

THE DECLINATION OF MALAYNESS IN SINGAPORE DURING THE POST-SEPARATION PERIOD

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Introduction

In the matter of geography, the island of Temasek (Singapore) situated in a very strategic location in the Malay world. Because of the location, Singapore had always become the centre for social interaction among the Malays in the Malay Archipelago. The prosperity of Singapore especially after the coming of the British on that island gave encouragement to the Malays from Indonesia and Malaya to move there looking for better prospects for their lives.

Furthermore, the location of Singapore which is close to the Riau Archipelago gave her an advantage to receive any influence that originated from the Sultanate. Hence the Sultanate, as noted by many was the centre of the Malay literary thus, Singapore received the spill-over from the Sultanate despite the island possesses a high number of non-Malays.

At the same time, Singapore became one of the terminals for the pilgrims departing for Mecca. This situation had resulted in the influx of Muslims from Malaya and Indonesia into Singapore before they proceeded to Mecca for pilgrimage. Some of them worked as labourers in the port of Singapore to finance the cost to the holy land. Yet, some of them were unable to raise enough money to facilitate their intention, thus received the ironic title of *Haji Singapura* which means Hajj from Singapore.¹

From the beginning of the 20th century until the middle of 1960's, Singapore attracted many young aspirants who came to find better prospects. As a result of this phenomenon, it made Singapore as a centre of the Malay world although the social reality in the island did not favour the Malays per se. This phenomenon has made Singapore so close to the hearts of the Malays up to this day.

The Relocation of Centre of Malay Arts and Culture from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur

It is difficult to find on what reasons made Singapore become the centre of Malay arts and culture. But it is acknowledged by the mass that the arrival of Abdullah Munshi as the personal secretary to Thomas Stamford Raffles, he gave huge contributions towards to establish the momentum in the study of Malay language and literature. In addition to Raffles extensive dedication in collecting old Malay manuscript, Abdullah's works contributed to the expansion of a greater interest in the Malay literature.

During the period of Abdullah Munshi in Singapore, there were many works which originated from other languages that were translated into Malay. One of them is *Hikayat Binatang* which it is believed a translation from an English book whose author's name he did not mention. Apart from this work, he continued to dedicate his time to write in Malay and some of his works were published in Singapore.

The publications of Malay literature since the period of mass publication were mostly done in Singapore and Penang despite these two islands having a smaller Malay audience. Especially in the 20th century, several Malay periodicals like *Neracha*, *Warta Malaya*, *Lembaga* and *Utusan Melayu* were published in Singapore. Because of this phenomenon, it may suggest this situation happened due to the high literacy among the Singaporeans but practically, if these publications were to consider the Malay language readers in Singapore, the number was inferior in comparison to the Malay language readers in the Peninsula. At the same time, the literacy rate in Singapore somehow was not very much different from that in some major cities in the Peninsula. In this context, what made most of these publications operated in Singapore?

To answer this question, Singapore during that period was the only metropolitan city in the British Malaya. Being the centre of the British colonialism, Singapore always attracted a large number of people surrounding her to migrate. Many people from the Peninsula and the Indonesian Archipelago migrated to Singapore to obtain better prospect. However in

other cities in the Peninsula, such a phenomenon did not occur. This made Singapore to become very unique and developed compared to other places. This trend of migration to Singapore continued even after the separation so much so that it alarmed the government of Singapore to introduce specific regulations to control this phenomenon.²

Another reason why many press publications took place in this British colony (in the Straits Settlement in general) was because of the policy of less interference adopted by the British towards these publications. In some of the Malay states, objections and interference from the Malay rulers were so extensive that some of the publishers relocated themselves to the British colony, like what happened to Syed Sheikh al-Hady. He found it difficult to accommodate with the Sultan of Johor when he was appointed as the *SyÉriÑah* Counsel in the state. Only when he moved to Penang, a British colony, he was more independent and dynamic in producing his works.

In parallel with the expansion of literature, the development of arts and motion picture also begin to take place. Before the Second World War in 1930's, there were efforts to start the motion picture industry by several Indian entrepreneurs. The first picture, *Leila Majnun* broke into the local cinema in 1933. But, it was only after the war ended, the industry started to consolidate. For almost two decades after the war, Singapore became the sole producer of Malay films until Merdeka Film Studio started their operation in 1961 at Kuala Lumpur. From 1947 to 1961, Malay Film Production (MFP), Nusantara Film Company and Cathay-Keris, all these operated in Singapore were the studios which spearheaded the production of Malay movies. These studios supplied hundreds of movies to the Malay audience (to Indonesia and Brunei as well) and many of them has remained evergreen until today. Especially for MFP, most of their films became a legacy for local movie-maker and these films provided precedents for the later Malay movies produce by independent producer.

After the separation, Singapore's position as the centre of Malay arts and culture began to take a setback. The reasons are numerous. Many of these factors happened naturally but a few factors were stimulated directly from this political separation. Initially after Malaya gained independence in 1957,

a number of Malay-based enterprises like the publication of newspapers and books began to relocate their operation to the newly-independent country.³ The relocation to Malaya was to support the aspiration of the newly independent state to have more locally and Malay enterprises and *Utusan Melayu* was one of them. In 1958, they moved their main editorial desk and the printing operation from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur. By coincidence of their relocation, majority of the *Utusan's* shareholders were derived from UMNO political elites thus probably the main drive behind the relocation. But, the *Utusan* maintained their office in Singapore but the functions were more subordinate to the headquarters in Kuala Lumpur.

The second reason is as a result to the Singapore's separation from the Federation. Still operating in Singapore after the separation, the publisher prefers their hostile attitude to the government of Singapore. Once the introduction by the Singapore' government regulation for every press operating in Singapore to engage Singaporean editorial, the *Utusan* refused to bow under this direction. As a result of their refusal, they have no choice by to cease their operation in Singapore.⁴ The reason behind this regulation was to ensure the interest of the newly-formed nation was not jeopardized with the policy of free press. Because of this regulation, many publications which have expatriates working at the editorial desk were handed over to Singaporeans. By having Singaporeans working at the editorial department, it will tighten the grip of the government to control the press. This regulation would stifle the role of *Utusan* as the voice of Malay interests. At the same time, it would become a tool for the Singapore Government to reach the Malays. For *Utusan*, by becoming the tool of Singapore Government would undermine their Malay agenda and thus conflicting with the government's policy to promote Singapore for Singaporeans. Soon afterwards, newspapers published in Singapore could not be imported and sold in Malaysia and vice versa. It has remained so till this day.⁵

The withdrawal of *Utusan* from Singapore had effects. The withdrawal of *Utusan* narrowed the Malay community access to the mass media. Prior to the separation, *Utusan* was always the frontliner of the Malay community to voice out their feelings towards the Singapore Government. Fortunately for *Utusan*, although the Singapore government practised strict censorship

towards press circulation in Singapore, Utusan was still ‘immuned’ from the actions from the Government. The ‘immunity’ enjoyed by Utusan provided some rooms for the Malays to use the press as their mouthpiece against the government. Coincidentally, the stand taken by Utusan always favoured the Malays and was hostile towards the Singapore Government and this made Utusan become the voice of the Malays.

So, when Utusan ceased their publication in Singapore, it left a vacuum in the Singapore press industry. The Singapore Malay community no longer had a strong voice to represent them in the Singapore mainstream. Although *Berita Harian* was still operating in Singapore until today, their voice carry is closely align with the governments’ aspiration. Indeed, the establishment of Utusan brought lots of sentimental elements among the Singapore Malays. Singapore Malay Union (SMU) whose roles were very instrumental in setting up Utusan in 1939 toured around Singapore and some parts of Johor to sell shares among the Malays to gather enough funds to start the press.⁶ For SMU, the new press must be the Malay-centric (*berjiwa Melayu*) and must be owned by the Malays. Since the publication of Utusan on 29th May 1939, Utusan always maintained its distance identity unlike the other Malay language dailies. The reports and the articles always provided a higher degree of Malay centricism.⁷ When the idea of Malayan Union was mooted to the Malays and the incident of Maria Hertogh erupted, it was Utusan which acted to stimulate the awareness and the emotional feeling among the Malays about these issues. Therefore in the context of the Malays, Utusan had a special attachment to their heart, not only in Singapore but to the whole Peninsula.

Similar situation can be found in the Malay film industry. Since Merdeka Film Studio began their operation in 1961, the Malay film market was no longer a production of the MFP studio and the Cathay-Keris. After P. Ramlee moved to Kuala Lumpur in 1964, Shaw Brothers gradually moved their Malay film production to Kuala Lumpur from Singapore.⁸ By sending him to Kuala Lumpur, Shaw had an ambition to make this studio as a rival to their MFP studio in Jalan Ampas. The decision taken by Shaw Brothers resulted in a series of strikes organized by the studio trade union organization and the decline of the Malay film industry since the mid-60’s. Soon, when Shaw shut down their MFP studio in 1967, it left only Cathay-Keris as the

only supplier of Singapore-made Malay movies until 1972.⁹ But the Cathay-Keris movies were not at the similar degree with the MFP films in terms of quality and reception among the audiences.

As a result of this closure, a bulk of MFP movie stars moved to Kuala Lumpur to resume their acting careers. Their relocation to Kuala Lumpur provided more dynamism to the Merdeka Film Studio which was previously known as a B-grade film studio. Cathay-Keris able to survive for several years to produce Malay films but the decline of the Malay film industry pre-occupied their survival. Soon, Cathay-Keris ceased their movie production and devoted more commitment towards film distribuship. The closure of this studio dismantled the landmark of Singapore as the centre for Malay arts and culture which she enjoyed since the early 20th century. The role was taken by Kuala Lumpur and Malaysia. At the same time, with numerous government initiatives, it provided more attractive outlook for many artistes to make Malaysia their home.

It is worth to write that during this period, the Singapore Government was too pre-occupied with several economic issues (like the withdrawal of British Armed Force and problems of unemployment) and this gave them little chance to make initiatives to revive the Malay film industry. Coincidentally, the Malay film industry during that period was in serious decline because of heavy competition from Indonesia and the technological backwardness of the Malay film industry.¹⁰ As a result, it was impractical to hope that the film producers or the government of Singapore would revive the Malay film industry.

The Decline of Malay as Lingua Franca

As the centre of Malay arts and culture, Malay language was widely spoken in Singapore. With the exception of the European community, people in Singapore at least knew to communicate in basic Malay especially in daily matters involving the Malays. English was still the official language on the island and other states in Malaya but the position of Malay was never marginalized. In Malay vernacular school, the Malay language was taught as one of the subjects.

The status of Malay as a language of communication further was consolidated with the adoption of the 1959 constitution which placed the Malay language as the national language (*Bahasa Kebangsaan*) of Singapore.¹¹ Although this step never undermined the *status quo* of English as the language of administration, it highlighted Singapore's intention of sharing similar aspiration with Malaya in promoting the Malay language as the national language.¹² At the same time, many official functions which involved the PAP ministers were conducted in Malay language thus supporting the aspiration of *mendaulatkan bahasa kebangsaan* (glorifying the national language), a trend in the Malay political mainstream.

However, some argue this situation was an effort of the PAP Government to please the Malayan Government to accept Singapore to be part of greater Malaya. Prior to the merger, the PAP made every attempt to impart a veneer of 'Malayness' to Singapore like adopting Malay language as the national language and a Malay was installed as the Head of State.¹³ By promoting more 'Malayness' into Singapore, added with the merger aspiration, these acts of promoting the Malayness at the same time filled the Singapore Malays with hope and made them feel secure politically and culturally.¹⁴

However after the separation, the status of Malay language as the national language began to become marginal.¹⁵ The special attention to the Malay language was discontinued after the separation. In return, the Singapore Government began to promote English as the main medium instruction in all aspects. Due to the requirement for economic survival, Singapore must readjust their orientation to be more competitive in the international market. A good command in English would give accessibility to its citizens of western enterprise to earn an employment. Despite this setback, Malay remains as the national language because of the historical consideration. Gradually, the government started to place the four languages as the official languages for Singapore (English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil) which are in line with their aspiration of multiracial and multicultural Singapore. At the same time, the government started to reduce the number of Malay vernacular schools and integrated these schools with the mainstream education which used English as the medium of instruction. Another factor which stimulated the government to undertake such action because of the low level of employment among the

product of the Malay stream had. Their command in English were inferior because the lack of exposure with other community in the island. This effort to integrate this educational stream was more serious after the mid-70's when Singapore was moving forward with their nation building process after their Independence. With this practice, most Singaporeans are perfectly bilingual with their mother tongue and English.

The decline in the usage of the Malay language in mainstream Singapore consequently affected the literature and arts relating to the language. Throughout this time, Singapore always produced many literary figures like Harun Aminurrashid, Masuri Salikun, Mohd Ariff Ahmad and Suratman Markasan. Accompanied with their *magnum opus*, they received acknowledgement throughout the Malay literature fraternity. However, the effect of this separation did not immediately stimulate the decline. Masuri Salikun when discussing the Singapore Malay literature after the separation, he maintained that everything was not distinct from the Malaysian Malay literature. Only after 1970, some elements of transformation started to emerge in linguistic style and themes.¹⁶

This new group of Jamal Tukimin, Yusman Abdul Majid and few others aligned themselves to a group called '*Group Gelorasa*' which emerged as a counter response to the weakness of ASAS 50.¹⁷ After the separation, ASAS' 50 lost almost half of its members as a result of this political incident.¹⁸ Although ASAS' 50 was established in Singapore, many of its members originated from the Peninsula. The involvement of Malayan citizens in ASAS 50 had showed the organization itself naturally has Malaysian worldview in their struggle. Members like Asraf, Uthman Awang and A. Samad Said returned to Malaysia because many of them found a permanent employment there. Therefore, it made ASAS 50 being held up by organizational problems to proceed with their activities. This group, though had a need for new orders which were distinct from pre-separation elements to be established in this newly independent nation. By establishing a new group of which can stimulate characteristics of new Singapore, it could somehow divert the trauma of separation suffered by many Singaporeans especially the Malays.

Ironically, in contemporary Singapore, it is rather difficult to find non-Malay who are able to converse fluently in Malay. Even the lyric of the national anthem are not understood by the majority of the them (especially for post-independent born) owing to their lack of familiarity with the national language.¹⁹ Indeed, many Singaporeans especially the non-Malays currently are not even aware that Malay is the national language. Because of the unfamiliarity of their national language, there was a debate in the early 90's to change their national anthem to another language. But the government rejected this proposal because they felt the matter was too sensitive and furthermore, they argued the lyric of *Majulah Singapura* is very simple to comprehend the meaning.

Decline of Malay Educational Stream

Since the beginning of colonialism, British started their project to develop an educational system which is suitable for the island. Thomas Stamford Raffles during his presence in Singapore tried to persuade Sultan Hussin to establish a school for the Malays to earn better education, unlike their parents. However, the suggestion proposed by Raffles was not enough to convince Sultan Hussin. But, it was the British who first established the school for children in 1819. Apart from this school, there were a number of English educational institutions. Some of these schools were funded by Christian missionaries and this situation made the Malays quite reluctant to send their children to these schools.

The Malays were not very keen to send their children to the government sponsored school instead willing to let their children be educated informally by sending them to the locally trusted man to teach their children to recite the *Qur'Ēn* and some basic requirements in daily affairs. However, as early as in 1834, there was already a formal educational institution using the Malay language to cater to the needs of education for the Malay community. However, the participation of the Malays was not very encouraging. It was reported, only 12 students registered for the first session on that year. The number increased annually but it was not the same if comparison was made in with the Chinese and English educational stream.

Somewhere in 1855, Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim and Governor Blundell donated \$1500 each to establish a school in Telok Blangah and another school in Kampung Gelam. The school at Kampung Gelam was named as Sekolah Melayu Abdullah Munshi probably because of his contribution in promoting education among the Malays earlier. Later in 1884, another development was achieved by the foundation of a school specially dedicated for the girls in Telok Blangah. Temenggong Abu Bakar (later Sultan Abu Bakar) was very generous by allowing some part of his palace to be converted into classrooms. However, the existence of this school only lasted about two years because of poor enrolment.²⁰

From the early 20th century until Singapore attained the status of self-governing territory, the Malay education was able to grow steadily. The Malay education received another boost when PAP won the election in 1959. Once the party won the election, the government led by Lee Kuan Yew launched a programme to provide free education for all Singapore Malays from primary to tertiary education. By launching this programme, it could eradicate the level of education dropout among the Singapore Malays which resulted from the poverty among them. The pre-Malaysia period for the Malay education stream was considered as the zenith of Malay education because it was the first time, the Malay education received huge attention from the government.

During this period, the Singapore Government introduced the Malay secondary class in 1960 in the government school. The male students were placed at Sekolah Kota Raja and the female were sent to Sekolah Geylang Craft Centre. The establishment of these classes in 1960 was in line with the appeal from numerous Malays organization to fasten the establishment of secondary level of Malay stream class. Soon, another sixteen classes were established throughout the whole island after the foundation of these inaugural classes. By the early 1961, about a year after the establishment, nearly 45 Malay secondary classes were established in Singapore schools. Although these classes were shared with the secondary English school, nobody was able to deny that by the establishment of these classes, it signified the rapid growth of Malay educational stream in Singapore.

Because of the warm welcome from the Malays, the government moved one step further by introducing the pre-university classes at the Malay school. The first pre-university class began at Sekolah Menengah Sang Nila Utama in 1964.²¹ The introduction of the pre-university class at the Malay school during this period was regarded as a very remarkable achievement by the Malay education activist because they were already conducting their work since 1963 in order to form the class.

It is acknowledged that the Malay education received a lot of momentum before and during the merger with Malaysia. Some Malay parents transferred their children from the English stream to the Malay stream because of the high prospect posed by the Malay education. Especially in the Peninsula, the promotion of Malay education done by the government helped to uplift the status of Malay education and the Malays started to build up their trust for it. As the result of the educational development in Malaya, the Singapore Malays followed the trend held by the Malays across the Causeway.

However, things started to change after the separation. The momentum which was already built up before the separation began to slow down. After the separation, the Singapore government began to detach their orientation from Malaya to become a separate nation and one of the areas which the government tried to adjust were the education and the language among the masses. As mentioned before in this article, after the separation, the usage of the Malay language started to decline because the government of Singapore's policy to promote the usage of English instead of the usage of Malay language. The priority given to English rather than Malay language affected the Malay educational stream as well.

One of the signs of the decline in Malay educational stream was the decline in enrolment after the separation. Since English education received more attention from the government, the Malay education got affected from this policy. By looking at the enrolment of students in the Malay school like mentioned below, the situation of Malay educational stream took place can be understood.

Table 1 The number of enrolment in the Malay school in Singapore

POLITICAL ENTITY	YEAR	NUMBER OF ENROLMENT
Malaysia	1963	5127
	1964	4750
	1965	4848
Republic of Singapore	1966	5249
	1967	3857
	1968	3025
	1969	2002
	1970	1000
	1971	876
	1972	553

Source: Kamsiah Abdullah, *Benih Budiman: Suatu Analisa Sosio-Sejarah Persekolahan Melayu di Singapura*. (Tanjong Malim: Penerbit Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 2007), p. 227.

By looking at Table 1, it could be seen that there was a steady decline in the number of enrolment in the Malay education since 1967. By comparing the enrolment of 1966 (the highest enrolment) and 1972, there was a ratio of 9: 1 from the enrolment in 1966 and the enrolment in 1972. The promotion from the government for the Malays to send the children to the English school was stimulated from the lack of accessibility of Malay educational stream graduates to the job market. The graduates of Malay school usually have low level of English proficiency as compared to the English school graduates.

Because of the government's policy to promote English education, it decreased the confidence among the students who were studied in the Malay school. Although the government continues to support and fund the Malay school, the support was not at the level before and during the merger. The low level of confidence among the Malay students in the Malay schools affected the passing rates in the Malay school.

Table 2 The number of candidates and the passing percentage of the Malay school for Malaysia Certificate of Education (MCE) 1963 – 1969

YEAR	NUMBER OF CANDIDATE	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	NOT PASS	NUMBER OF PASS	% OF PASS
1963	1525	25	125	426	914	614	38.70
1964	1482	15	107	522	838	644	43.45
1965	1190	15	74	401	686	504	42.50
1966	1308	6	35	299	955	353	27.00
1967	1470	2	21	257	1185	285	19.40
1968	1216	3	34	276	891	325	26.70
1969	210	0	3	38	169	41	19.50

Source: Sharom Ahmat, Singapore Malays, Educational and National Development in *Malay Participation in the National Development of Singapore*, edited by Sharom Ahmat and James Wong, (Singapore: Eurasia Press, 1971), p. 9.

In the early 1970's, there was an effort to revive the Malay school proposed by the Singapore Malay Teachers Union (SMTU) to the government. Looking at the trend of decline within the Malay education, the union proposed to the government to integrate all educational streams in Singapore into single educational stream (national stream). The proposal is by having one national stream with English as the main instruction and Malay language must be taught as the second language. For the Chinese and Indian students, apart from these two languages, they would be taught their mother tongue in order to preserve their community heritage. For the Malays, they will be taught the subject of Islamic studies²².

Despite numerous attempts and proposals forwarded by a number of Malay organizations, the situation of the Malay schools did not improve very much. The continuous decay of Malay education cannot be solved with the efforts of the government because the Singapore industrial requirement placed high level of preference for English educated graduates. Without any significant result although with continuous government support, the Malay education was heading towards the closure.

The decline of intake in the Malay school since 1967 resulted in the closure of Malay primary school and the integration of Malay secondary school with the English secondary school in the later years of post-separation Singapore. Although the pre-university classes continue to exist until 1986, the situation of Malay educational stream in the decade of 1970s exposed their reality to the Singapore mainstream that Malay education was no longer able to sustain with the need of Singapore nation building. Finally in 1986, the last batch of pre-university classes ended their study and it was that year, the Malay educational stream closed for good in Singapore.

Uncertainty of Singapore Economic Development: Impact to the Malays

Prior to the separation, Singapore started to enter rapid economic transformation. But after the collapse of the common market arrangement with Malaysia after the separation, Singapore started to find new alternative to proceed with their economic orientation. The mentality regarding Malaya as the hinterland for Singapore was gradually abandoned by the PAP leadership after the failed merger.²³ From that point, Singapore initiated various policies to detach themselves from their 'hinterland.'

However, their plan to accelerate their economic transformation received a huge setback in 1968 when the British Government announced their intention to review of their 'east of Suez policy.' One of the reviews was to withdraw from their military base in Singapore. On the perspective of the British government, maintaining their military base beyond the Suez Canal was very costly and strategically did not give them long term benefits. Therefore, the best solution for the British was to abandon their Singapore base and concentrate their military interest in Cyprus and Hong Kong.

Domestically, they received the announcement negatively. During that period of time, Singapore was still incapable to defend themselves independently. Singapore during that period was still in the process of building their military capabilities and therefore, their defence was greatly relying on the presence of British military personnel on that island. But the most serious question on the mind of the government leadership was to maintain the confidence of the foreign investors to remain on the island beyond the

British withdrawal. For Lee Kuan Yew and his cabinet, jobs can be created but the confidence of the investors must be maintained because the vulnerability of Singapore economy by then to survive alone.²⁴ The local investors needed time to become more competitive and the capitals were mostly derived from these foreign investors.

Prior the separation, the PAP Government had begun initiatives to transform Singapore's economic structure in order to maintain the economic sustainability of the island. The 1959 constitution gave the island the status of self-governing territory while the British maintaining the authority in defence and foreign affairs.²⁵ It was common during that period that a territory with such a status be granted with independence soon. When the PAP formed the government in 1959, they began to acknowledge the task ahead if the economy remained stagnant. The British will leave and they must find ways to maintain their sustainability with or without Malaya. The only way for Singapore was to venture into mass industrialization. For that purpose, 9000 acres (initially) of land was allocated for the establishment of Jurong Industrial Estate, where the previously swampy lands were reclaimed to path way for the construction of factories. Other swampy area like Toa Payoh and Kallang were included for the redevelopment project.²⁶

Commonly happen in many nation states, not all Singaporeans attained the benefits from this economic transformation. The Malays were further left behind because the profession they were accustomed to were no longer available. Looking at Table 3, it gives a better understanding of the situation since the traditional Malay occupations like in the agricultural and fishing sectors sharply declined after 1965. Moving to the flat provided by the Housing Development Board (HDB) may sound comfortable for the youth but for the elders, it was not easy to adjust with this new life. The Malays really missed their *kampong* life and some of them required lots of time to adjust with the new surroundings.²⁷

Losing their old job, they began to seek new ones. But the challenges were daunting because new skills needed to be acquired. For those who were unlucky, the job stayed away from them. There were several reasons to understand this situation. Going into 1970's, the government linked jobs like

the police and military which were traditionally associated with the Malays suddenly excluded them from their ranks.²⁸ Because of this scenario, many Malays were involved in negative activities like drug addiction and other social illnesses. Looking at this scenario, some argued that the poor outcome of the PAP in some constituencies (like Geylang Serai and Kampung Kembangan) in the 1972 General Election was probably because of the protest votes given by the Malays because they felt that the PAP had abandoned them.

For some quarters of the Malays, losing jobs was not a big deal. Some of them were not born in Singapore. This section of Malays originated from Malaya like Malacca and Johor and therefore, they never regarded Singapore as their home. Singapore in their views was only a place to earn money and once the job is no longer available, they will move back to their *kampung* (hometown) and the land owned by their parents still enabled them to benefit from it. Some of them who worked with the British army in the Singapore military base but when the base was closed in 1971, they moved back to their *kampung* and because of this reason, it decreased the number of Singapore Malays in the state demographics.

There were also some other sections of Malays who took the offer given by the *Menteri Besar* (State Minister) of Johor. The government of Johor felt the need to accommodate the Malays who felt their future was uncertain in Singapore by offering them land.²⁹ The offer sounded politically-motivated but at least, this was the best way to cool down the uncertainties faced by the Singapore Malays by providing them alternatives apart from Singapore. While there was no statistic to indicate how big the migration that took place was, the perception of such migration among the Malays was very high. Among the big names that moved to Malaysia after the separation were Ahmad Ibrahim, Sharom Ahmat and Abdul Hamid Jumat. These personalities made their names there but later found their final destination in Malaysia.

Because of these economic uncertainties, the standard of living among the Malays downgraded a few years after the separation. Compared to the Chinese, the Malays were far behind in terms of income, land ownership and profession.

Table 3 The occupation of Malay and Chinese male age 10 and above for the year 1957, 1970 and 1980 (percentage)

	1957		1970		1980	
	M	C	M	C	M	C
Professional and Technical	2.8	3.6	4.4	6.7	4.6	8.3
Administrative and Management	0.3	1.8	0.3	2.1	0.8	6.7
Clerical	15.0	11.5	13.9	11.2	13.0	8.5
Sales	3.0	23.8	3.7	20.0	3.1	15.4
Services	13.7	9.0	21.6	7.6	18.0	6.2
Agricultural and Fisheries	10.0	7.6	5.9	4.6	3.1	2.5
Production and Transportation	42.1	42.3	45.4	43.2	53.5	43.2
No Classification	13.1	0.4	4.6	4.8	3.7	9.1
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Tania Li, *Malay in Singapore: Culture, Economy and Ideology*. (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 140.

Table 4 The monthly income of Malay and Chinese male for the year 1975, 1978 and 1980 (percentage)

	Income less than \$400 monthly		Income more than \$1000 monthly	
	M	C	M	C
1975	62.6	67.1	0.8	7.0
1978	75.8	53.3	1.8	8.9
1980	64.1	41.8	2.7	12.9

Source: Tania Li, *Malay in Singapore: Culture, Economy and Ideology*. (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 140.

The figures representing the income between the Malays and the Chinese indicates a clear trend on how far the Malays were lagging behind the Chinese in the 1970's, after industrialization took place. Probably one of the reasons was because of the attitude of the Malays themselves who were too complacent with their lives compared to the other races especially the Chinese. But, poverty among the Malays was not new. It can be traced back to the British colonial period. So by looking at this situation, the poverty and backwardness among the Malays were not solely because of the post-separation transformation but it is deeply-rooted in the earlier period.

Since the Chinese were more competitive and well-prepared to face this changing situation, they found themselves in a better situation to adjust to the transformation.

This uncertainty in the economic field posed serious problems to the Malays after the separation and as a result, some of them migrated to the Peninsula to find better prospects or to obtain the jobs that they were accustomed to. The best example was the Malay movie stars who moved to Kuala Lumpur after the closure of the film studios. But this few marginal cases did not to apply to all Malays. Most of the Malays after their old jobs were no longer available (like in the police force and the military), they found other occupations although they were not accustomed to the occupations before. But, they needed to work for a living. They found it hard but it was the reality they were required to face.

Table 5 Malays in the police, fire brigade and military services

	1957	1970
Number of Malay personnel	10 845 (75.57%)	7 563 (21.68%)
Total number of personnel	14 350 (100%)	34 891 (100%)

Source: Kamsiah Abdullah, *Benih Budiman: Suatu Analisa Sosio-Sejarah Persekolahan Melayu di Singapura*. (Tanjong Malim: Penerbit Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 2007), p. 223.

Despite numerous hiccups in the years after the separation, they began to recover from the trauma of the separation. This trend started to bear fruit since the early 1980's when few Malay/Muslim organizations were established to start self-assisted programmes to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the Malays. The emergence of MENDAKI brought many expectations from the Singapore Malays to compete with the non-Malays in various areas.

Years after the separation, the feeling of close attachment of the Singapore Malays to Malaysia began to decline. Probably, the attachment which still exists is the family relations across the Causeway and to get cheaper household products in Johor. Other than that, the attachment of Singapore Malays to the Peninsula is not as high as before the merger. The newspapers from Malaysia are also barred from being sold in Singapore and vice versa

for the Singapore newspaper. Because of less things being shared on both sides of the Causeway, it makes them feel less attachment to each other.

Reflection

There are effects which happened subsequently after the separation of Singapore from Malaysia. Some of the reasons contributed to these effects occurred naturally and some of these effects happened because of the government policies after the separation.

The Singapore Constitution mentioned the status of Malay language as the national language of Singapore. The promotion of Malay as the national language already took place since 1960 when the government adopted the constitution of 1959 in full. Although English remains as the official language but the promotion of Malay as the national language was an effort by the Government of Singapore to bring the island closer to the Malay world after more than hundred years of British colonialism. But the status of Malay language received a setback after the separation because the government policy to promote English as the main language for the masses. In the constitution, the status of Malay language remains unchanged but in practical, the Malay language happens to be marginalized.

In relation with the decline of the Malay language, it also affected the Malay educational stream on that island. Because of the high priority given to English and Mandarin in the commercial usage, the demand of Malay language in daily usage subsequently declined. The lack of demand in the usage of Malay language in employment decreased the momentum of the Malay education stream in post-separation Singapore.

Apart from the decline in Malay language and Malay educational stream, the status of Singapore as the centre of Malay arts and culture was also affected. The closure of the MFP and Cathay-Keris Film Studio shut down any possibility to keep Singapore as the centre of Malay arts and culture. Apart from the closure of these film studios, accompanied with the withdrawal of Utusan Melayu and the decay in Singapore Malay literature, it evolved the landmark of Singapore as the centre of Malay arts and culture.

Immediately after the separation, the changing pattern of the island's life brought many dilemmas to the Malays. Although their economic status received many setbacks after the separation, they tried to find alternatives within the island. For them, it was very hard to relocate *en masses* to a new place once the old place was no longer attractive. Looking at the Malay worldview, generally the Malays would never leave their home to an alien place. They would live and retire at the home or place where they are born though their home might not be as good as in other country. Therefore, it can be understood why there is a Malay proverb *Hujan Emas di Negeri Orang, Hujan Batu di Negeri Sendiri, Baik Lagi di Negeri Sendiri*.³⁰ The problems that the Malays faced on that island however has made them a more sustainable and self-sufficient community than before.

By looking at these four issues, it could be estimated how far Singapore has departed after the separation in 1965. Once a Malaysian goes to Singapore, they may feel as though they are travelling in a western hemisphere because Singaporeans after the separation tried to distinct themselves from the rest of their Malay neighbours. From this, it can already be assumed how far Singapore has detached themselves from Malaysia and the rest of the Malay world. Therefore, it is not unusual to find the lifestyle and the mentality of the Singapore Malays to be distinctive unlike the Malays surrounding them.

Nota

- ¹ William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*. (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.39.
- ² *Utusan Melayu*, "Malaysia Memandang Singapura Sebagai Saudara Adakah Singapura Memandang Malaysia Begitu?", 17 November 1965, p.4.
- ³ Mana Sikana, "Wajah Melayu Singapura Selepas Perpisahan dengan Malaysia", *Sari – International Journal of the Malay World and Civilization*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2009): p. 29.
- ⁴ Lee Kuan Yew. *From Third World To First: The Memoir of Lee Kuan Yew*. (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings, 2000), p. 266.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ Roff, p.175.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p.176.
- ⁸ Raphael Millet. *The Singapore Cinema*. (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006), p. 64.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p.65.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.67.

- ¹¹ *Utusan Zaman*, “Bahasa Melayu Menjadi Bahasa Rasmi Yang Tunggal Di Singapura”, 6 March 1960, p. 4.
- ¹² The interpretation of *bahasa kebangsaan* (national language) in Malaya and Singapore is different. Malaya adopted Malay as the national language by interpreting Malay as the language for unity and the language for official function (gradually adopted). While in Singapore, the adoption of Malay as the national language only basically on historical consideration and the practice in official affairs is more limited unlike in Malaya. This practice is similar in India where Hindi is recognized as the national language but English remains as the official language.
- ¹³ Bedlington, p. 214.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ Hong Lysa and Huang Jianli. *The Scripting of a National History: Singapore and Its Past*, (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), p. 95.
- ¹⁶ Mana Sikana, p. 28.
- ¹⁷ Generation of 50 Laureate (*Angkatan Sasterawan 50* in Malay) was founded in 1950 by a group of Malay laureates like A. Samad Said, Masuri Salikun, Mohamad Ariff Ahmad and Harun Aminurrashid. The focus of this organization is to promote new approach in modern Malay literature and narrowing the gap, between the literature and the masses. With their tagline, *Seni Untuk Masyarakat* (Arts for the Masses), ASAS 50 tried to promote to the laureate to compose works which reflect the masses of the period and promote the usage of literary works to revive the masses. Please refer Mohamed Pitchay Gani Mohamed Abdul Aziz. (2005). *Dari Gerhana Ke Puncak Purnama: Biografi ASAS 50, 55 Tahun Dalam Persuratan*, Singapore: Angkatan Sasterawan 50.
- ¹⁸ Mohamed Pitchay Gani Mohamed Abdul Aziz, *Dari Gerhana ke Puncak Purnama: Biografi ASAS 50, 55 Tahun Dalam Persuratan*, (Singapore: Angkatan Sasterawan 50, 2005), p. 3.
- ¹⁹ Lily Zubaidah Rahim, *Singapore in the Malay World: Building and Breaching Regional Bridges*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 2.
- ²⁰ Kamsiah Abdullah, *Benih Budiman: Suatu Analisa Sosio-Sejarah Persekolahan Melayu di Singapura*. (Tanjong Malim: Penerbit Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 2007), p. 58.
- ²¹ *Ibid.* p. 213.
- ²² *Ibid.* p. 230.
- ²³ Chan Heng Chee, p. 3.
- ²⁴ Loh Kah Seng, The British Military Withdrawal from Singapore and the Anatomy of a Catalyst in *Singapore in Global History*, edited by Derek Heng and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljuneid, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), p. 199.
- ²⁵ Chan Heng Chee, p. 4.
- ²⁶ Drysdale, p. 254 – 55.
- ²⁷ Bedlington, p. 221.
- ²⁸ Bedlington, p. 218.
- ²⁹ *Utusan Melayu*, “Singapura Keluar dari Malaysia: Akhirnya Sampai Jugalah Hajat Petir dan Pemimpin-Pemimpinnya” 10 August 1965, p. 4
- ³⁰ Translation: How Good Other People Place, Ours is the Best.

