Volunteer labor is sent not only to Logas but also outside Indonesia. Karja Wiredja from Madukara Banjarnegara, Central Java, was sent to Thailand as a *Romusha* laborer, along with thousands of others. Karja was assigned as a foreman, supervising railway work between Nong Pla Duk (Thailand) and Thanbyuzayet (Burma). The railway line they had to build was 415 kilometres long. Karja was paid 2 cents per day for his labor. Apart from Karja, Sadin - a young man from Kuningan, West Java, was sent to Thailand as a manual laborer. He never expected to be sent across the sea, only to be used as a *Romusha* (Mukhti, 2010).

Railway Work Begins, Victims Fall

The Japanese railway lighthouse project, when examined far back, is a continuation of the development of railway access that the *Staatsspoorwegen* Service failed to build. In planning the construction of the Muarakalaban-Tembilahan railway line, the Dutch Colonial government planned to build access to Muaro Sijunjung-Lahat-Muara Lembu Kuantan Singingi, and Air Molek.

In the implementation of the construction,

the Muaro-Kalaban -Padang Sibusuk segment was built along 6.2 km, followed by the construction of the Padang Sibusuk-Muaro Sijunjung segment (19.9 km), which was inaugurated on 1 March 1924. Plans to build a railway line between Muaro and Pekanbaru had begun in the early 20th century. However, for various reasons, the central government in the Netherlands was not interested in following up on this plan. In 1920, *Staatsspoorwegen* resumed its previous explorations and commissioned Ir. W.H. de Grave and Ir. W.J.M. Nivel will study and research the possibility of building the best railway route to the east coast of Sumatra. He wrote the research report and technical guidelines for the construction of this line in *Staatsspoorwegen* document no.19 of 1927 (Reitsma, 1925).

The economic depression and the malaise that hit the world had a major impact on the Dutch East Indies. In 1933, the construction of the Muara-kalaban-Tembilahan railway line was halted. The reason was that the railway line had to be abandoned after considering that the exploitation of the railway line towards Pekanbaru, which relied mostly on 'black gold' (Hovinga, 2010).

According to the calculations of the coal mining company *Landsbedrijf de Oembilin Steenko-lenontginning*, or *Ombilin Mijnen*, the construction cost was not worth the returns from exploitation. In addition, the difficult terrain and the large number of malaria mosquito nests made the development costs even higher. These were why the project was not continued to the east coast of Sumatra.

In March 1943, a group of *Romusha* from Java arrived in Pekanbaru. They were tasked with building an emplacement in Pekanbaru to facilitate the construction of a railway line to the interior. The Japanese led the construction of a 220 km railway from Pekanbaru to the Strait of Malacca, with details in Pekanbaru along 180 km, and in Muaro Sijunjung, West Sumatra, about 40 km. The railway construction was carried out simultaneously between Pekanbaru and Muaro Sijunjung.

The two tracks met in Lubuk Ambacang, precisely in Logas village. This work was then added along 18 km in Logas village. The additional length of the railway was triggered by the economic motives of Dai Nippon, which discovered mineral mines in Loge Tangko. In the Logas area, according to the research results of Ir. W.H. de Grave, a tunnel should be built through Bukit Barisan. However, the Japanese army did not heed the opinion of the SS Engineers. Instead, they detoured next to the ravine and made the construction very poor.

Table 1. Food Rations for Japanese and Romusha Workers (1942-1945)

Residents	Type of Food	
	Rice	Fish
Japanese Citizens	550 gram	150 gram
Romusha Labor	250	75 gram

Source: Food. Ration in Sumatera Military Administration, 1970.

The Dai Nippon government used forced labor and prisoners of war. The construction was carried out over 15 months through mountains, swamps, and rivers. A total of 6,500 Dutch (mostly Indo-European) and British prisoners of war, plus more than 100,000 Indonesian Romusha (mostly Javanese), were mobilised by the Japanese military. At the beginning of their work, these *Romusha* were fed three times a day, complete with side dishes. They were given a rice ration of 250 grams per day and a side dish ration of 75 grams. For more details, see Table 1.

Every morning, *Romusha* laborers were only given a breakfast of sago the size of an adult's fist (*ogol-ogol sago*). In the afternoon and evening, they were given rice. The menu in the afternoon and evening was only rotten radish leaves, mixed with salt, and fried chilies. The daily rice ration for *Romusha* workers is estimated to be no more than the size of a fist, or 200 grams. Meanwhile, cooks in the public kitchen were usually taken from the *Romusha* workers or residents. One *Romusha* ration was given one sonduk of coconut shell. Their food plates were made of woven bamboo in the shape of a bowl (Abdullah, 1987).

The food ration was only available for three months. After that, they were always short, and some even starved. The Japanese army argued that *Romusha's* energy was not working optimally, resulting in a cut in food rations.

Try to imagine that wood that is so big and heavy must be carried on the shoulders. Moreover, the swamps along the railway road reached hundreds of metres, stockpiled using only a makeshift basket hoe. In return for their hard work they are given very little food, sometimes even less!" (Munir Indra, interview, 29 February 2020 in Kota Padang).

To cover their hunger, they look for mushrooms in the forest in the afternoon to survive and increase their appetite. Due to the lack of knowledge of which mushrooms to eat, many *Romusha* were drunk because they consumed rice fun-

gus. In addition to eating forest mushrooms, some ate rubber fruits, whose previous manufacturing process involved beating, soaking (to remove the poison), and burning. Physical and psychological torture and lack of food were the causes of *Romusha's* escape from the camps. Workers who were able to escape were generally in a miserable state.

Some went to Logas to build the railway from Muaro-Sijunjung to Pekanbaru, some to Teluk Bayur Padang, and others. They were forced to work and fed cassava flour mixed with dirty rice. Many *Romusha* who came from Java died of hunger, and many escaped to die in the Lisun forest (Yarsi, 2015).

According to estimates, each railway sleeper, which is only ½ metre away, is one human corpse. One kilometre equals 2000 corpses, and imagine that the distance between Muaro Sijunjung and Pekanbaru is more than 220 km, so the number of victims is around 4,400,000 people. Despite the many casualties, the Muaro Sijunjung to Pekanbaru railway was not completed until the proclamation of Indonesian independence.

Due to Carelessness, the Railway Cost Lives

The rail and sleeper materials were taken from *Delispoorweg Maatschappij* in North Sumatra. However, some workers saw materials from *Malang Stoomtram Maatschappij*. The Japanese also took rail vehicles and staff from DSM. Three DSM locomotives were taken. Two were 1B1 locomotives made by Hanomag (Nusantara, 1997). The railway was intended to transport coal, crops, and soldiers from Pekanbaru to another railway in Muaro Padang. Construction of the railway was completed on 15 August 1945. The railway was only used once to transport prisoners of war out of the area, and was left covered in forest.



Figure 6. Dai Nippon period locomotive site in Lipat Kain Village, Kampar Regency, Riau Province. Source: (Rizky, 2021).

The construction of the railway was haphazard because the Japanese soldiers and the *Romusha* did not know how to build a good railway. Railway sleepers were made from whatever wood was in the forest, so the sleepers broke when the rails were attached to the wood. When the railway crosses a swamp, the swamp is dug up without compacting, so the land is prone to subsidence when passed by trains. The railway bridge was also improvised, so the construction was fragile and could collapse at any time. Shortly before the Japanese surrender, on 13 August 1945, the train carrying the *Romusha* crashed at Logas and fell into a ravine.

After completing the Muaro-Pekanbaru segment on 15 August 1945, there were at least a few noteworthy occasions when the mass transportation system was in operation, especially after independence until 1946. First, from 24 to 30 August 1945, prisoners of war were evacuated by train to Pekanbaru. They were then transported to Singapore for medical treatment (Hovinga, 2010).

How about *Romusha's* in Thailand and Burma? Constructing a railway connecting Thailand and Burma was the only option for transporting troops and equipment overland. The long connecting route by sea was highly vulnerable to Allied attack. Dai Nippon, in charge of railway construction, drew up a large-scale Tetsudo Heita plan that envisaged a link between Thailand and Burma.

The majority of workers in Thailand and Burma were not prisoners of war. Rather, they were people from Java, Burma, and Malaya. Forced labor was used in various sectors, but not all were forced. Moreover, conditions for forced laborers can be very different, even on the Burma-Siam railway. At the same time as the Japanese increasingly used force to recruit labor, locals found ways to avoid forced recruitment. Others sought to volunteer for the Heiho (Melber, 2016).

Indeed, the prospect of recruitment for construction work on the Burma-Siam Railway was greatly feared by all Malayan locals, their fears mainly fueled by reports from returnees of appalling working conditions. Ironically, many returnees had volunteered to work on the railway, but ran away.

The route partly passed through rocky, rugged, and difficult terrain to conquer. The labor required was initially from prisoners of war. However, it was not possible. The construction of the Burma railway from Non Pladuk to Moulmein involved as many as 278.000 people, including 61,000 prisoners of war and 200.000 Asian workers, most of whom were recruited from Java. They were called

Romusha, not coolies as in the colonial period. Elsewhere, the Japanese dubbed them “production fighters.” (Trouw, 1983).

They were the most miserable group sent to the jungle without organization, medicine, or assistance. They had to do the same and sometimes harder work than prisoners of war. There are several testimonies from POWs who saw them working, or dying, lying under and among the trees. They were even shocked by the sight.

According to De Jong, of the 120,000 *Romusha* transferred to Sumatra, less than 23,000 survived; of the 31,000 transported to Singapore and Malacca, only 10,000 survived. Of the 31,700 employed in British Borneo, only 2,500 survived. It is also known that none of the large group employed in Dutch Borneo to build the Banjarmasin-Samarinda road in the north survived. So, of all the *Romusha* forced to leave Java (estimated at more than 300,000), only 77,000 returned (Het Parool, 1985).

Suratman and Emok: Memory of a former *Romusha* in Durian Gadang and Banten

Suratman, from Lubang Kidul Village, Boto Subdistrict, Purworejo, Central Java, is one of the former *Romusha* who testified to the cruelty of the Dai Nippon army. He is one of the few individuals who witnessed forced labor during the rule of the Dai Nippon. He was one of the tens of thousands of *Romusha* who worked to build the railway line connecting Muaro Sijunjung to Pekanbaru (Suratman, 2015).

Suratman narrates his experiences as a *Romusha*, although he often forgets the details. The story begins when he was 18 years old. In his village, he joined the Kinro Hoshi organized by the Dai Nippon army. Recalling the events around 1943, he said, “The promise was that I would be sent to school.” (Yarsi, 2015)

Being lured to continue his studies was certainly attractive to him. This was because of his great desire to become a student. He left his home village and his work as a farmer. Suratman left with Dullah, who was two years younger. They were taken to Ambarawa with a group of people from various villages in Central Java. A train transported them to Jakarta from Ambarawa.

The promise to go to school was just a promise from the Japanese army. After arriving in Jakarta, Suratman and the group from Ambarawa were immediately herded to Tanjung Priok Harbour. They joined thousands of others who were ready to depart by ship. The destination was Emmahaven

Port in West Sumatra. Suratman's dreams were dashed when he discovered he was only used as a *Romusha*. Because they were separated, Suratman did not know what happened to Dullah.

Suratman, Turijan, and their friends later joined thousands who wanted to become *Romusha* in Tanjung Priok. They were taken to Teluk Bayur and transported by train to Muaro Sijunjung. Every day, he worked digging up hills to make tunnels and filling in valleys for the railway bed (Laksono, 2012).

Suratman testified that the *Romusha* working in his group were all from Java. He did not know that the Japanese also employed Caucasians when building the railway line, especially from the direction of Pekanbaru, since mid-1944. There were more than 5,000 of them. Most of the white *Romusha* were Dutch prisoners of war.

The experience that sticks in his memory the most is working on a cliff, Ngatau Cigak. One night in 1944, while hundreds of men were still working at the foot of the cliff, he suddenly heard a dynamite explosion from above.

The cliff above collapsed within seconds. Suratman managed to save himself. Unfortunately, the other *Romusha* did not have time to escape. The ruins of the cliff crushed them. That night, he could only hear the screams and heartbreaking cries of his colleagues who fell into the ravine (Kompas, 2009).

The next morning, he saw bodies strewn across the streets. Some of them had been crushed to death by trees. There was a rancid corpse odor everywhere. Among the victims of the explosion, some were buried, while others were washed into the Kuantan River that flows nearby.

During their forced labor, the *Romusha* were fed only the bare minimum: a fistful of rice with salt. The only clothes they wore were burlap sacks molded to cover their bodies and *torok*, the local term for bark. If they were sick, they had only two options: find their own medicine from the available plants or die. “We are not allowed to help each other. If we were caught, we could get beaten or not be fed by the Japanese soldiers,” he said. (Suratman, 2015).

Under such conditions, it makes sense that many *Romusha* tried to escape. Among those who dared to take that risk and survived after escaping was Turijan. This *Romusha* had worked on the same railway line that was worked on from the direction of Pekanbaru. The Javanese forced laborers were placed as workers around the Singigi River area, which is included in Kuantan, Riau.

The behaviour of the Japanese military at that

time was very bad. In addition, the torture was carried out in front of other *Romusha*. Turijan finally decided to run away because he could not stand such treatment. Every day, he was forced to witness torture and was not even fed. He turned out to have his abilities. He escaped into the wilderness with six other *Romusha*. Dai Nippon soldiers did not closely watch him.

He said that during his escape, he was always afraid because the Japanese soldiers kept hunting down those who escaped. In addition, he did not dare to visit the hamlets for fear of being reported by the locals. He ate everything in the forest, including leaves, to survive.

Turijan hid around Logas in the final moments before the Japanese surrendered. He arrived in Nagari Paru, Sijunjung District, after returning to the forest after reaching the Loge area. After that, he chose to stay in Jorong III, where he lived with his children, son-in-law, and grandchildren. About a year after the Japanese surrendered, Suratman returned to Silukah to set up a new life as a farmer like he had done in Java. It was also here in Silukah that he married a woman named Sinem.

The heartbreaking story of the *Romusha* was also revealed by Haji Emok - a gravedigger for 3000 *Romusha* in Lebak Regency, West Java. At that time, Emok was appointed by Japanese soldiers to bury the *Romusha* who died while working on the Saketi-Bayah railway line (South Banten). The railway line was 90 kilometres long and had to be built under harsh conditions to transport coal from mines near Bayah. During the forced labor, 300.000 *Romusha* died from starvation, infectious diseases, and abuse (De Waarheid, 1985).

The dead were not buried, but buried underground endlessly near the railway tracks. There were days when the bodies could not be buried on the same day, and they would rot. Every day, Emok had to bury five to seven bodies of forced laborers, and the image haunted him throughout his life.

CONCLUSION

The *Romusha* policy was implemented during the Dai Nippon period through mass mobilizing human labor in the Southeast Asian region. In Indonesia, it occurred in several areas, such as Muaro Sijunjung - Pekanbaru, Banjarmasin - Samarinda, Saketi - Bayah South Banten, and others. While in other regions in Southeast Asia, it occurred on the Thailand-Burma, Singapore-Malaya, and British Borneo routes. This policy of violence and human slavery has made life miserable for the local population, including prisoners of war. The Japanese gov-

ernment's foul propaganda had deceived them into agreeing to forced labor. The railroad laborers, who generally came from Java, were recruited using various strategies. They were recruited with various strategies, ranging from subtle methods to acts of violence, so they were willing to leave for West Sumatra. The treatment of these forced laborers was horrific. Those who initially arrived healthy and well-fed during their time in the labor camp were treated inhumanely for the next month. They were fed rice that had been mixed with chicken food. As a result, many *Romusha* suffered from hunger pains and died of starvation from Muaro Sijunjung to Logas. Even though they were sick, the *Romusha* were still forced to work. Some who could not stand the cruelty of the Dai Nippon army chose to escape. Those who were recaptured would end their lives tragically. Some survivors, like Suratman, chose Durian Gadang as their hiding place. Research on violence during the *Romusha* policy can certainly be explored by researchers from different locations, especially in Southeast Asia, and different disciplinary approaches.

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