

Resistance in Singapore

Introduction

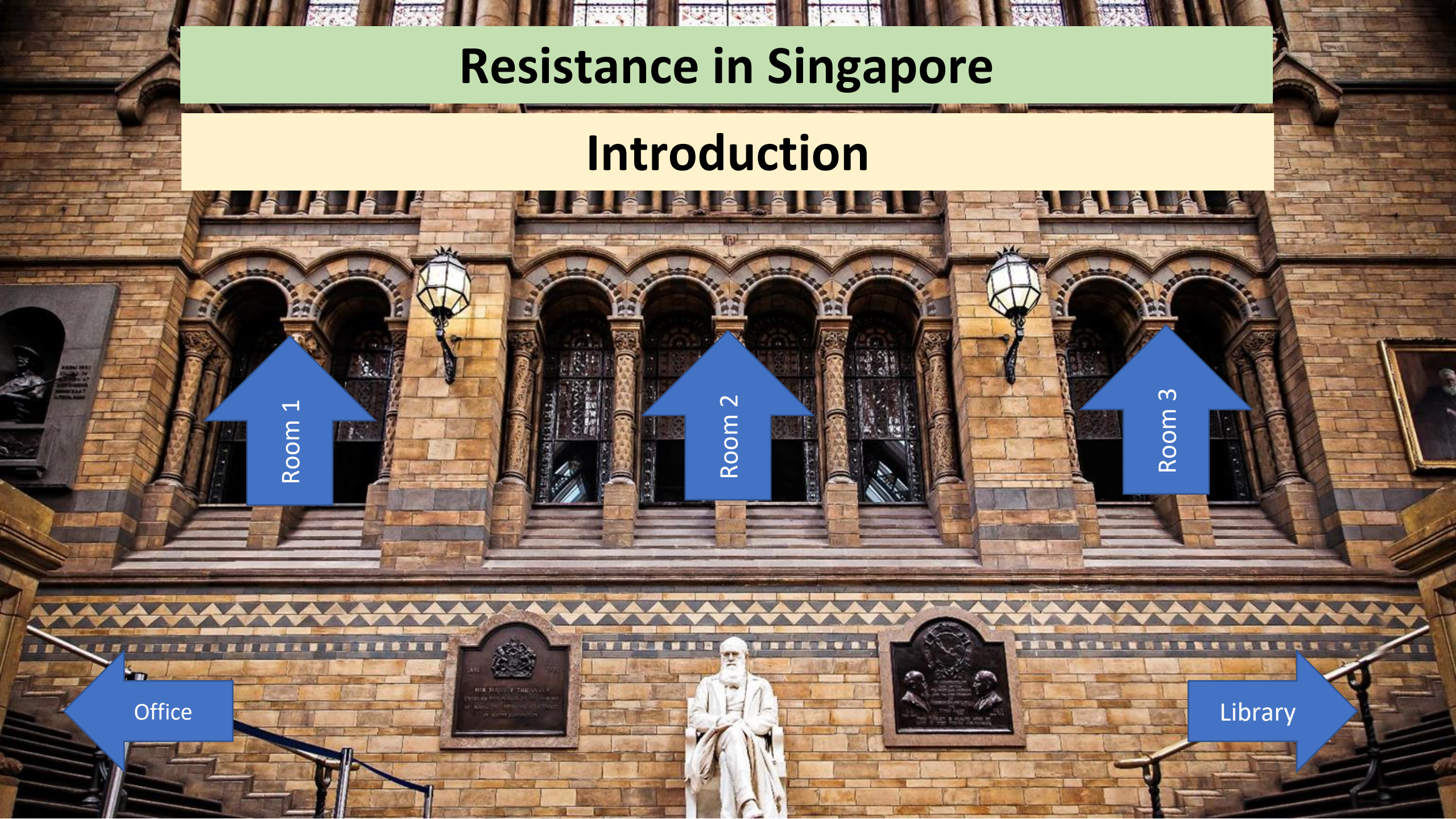
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Resistance in Singapore

This exhibition showcases the lives of Singaporeans back in the Japanese Occupation. Through recounts and pictures, we present to you the occupation from the locals' point of view, not historians. These will let you see the experiences of Singaporeans from a personal perspective. It shows what they went through and the problems they faced. Resistance groups have played an integral role in Malay and Singapore during WW2. Even before the Japanese landed in the Malay Peninsula, there had already been many movements supporting the war effort in warring China, with many Chinese locals donating money and other supplies. When the Japanese invaded Malaya and Singapore, resistance groups formed the defence trying to slow down the Japanese advance.

During the Japanese occupation of colonial Singapore, there were many resistance groups and movements such as Force 136, the Malaysian People's Anti-Japanese Army, and Dalforce, carrying out a variety of operations, such as intelligence and guerilla warfare. Some of these groups were formed by governments to defend the peninsula, while others were started by businessmen, or just ordinary citizens, and they each played their different roles. We will focus on the types, preparation, and operations of these resistance movements and their members, how they helped to prevent the Japanese from gaining the locals' allegiance, and how the Japanese detected and punished these members. Thus, let us experience the past like our forefathers did, and honour them.

Return to
Lobby

Room 1

Introduct
ory Panel

A bullet, a knife, a grenade

Exhibit 1A

**Introductor
y Panel**

Exhibit 1B

Return to
Room 1

Move to
Exhibit 1A

Room 1

A bullet, a knife, a grenade

Introductory Panel

This room will be focusing on the operations carried out by the different resistance groups in Malaya and Singapore, some of which were Force 136, a special operations force formed that was supported by the British which carried out intelligence operations, the MPAJA, which conducted guerilla warfare, but also individual citizens or locally-organised groups, like Dalforce, also a guerilla unit made up of the ethnic Chinese people in Singapore. The combined effort of these groups put a drain on Japanese supplies and troops, and also forced the Japanese to conduct screenings and interrogations to try and find these members, which will be focused on in the third room. The resistance forces that were mostly formed by locals, not governments, received little training and preparation for the war, and during the occupation, mostly relied on local support for supplies, which were scarce.

Return to
Room 1

Exhibit 1A

Move to
Exhibit 1B

Exhibit

“My impression of these people [who were being trained] is that they are brave but their training is far too short for them to know anything... They were quite young. They consist of hawkers, shopkeepers and some of them could be working but they are not English-educated... They said ‘No, we are just trying to prepare ourselves for the war and we will be going to the front in no time’... the people [living in Singapore] were not happy in buying Japanese goods. They just boycott the stalls in Middle Road.”

Explanatory Text

An oral recount from Mr Jack Ng Kim Boon, a civilian who lived near Dalforce’s training grounds. He describes the Dalforce trainees as too young and received inadequate training. Most of the Dalforce resistance fighters were common hawkers and shopkeepers who did not participate in battle, and joined resistance forces because of their homeland being occupied by a foreign power. We are also introduced to how civilians carried out resistance operations in their own way- boycotting the stalls selling Japanese goods in Middle Road. Though this may not have had a profound impact, these boycotts, repeated across streets and cities and nations, undermined the Japanese market in its territories.

Exhibit 1B

Exhibit

“...the Malay Regiment resisted the Japanese vigorously in Pasir Panjang, making it difficult for the Japanese to enter Singapore... the soldiers of the Malay Regiment were brave men when they fought the enemy. But though brave, they were few while the Japanese came in too large a number. So, the defeat of the Malay soldiers had nothing to do with their courage. It was because they were ill-prepared in terms of equipment and strength. If they had faced the enemy properly outfitted, with full equipment and plenty of men, I think, the enemy would not have been able to penetrate into Singapore, or if they could, it would have taken them a long time. It was all because they were inadequately prepared... The Japanese came to Singapore to face no strong resistance because Singapore was the very last resort... The British, in battle, they merely gave the orders. Their men, many of them, were not as courageous as the Gurkhas and the Malays. They were merely the leaders. And many of their men had surrendered long before the Malays and the Gurkhas. Many Malays and Gurkhas died in the battle to defend Singapore. Many British soldiers had surrendered to the Japanese.”

Explanatory Text

An oral recount from Mr Mofradi bin Haji Mohd Noor, a witness of resistance movements against the Japanese. He describes the resistance fighters in the Malay Regiment as brave, but tragically underequipped and undersupported, resulting in their defeat. On the other hand, he portrays the British resistance fighters as the opposite, having much more men than the Malay Regiment did, but were too cowardly and scared to fight against the Japanese, only ordering other fighters to do their duty. While the locals were fighting for their homeland with tenacity and will, the troops from overseas wanted to return home, and were not willing to die for a foreign land. This disproportionate spread of forces and support was partly what cause the defeat of the resistance fighters in the fall of Singapore.

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Lobby

Room 2

An Iron Fist

Introduct
ory Panel

Exhibit 2A

**Introductor
y Panel**

Exhibit 2B

Return to
Room 2

Move to
Exhibit 2A

Room 2

An Iron Fist

Introductory Panel

During the Occupation, the Japanese ruled with fear and intimidation. As part of their “Nipponisation” process, they tried to forge loyalty among the locals through multiple methods such as education, propaganda, and sifting out those that opposed them. This room details how it was carried out, and how the locals, obviously not willing to submit to the Japanese, used various methods to endure the occupation, such as refusing to learn and practice Japanese things like the Japanese anthem, and maintaining spirit and camaraderie among local communities. A resistance movement did not have to be large or carry out bold, destructive operations. Every single group, whether or not it actively or passively opposed the Japanese, had its own purpose and played a crucial part in helping Malaya and Singapore endure the Japanese occupation.

Exhibit



Explanatory Text

A book published by the 朝日新聞社, the Asahi Shinbun (a Japanese newspaper supporting the war), with illustrations supporting patriotic songs that were taught to students to make them more devoted to the Japanese. The title reads “Picture book of songs”, with the description to the right stating its target audience, “children of the Great East”. The children are portrayed to be dancing happily with each other on the cover page of the book, suggesting that the Japanese wants to convince students that they would enjoy being under Japanese rule and that it would be beneficial to their lives. Through the process of instilling their values and a sense of loyalty to Japan from a young age, the Japanese conditioned the locals to appreciate and respect the Japanese and their culture. By making Nipponisation an integral part of local children’s childhood, the Japanese successfully “brainwashed” these children.

Exhibit 2B

Exhibit

“We were particularly interested in international affairs, how the troop movements and situation in Malaya was, and similar things... we used to admire those that carried out sabotage operations against the Japanese. There was nothing we could do... without weapons, our only way of resisting the Japanese was getting information from all around.”

“Our organisation had around 300 people, which was quite large. The reason for this was we had gained the respect of the people by wearing armbands with the emblem of China. We encouraged the local people to maintain order and did not expect anything in return.”

Explanatory Text

A recount of Lee Mun Hee, a local underground resistance member during the occupation.

His description of what his small underground organisation did during the Japanese Occupation gives us a different point of view to how the locals were affected by Nipponisation. Locals had a common strong anti-Japanese sentiment, which kept them together. Instead of being conditioned to have loyalty to the Japanese, they maintained their loyalty to their homeland and respected these small, local resistance groups that did no more than organise the community together and spread information from the outside that was not controlled by the Japanese. These groups were not armed. Instead, they held meetings and spread information and supplies among the locals to keep up their morale throughout the war. In spite of the Japanese’s efforts to control the people of Singapore, the locals held strong and stayed cohesive to endure the brutal occupation.

Return to
Lobby

Room 3

Introduct
ory Panel

A flashlight, a stick, an empty bowl

Exhibit 3A

**Introductor
y Panel**

Exhibit 3B

Return to
Room 3

Room 3

Move to
Exhibit 3A

A flashlight, a stick, an empty bowl

Introductory Panel

The Japanese responded to resistance movements with determination. They conducted mass screenings, such as the Sook Ching operation, set up many checkpoints, and utilised those already captured as double agents, such as when they arrested Lai Teck, the MPAJA leader, and got him to organise an meeting which the Japanese ambushed and killed the entire leadership of the MPAJA. They also set up a network of informers, both with secret agents and civilian informers which they gave food and other necessities as rewards. These methods were flawed, as they often found innocent people guilty, and let resistance members, who had been trained to appear inconspicuous slip through. Whether you were caught often depended on how the interrogation officer was feeling. When one was caught, the Japanese would interrogate and torture them to try to find out more information that might be useful to them. However, it was easy to feed false information to them. Prisoners were kept in overcrowded facilities, were mistreated by the prison guards, and usually contracted diseases due to the poor conditions of the prisons. In this room we will introduce how the Japanese had punished those who took part in resistance movements during the Japanese Occupation.

Exhibit



Caption: The Kempeitai broke every bone in his fingers, beat his mouth until his jaw broke for talking too much, and broke his forearm with Indian clubs. They tortured him, sent him to the hospital to get patched up, then called him back and broke some more.

Explanatory Text

The Japanese conducted mass screenings, such as Sook Ching to try and find those that were anti-Japanese. However, they also regularly carried out arrests and raids, trying to find those that had slipped through. They would arrest everyone present, even the families of those suspected. If the suspect did not admit to resisting the Japanese (even if they were innocent), he would be tortured. The Japanese used a variety of torture methods such as waterboarding, pulling of fingernails and physical beating, like in the caption. The Japanese also somewhat sadistically overdid and killed suspects to their own liking, as they had no regard for human life. In addition, these interrogations and tortures were carried out with the pre-assumption that the person arrested was guilty, and the torture was merely getting him to confess, and thus were usually very cruel and harsh from the very beginning.

Exhibit 3B

Exhibit

“It depended on whether they were happy. (laughs) It depended on your luck. If they perceived the person as being reliable, perhaps they would relax the inspection a little.”

“When it was not important, the Japanese would not be present and there would only be Malay policemen who coveted benefits.”

“The interrogator was touched by this sentence... He understood my predicament and sympathised with me.”

“The interrogator wanted me to draw some things for him. I said, “What do you want me to draw?” He said, “Draw the radio station, military bases and barracks, presidential palace, Ministry of Defence and other important organisations and venues in Chongqing. Then I randomly drew the streets of Chongqing. (laughs) I said, “If I draw randomly, you are also unsure of what I am drawing. It is useless if you take the drawings and compare.”

“We had a meal consisting of a few pieces of sweet potatoes per day...After a very short period of imprisonment, you could see that the prisoners were only skin and bones. It was tragic.”

“I became listless. My mental state was very poor. In the later stages, there was approximately one week or so where I completely could not recall what my name was... I basically did not supplement and only depleted my mental reserves.”

“I heard Lim Bo Seng wailing in anguish at night. He sounded in pain...The prison warden did not bother. He went to notify the Kempeitai but the Kempeitai basically did not bother. I felt that there was no way to help.”

“Not long after, a few Kempeitai came over with a big bed sheet and place Lim Bo Seng on top. Four of them pulled this bed sheet downstairs to a small house divided into three rooms. Prisoners who were going to die were sent there. The Kempeitai were waiting to collect the corpse...”

Explanatory Text

Oral recount from Tan Chong Tee, a member of Force 136. The Japanese checkpoints as highly varied. Those in areas with high amounts of resistance activity were strict, while others were maintained by corrupt Malay policemen.

During interrogation, prisoners who were cooperative and more important to the Japanese because they could provide information were treated better. The Japanese interrogation system was also highly dependent on the officer, and many decisions were made on the spot.

Those imprisoned were affected by mentally and physically. The prisoners received little food and guards/Kempeitai had no regard for their well-being. With the constant fear of death and the thoughts of escape, Tan Chong Tee suffered more than others mentally. He describes Lim Bo Seng coming down with dysentery, and how the warden, instead of giving him medical attention, left him to die. The Japanese treated the captured mercilessly and cruelly.

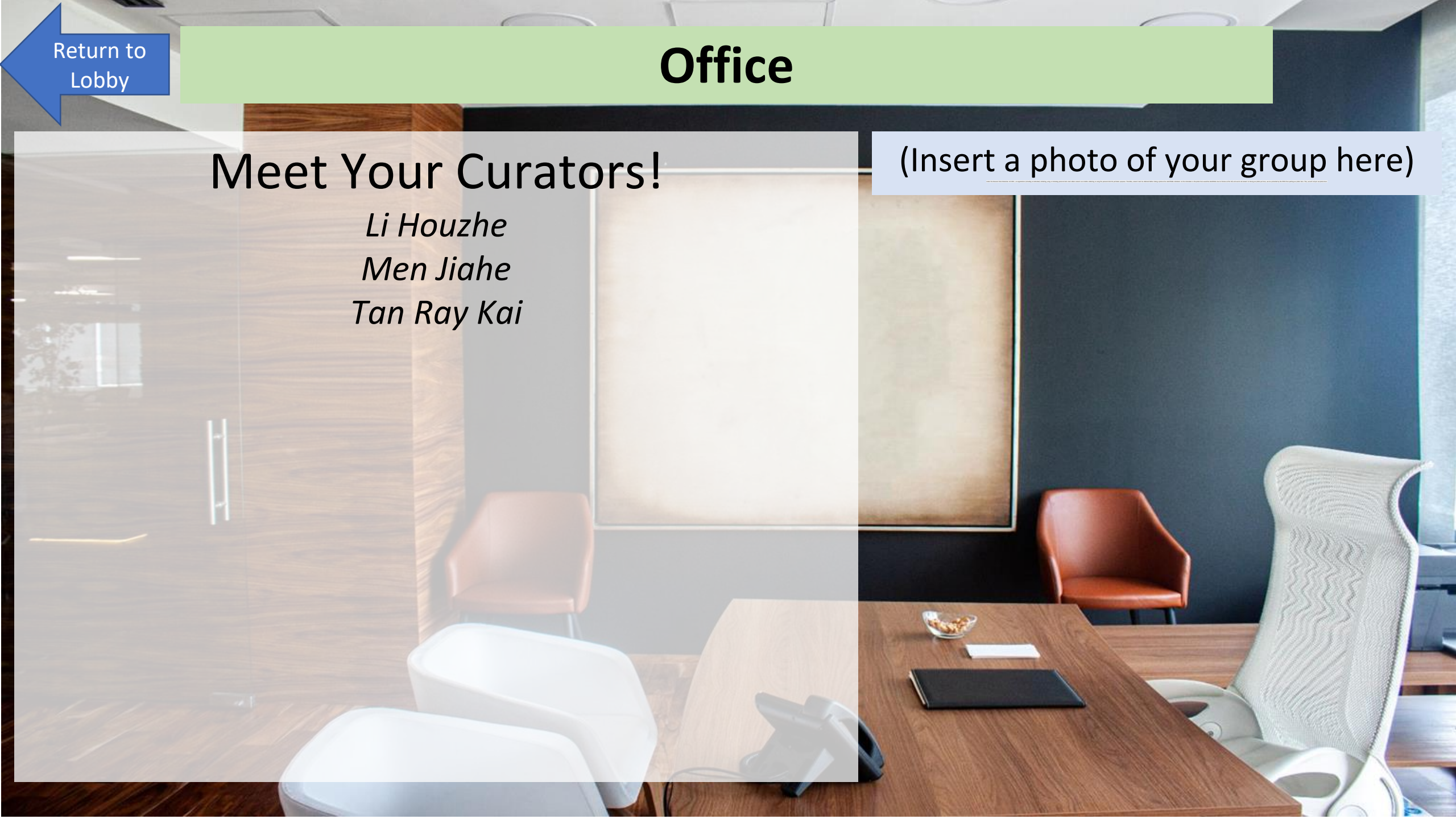
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Meet Your Curators!

Li Houzhe
Men Jiahe
Tan Ray Kai

(Insert a photo of your group here)



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