

The Malayan Emergency Leaflets: Its Roles and Effects in The “Psychological War” against Communism during The Malayan Emergency Period

Risalah Darurat: Peranan Dan Kesannya Terhadap “Perang Saraf” Dalam Melawan Komunis Semasa Zaman Darurat Di Tanah Melayu

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ABSTRACT

During the Second World War period, the propaganda leaflets are widely utilized by the Japanese and Allied Powers to spread their propaganda in their colonial sphere. In the case of Malaya, the British eventually has decided to use the same method to fight against the communist insurgency by 1950. This method is also known as a part of ‘Perang Saraf’ throughout the Malayan Emergency period. Upon the Emergency leaflets distribution all over Malaya, many insurgents and civilians were convinced to cooperate to end the terror. This study, therefore, attempts to analyze the British modus operandi in the ‘Psychological War’ within the Malayan Emergency period. Besides, it is crucial to re-examine the contents and the purposes of the Emergency Leaflets from different perspectives. As a result, the distribution of the Emergency leaflets has eradicated the influences of communism. Hence, it had increased the cooperation of its insurgents, spies, and civilians with authority. This paper utilizes sources like the Emergency Leaflets samples, the British Military Administration records, colonial period newspapers, articles journal, and books related to the issue. Finally, this paper will hopefully contribute towards the understanding of the ‘Psychological War’ as an essential method of saving the energy, expenses, and most importantly, the lives of innocent civilians.

Keywords: *Malayan Emergency Leaflets, communist, propaganda, Malaya*

ABSTRAK

Semasa meletusnya Perang Dunia Ke-dua, banyak risalah propaganda telah digunakan oleh pihak Jepun dan Tentera Bersekutu bagi menyebarkan dakyah serta propaganda dalam lingkungan jajahan mereka. Dalam kes di Tanah Melayu, pihak British telah berkeputusan untuk menggunakan kaedah yang sama bagi melawan keganasan Komunis pada tahun 1950. Kaedah ini juga adalah sebahagian dari pelancaran “Perang Saraf” ketika Zaman Darurat berlangsung. Disamping ini, adalah amat penting bagi kajian ini untuk meneliti semula kandungan-kandungan serta tujuan-tujuan Risalah Darurat dari sudut yang berlainan. Hasil utama yang dapt dilihat melalui penyebaran risalah-risalah ini telah menyebabkan berkurangnya pengaruh Komunisme. Kajian ini menggunakan bahan-bahan primer seperti sampel-sampel Risalah Darurt, catatan Pentadbiran Ketenteraan British, akhbar-akhbar zaman penjajahan serta sumber sekunder seperti artikel-artikel jurnal dan buku-buku yang berkaitan dengan isu yang berkaitan. Adalah diharapkan kajian ini dapat memberikan sumbangan pengetahuan terhadap kaitan risalah Darurat dengan ‘Perang Saraf’ sebagai

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antara langkah penting bagi menjimatkan tenaga dan perberlanjaan serta dapat menyelamatkan nyawa masyarakat kebanyakan.

Keywords: *Risalah Darurat, komunis, propaganda, Tanah Melayu*

Introduction: The Psychological War paradigm

The role of propaganda in wartime history is very crucial for the parties involved in the same conflict. It is used to describe the hideous and insightful attitude of the enemy, and self-glorifying the counter-party. It believed that "the propaganda is a vital element of the modern total warfare as are tanks, guns, aircraft, and man". Good wartime propaganda always depends on the structural apparatus that would be used to convey towards different kinds of subjects in one particular group of society. It could be conveyed through the different kinds of media such as television, radio, book, newspaper, and any of its kind. The messages of wartime propaganda commonly playing with psychology by using basic emotional communication or selected words, disturbing or well-portrayed images, and language structure.

Among the earlier modern wartime propaganda that existed in Malaya was provided by the Japanese in late 1941 to 1945. The Japanese war propaganda was conveyed using a device of media, quite similar to the British appliance later on. It was essential for the Japanese to indoctrinate the masses through visual arts to "win their heart and mind" of society to accept the Japanese administration in Malaya (Saiful Akram, 2019). Base on the Japanese approach, the British have taken the same dimension of the propaganda to be practiced for its new enemy, the communists. A very practical form of propaganda publication is known as the leaflets is developed by dropping counter-propaganda flyers across the country, compacted with many kinds of messages. The value of the leaflet raids is physically harmless to the human or civilian but may do phycological damage to the enemies' morale and defense.

Previous studies focus generally on technical issues such as military operations and securities, socio-economic conditions, and political demography during the Malayan Emergency. However, the focus on the propaganda leaflets during the Malayan Emergency is still lacking. However, the Emergency Leaflets never fails to appear as a small part of any topics discussion regarding the Malayan Emergency. Perhaps, the details of the Emergency Leaflets should not be discussed widely together with other topics. It should be discussed separately to avoid confusion for its characters and significance to the Psychological Warfare during the Malayan Emergency.

Research Methodology

This study is using primary and secondary sources. The content analysis using both type of sources has been conducted to clarify the roles and impacts of the leaflets as a part of the Psychological War that has been implemented to wipe out the communist influences during the Emergency period. It also crucial for the study to comprehend the Emergency Leaflets according to their types and functions.

The primary sources consist of the Emergency Leaflets samples, newspaper clips between the 1940s to 1960s, and the British Military Administration records. For secondary sources, the analysis is extracted mainly from journals, and books related to the issue.

The Emergency Leaflets

The Leaflets were part of the Psychological Warfare instrument that has played an important role in combating the communist influences since the early Malayan Emergency period. With the development of the Emergency Information Service in early 1950, the counter-insurgency operation and mission became more complex. Under its new Head of the Psychological Warfare Section, C.C Too has developed seven operational systems regarding the leaflets operation. This sub-section also subsequently accommodated the objectives of the British to create distrust, doubt, and misleading images between the MCP members and its insurgents (the MRLA) as well to its supporters.

Since the 1950s, the Psychological War Section has produced millions of leaflets every single month. It was distributed by the Royal Air Force together with the announcement recorded by Radio Malaya – using mostly Chinese major dialects; Cantonese, Hakka, and Mandarin. Other languages such as Malay, Tamil, English, and other local dialects included along with the announcement. The dropping areas era mostly covered the remote villages and dense jungle, which were the roaming areas for the communists. The civilian also would receive similar kinds of leaflets to keep them to be well informed over the British principles against the communist.

The leaflets were represented in bright such as red, orange, yellow, and blue to outstand the greenish color of the jungle. Indeed, the color sometimes is considered as a code for the type of messages given. On the other hand, the majority of the leaflets are produced in a color of light yellow sand and deep brown earth. The purpose is to blend the color with the ground and looks not very important, which at the same time to enable the ‘potential insurgents’ to read without hesitating of being checked by their superiors. Cartoon images also are included to accentuate the messages and at the same time help the illiterate civilian to understand the idea of the messages. Therefore, the representation of the leaflets’ elements has played a vital role for it to be taken as an effective apparatus of Psychological Warfare for the counter-insurgency mission.

Types of the Malayan Emergency Leaflets

There are so many themes regarding messages that have been employ in the Emergency Leaflet between 1949 to 1950 onwards. This study would focus only on several themes for an analytical discussion

1.1 The Pass Conduct and letters

Several series of Emergency Leaflets have been verified as essential for this study by giving much information on the insurgents and Min Yuen activities. The information mostly could be found in a form of letters and rewards of surrender. The messages are very clear as the main objective was to lure the insurgents and their helper to self-surrender to the authority.

The messages in the leaflets are written in Mandarin thus most of the informants were mostly from surrendered enemy personnel (SEPs). They are either former MCP members as well as the former Min Yuen. The use of the Mandarin language has shown that most of the MCP/MRLA and Min Yuen members suspected were among the Chinese. However, some of the published leaflets remain using multiple languages - either in English, Malay(*Jawi*), Tamil,

and Ceylon. This particular example of the leaflets could be found through Leaflet No. 1818. The leaflet (Pass Conduct) suggests specifically to the armed Min Yuen members to surrender with several conditions:

“The bearer of this pass wishes to surrender, he is to be given food, cigarettes and medical attention if required. He is to be taken as soon as possible to the nearest senior police office” (INF. 1780/1953)

The message indicates that some of the armed Min Yuen members were not only among the Chinese civilian. It also could be participated by the Malays, Indians, or even among the Indigenous community (the *Orang Asli*). This phenomenon occurred due to a lack of information regarding the danger of communist ideology. Besides, they have misunderstood the concept of Nationalism that has been brought by the communist and eventually influenced to support the idea and join the Party (Mohamad Ali & Ayu Nor Azilah, 2017). However, the involvement of the Malays in communist activates are quite controversial due to the religious factor and the existence of racial conflict with the Chinese (Cheah, 2003 & Cheah, 1981). Hence, the authority in this matter argued that it was hard to be identified or to be differentiated from the common civilian. The multi-language method is simply used because this method could convey messages towards the unknown or unspecific "character" of the Min Yuen members. Therefore, the message also is seen as not generalizing the Chinese civilians alone as communist supporters, neither volunteer nor sympathizers. Besides, the use of multiple languages also could be easily understood by varieties of ethnicities in Malaya and also could be conveyed widely among the civilian.

The Pass Conducts were mainly published as a preparation for the first Malayan Election to gain Chinese supports over the British. This process also includes the right of citizenship especially for the Chinese and Indians in Malaya around 1952. Several months after the General Election in July 1955, a new type of leaflet has been issued, known as the Amnesty Pass, and widely distributed. In September 1957, a new Amnesty Pass had been issued as the offers in conjunction with the Malayan Independence (4786/HPWS/181 & 4580/HPWS/167A) As the consequences, many of the insurgents were self-surrendered up to April, 1958. This action not only has to be credited to the amnesty offers, but security and military operation also has taken its part to ensure the implementation of the Psychological War towards communism in Malaya is infinite (Ho, 2004 & Yuen, 1998).

The Letters

To prove all the promises written in the previous leaflet, confession letters have been issued specifically to the Min Yuen and the MCP comrades. It was part of the confession either given by the former insurgents or the Min Yuen. The confession accentuating the benefits of self-surrender to the authority. One of the confessions has written by former MCP comrade, Chong Kok Chai where he pointed out negative images of the MCP struggles and its leadership. He revealed the ugly truth of harsh and unfair treatments received from the superior towards the lower rank comrades. Perhaps, by virtuously mention the Government offers (reward), it would attract many of the MCP comrades and the Min Yuen members to surrender peacefully. Similar series of confessions also published in Leaflet No. 2028. The confessor, Wong Fui” admits that he was forced to become the Min Yuen and worked as labor for communist plantation. He indeed suffered from the horrible living condition within the dense jungle (INF.2139/1953)

Another leaflet letter had specifically mentioned its messages to the Min Yuen members through Leaflet No. 3254. Many information has been revealed by the former Min Yuen, known as Siew Hong. Some of the Min Yuen members (Figure no.1) are revealed as the armed Min Yuen which highly contributing to the Communists during the ambush or sabotage activities. An armed Min Yuen received no military training and usually used to replace or to add to the combatants during the Communist operation. The writer (Siew Hong) emphasize the unfair treatment received by the Min Yuen members – like a bullet shield for the Party:

"...The party wants to preserve the troops to safeguard itself. It is obvious that the Party does not care for your sacrifices, especially to-day when there are no source of manpower to replace the troops and a shortage of arms. During the six years, who were killed – the Min Yuen or the troops? You will surely answer the Min Yuen.".....
...." In the last half year 21 Min Yuen have surrendered and 10 have been killed by security forces in Raub South-East District. (The number of the members of troops killed is not included in the above figures). Those surrendered are now leading a pleasant life" ...(INF. 655/1954)

Although Siew Hong has exposed that many Min Yuen were killed, but their death figures in several casualties lists have shown otherwise. This circumstance appeared probably because the Min Yuen was mistakenly understood as the insurgents whereas, they are the armed Min Yuen with no defense talent like the other insurgents (MRLA). This letter is not the only a written confession as to appeal the other Min Yuens for surrender. Siew Hong also attached some letters from the other Min Yuen's family members. Psychological wise, this action is an attempt to put an urgency on the remaining member to stop assisting the Party (MCP and MRLA), and return for their family. The letters that had been published for the leaflets mostly have it similarity whereby the writers have urged either their relatives or friends who involved with the Min Yuen and communist activities for self-surrender. It was understood that many of the Min Yuen members as well as the insurgents, had been surrendered within 1954 as the result of the "confession" leaflet. This action more or less has weakened the MRLA guerrilla operations and decreased the Communist influences day by day.

Figure 1: Leaflet No. 3254; OP. HELIER – From Siew Hong to Raub Min Yuen.



Sources: Retrieved from National Archive Malaysia

Since the early implementation of the Emergency Leaflet in 1950, the authority only focuses on decreasing the fault casualties. By 1952, it was estimated that almost 3000 casualties among the civilian had been recorded as either to be killed in the hand of British troops or the insurgents (Hack, 2009). Many case statuses remain unclear nor it was a deliberate action nor accidental. Table 1 below indicates a summary of the general casualty cases between 1948 to 1949. The information and figures are incomplete as not all of the incidents that happened have been detailly recorded.

Table 1: General number of casualties between 1948 to 1949

Month/Year	Area	Death Toll		
		MRLA	Civilian	Unidentified
20 July, 1948	unknown	2		
21 July, 1948	Elphil Estate			2
7 Aug, 1948	unknown			1
8 Aug, 1948	Bentong			1
24 Sept, 1948	Kuala Pilah	1		
7 Nov, 1948	Lenga	11		
10 Nov, 1948	unknown			3
10 Nov, 1948	Kuala Kubu	6		
Dec, 1948	Batang Kali		24	
Feb, 1949	Kajang			1
23 Jan, 1949	Segamat			1
April, 1949	Ipoh	1		1
27 April, 1949	Batu Pahat		1	
Total	-	20	25	10

Sources: Extracted and modified from CO 717/170/1; CO 717/170/2; CO 717/173/1 & Bennet, 2009.

Those cases appeared most of the time since the authority and security forces were unable to identify between the civilian and its real enemy (the MCP/MRLA). Moreover, the Emergency Regulation (27A) has authorized the security forces to "arrest any suspects, overcome resistance to arrest and prevent escape from arrest with 'reasonably necessary' force" which it might extend to lethal force. In most cases, lethal force was executed as the suspect was shot while attempted to escape the course. The most possible example for this case could be examined through the 'Batang Kali Incident' whereby a group of civilians (Chinese villagers) were shot dead and the whole village had been destroyed (Short, 2010). While another version of the civilian casualties has been caused by the insurgents who have randomly ambushed the village to seek essential support and brutally killed whoever refused to cooperate. Some of the attacks also caused by the racial and religious issues by the insurgents towards the Malays (Mohamad Ali & Ayu Nor Azilah, 2017)

1.2 The punishment-rewards and provocation

The implementation of the Emergency Leaflet is considered as effective as the decoy for communist influences by its counter-propaganda. The messages are aimed to be delivered for the ordinary members of the MCP, the insurgents (MRLA) as well as the Min Yuen. An amount of money is always represented to be part of the rewards for their self-surrender. Most importantly, the information given has twisted human rationality by adding promises sentences like:

“People have been told that if any of them could help to bring anyone of you to surrender they will be given a reward of \$500 for each of you (that means \$1000 for two). If you can convince your subordinates and bring them with you, you will be rewarded” (INF. 2155/1953)

Indeed, this kind of promise had attracted many of the insurgents and the Min Yuens to self-surrender rather than to be captured or shot (injured or killed) by security forces or others. An example complete of a monetary list also could be seen through Leaflets No. 459. This leaflet offers specific rewards for different ranks of "wanted" figures, from the MCP Executive Committee to the lower ranks insurgents and it's labor forces. The price tag of different ranks is started from \$30,000 to \$1,000. Besides, the reward will be increased if they could bring other members to surrender or even can exchange secret information

Provocation

Another clear counter-propaganda leaflet published by the authority was in a form of provocation statements. The messages either to lower the morale of the insurgents and at the same time belittling the Min Yuen activities. For example, Leaflet no. 3042 has lists many negative images of the MCP, translated from Mandarin to English such as:

“The attraction of Communism is that it offers nothing and demand everything, including the surrender of spiritual freedom”

“MCP dictatorship rest on a sea of blood, an ocean of tears and a world of suffering – the result is cruel means.”

“Why then do you allow yourself to be a party to this sinister movement which have brought upon innocent and harmless men, women and children immeasurable miseries and sufferings and shattering their peace, happiness and family life!” (INF. 237/1954)

The statements within this leaflet were clear to downgrade and strip out the integrity of the high ranking of the MCP committee members as well as to belittle their barbaric actions. Apart from that, it also reminds others to comprehend that the struggle for an insurgency was not giving any benefit but agony and misery.

against the communist propaganda around Malaya. Although the "Min Yuen" word is absent within the messages, the purpose remains to break the chain of information carried out by any unidentified Min Yuen members. Yet, again the authority had offered an amount of money as a reward for the courier:

“All courier of the MCP are especially welcomed and from today those couriers who surrender and bring in the documents that are carrying are to be given a cash reward which will be assessed by the value of the information contained in the documents and the value of the information carried by the couriers in their head.” (INF. 68/1954)

The message indeed has applied the notion of "punishment and reward" to rationalize one's behavior to act accordingly. It might sound rather provocative, yet reminding the readers of the risk and danger that any of them might face while carrying the important information. The choices that they had been either it worth to die unpaid, or to survive and getting the reward. Supplementary, the provocation leaflets always appoint that the armed struggle is pointless or rather hopeless nor to its followers neither supporters. However, it is infrequent to find a harsh statement regarding the crime of assisting the communist.

In the early period of the Emergency, the civilian especially the Chinese have been decisively warned of the consequences of assisting the MCP or MRLA. The Chinese had considered the deportation to their origin country is very worrisome. This particular punishment previously was applied through the Society Ordinance in late 1800 onwards to control the Secret Societies and was followed by Nationalist movements among the Chinese in Malaya and Singapore (Faedah Kassim, 2017). Under the Emergency Regulation, a person with an allegation regarding communist activities would be charged without a trail. Hence, many Chinese has taken the precaution to 'stay in the line' and try to obey the regulation as possible and tend not to against the authority.

On some occasions, their 'action' is not voluntary rather it was a response towards the communist intimidation. Based on intelligence analysis upon the Chinese 'action', concludes that "It is difficult not to feel some contempt for people who can be so terrorized that they dare not even to defend themselves" (CO 717/171/3). At the same time, an act of sympathy among the civilian toward the insurgents is indeed shaped in regards that they belong to the same group of race. The British memorandum also contends on the same issue:

...” One of the most serious features of the whole problem is the amount of protection money and payment in kind which are being made daily to the bandits. On the one hand, the rich Chinese are known to be paying large sums of money to prevent their estates and mines from being attacked; on the other, the Chinese laborer is passing food and clothing or stolen rubber and tin to the bandits through the wire of the Resettlement Areas or directly in the fields or jungle generally from fear but sometimes from sympathy”...

The statement indicates there are of two types of the Chinese that appeared to assist the communists base on their economic condition; the rich and the poor. The rich allegedly were forced to assist communist in order to protects life and to avoid the destruction of their properties. In the meantime, the poor rather commit to help simply for the sense of fear and sympathy. However, this action has been argued by the police report as those people have had too many excuses for their crime and cowardly to face their oppressors (CO 717/171/3). The statement therefore has clarified that the government was far from negotiating over any crimes regarding the communist.

Conclusion

In the early phase of the Malayan Emergency, the distribution of the leaflets was unable to decrease the violence. Probably the notion of the message was not well prepared by British intelligence. Since the declaration of the Malayan Emergency in December 1948 to December 1949, coercion had been applied to control the situation. By 1950, the Briggs Plan had taken over the population control, mainly to place the Chinese population under strict surveillance and protection from the insurgents. Another purpose also to break any existed movements and civilian contact related to communist activities either by a volunteer or by coercion. Until December 1952, full counter-propaganda through the distribution of the leaflets had been used to wipe-out the communist influences among the civilians and to end the terror.

Apart from that, the Briggs Plan, the execution of the counter-propaganda mission has given a huge impact on the communist supporters, mainly among the Chinese. The communist influence gradually retreated among its insurgents and the civilian. Thus many of its members and insurgents tended to surrender for different reasons; including internal resistance and, shortages of food, and an increasing sense of hopelessness through the struggle living in the dense jungle. However, one of the main aspects of their surrender was the monetary rewards that had been offered through the leaflets. The definite benefit for the leaflets distribution have saved many lives from being mistakenly killed. It also given chance for a people (the insurgents and supporters) to make amends through the amnesty offered between 1955 to 1958.

Indeed, the leaflets should be utilized as a major war propaganda apparatus to indoctrinate the subjects. It should be represented with superficial elements to attract the masses for support and offended the enemy for their retreat. Thus, the Malayan Emergency leaflets standard then, have been used as an example for part of the visual-propaganda into the Korean War and later into the Vietnam War.

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