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“The Burma-Siam Death Railway and the British War Crimes Trials at Singapore”

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In the wake of the V-J Day, the Allied Powers established in central Tokyo the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) in order to prosecute wartime leaders of Japan for crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity (the “Tokyo Trial,” 1946-1948). Perhaps less known but by no means less important were the trials of some 5,700 suspected war criminals that the Allied authorities concurrently hosted at 51 separate locations across the Asia-Pacific region. They included 330 trials involving a total of 978 suspected war criminals, held by the British authorities in formerly Japanese-occupied British colonies in Southeast Asia: Alor Setar, Hong Kong, Jesselton (present-day Kota Kinabalu), Johore Baru, Kuala Lumpur, Labuan, Penang, Rangoon (present-day Yangon), Singapore, and Taiping. This talk will explore a representative range of cases from the British war crimes trials to showcase a rich body of oral and documentary history of World War II as contained in the trial records. At the same time, this talk will assess the jurisprudential legacy of the Allied war crimes prosecutions through the case studies, and consider their relevance to deepening our understanding of the issues of justice, accountability, and the rule of law.