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BERITA

Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group
Association for Asian Studies



Berita

Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group Association for Asian Studies

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Letter from the Chair

At the March 2023 Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies in Boston, scholars of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei gathered to exchange ideas and connect (or reconnect) with friends, new and longstanding. The plethora of panels and roundtables that had significant MSB content – 14, on a variety of topics delivered in person and online – showcased the positive health of current scholarship of the region. Even more heartening was the significant presence of early career scholars from across the world.

At the MSB Studies Group business meeting held in Boston, the community honored the best conference paper and best journal article prize winners, and also debated efforts to expand interest in the region. The report of that meeting is included in this issue of *Berita*. But the highlight of the conference must surely be the shared dinner we had – over 20 showed up, and many were new faces.

Berita and the MSB Studies Group will hit their significant 50th anniversary milestones in 2025 and 2026 respectively. As we plan to celebrate those events, we are taking a look at their early years in this and upcoming issues of *Berita*. Upon reading its early issues, it becomes immediately clear how important *Berita* was in connecting scholars of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei from all over the world in an age where computers were rare, and the Internet and emails were non-existent. Subscription and contributions to it jumped exponentially over its first few issues, and its regular features – recent publications, members' updates, recent

dissertations – were invaluable in knitting a far-flung community together. Check out the first of many articles reflecting on our history in this issue.

Mining the past cannot just be for the sake of nostalgia, for it should inspire us to continue to grow the scholarly space on Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei. The MSB Studies Group welcomes all ideas and efforts toward this end, in whatever capacity we have, big or small.

Happy belated National Day to all Singaporeans and Malaysia Day to all Malaysians!



Photos (left): Malaysian community in Duluth, Minnesota gathering on Aug 31 to celebrate Merdeka with, what else, food! (right) RSAF helicopters as they get ready to fly over the Singapore National Day Parade, Aug 9.

Best wishes,
Cheong Soon GAN
Chair, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei (MSB)
Studies Group
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MSB 2023 Meeting Report



Minutes of the 2023 Annual Business Meeting of the Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group (MSB), March 18, 2023, 12:15 pm, Meeting Room 103, Hynes Convention Center, Boston

In Attendance

Please note that this list is based on the sign-up sheets circulated during the meeting. The executive committee is aware that there are others present whose names are not on the sign-up sheet. Our apologies for the omission of their names.

Quah Say Jye (Cambridge), Chang Yi Ning (Harvard), Allan Pang (Cambridge), Muhammad Suhail Bin Mohamed Yazid (Cambridge), Nurul Huda Mohd. Razif (Kyoto), Walid Jumblatt Abdullah (NTU), Maznah Mohamad (NUS), Nursyazwani Jamaludin (Penn), Margaret Sarkissian (Smith), Jerry Dennerline (Amherst), Yen Wei-Ting (Franklin and Marshall), Nathan Peng (Singapore Management University), Teo Kay Key (NUS), James Jesudason (Colorado School of Mines), Asmus Rungby (Yale), Ryanne Flock (University of Wuerzburg), Barbara Andaya

Watson (Hawai'i), Laavanya Kathiravelu (NTU), Susan Philip (Universiti Malaya), Xinyu Guan (Cornell), Eric Thompson (NUS), Sher Banu A.L. Khan (NUS), Meredith Weiss (Albany)

MSB Executive Committee: Cheong Soon Gan (Chair, Wisconsin-Superior), Elvin Ong (Chair-Elect. NUS), Patricia Sloane-White (Chair Mentor, Delaware), Sarena Abdullah (*Berita* Editor, USM)

Introductions and Report of Past Meeting

The meeting, with at least 28 in attendance, was chaired by MSB Chair Cheong Soon Gan. As with past meetings, all in attendance introduced themselves. The chair then reported on the minutes of Annual Business Meeting of 2022, held in Hawai'i. That was the first in-person AAS Annual Meeting post-Covid, and over 20 people attended in person while at least 15 people attended via Zoom, many from Singapore and Malaysia. This was heartening as one of MSB Studies Group's mission is to extend our support to scholars from the region through partnerships and funding. The availability of online participation via Zoom has been a boon, particularly aided by the favorable time zone differences afforded by Hawai'i's location. However, the 2023 Boston business meeting did not have a Zoom component as it would have been just past 2 am in Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei.

MSB-related Panels

The 2023 Designated Panel sponsored by the MSB Studies Group was "Disturbing Artefacts: The Politics of Preserving and Presenting Histories of Singapore and Malaysia", which was held on Thursday, March 16, from 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM.





Photo 1 The MSB-sponsored panel entitled “Disturbing Artefacts: The Politics of Preserving and Presenting Histories of Singapore and Malaysia.”

There were four papers:

1. “Networks of History Textbooks and Intra-Colonial Control in Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong, c. 1950s”, by Allan Pang, University of Cambridge
2. “The Framing of Singapore's Wartime Experiences through Oral Histories”, by Rachel Eng, National Museum of Singapore
3. “The Interruptive Space of the Istana Kampong Gelam in Singapore”, by Muhammad Suhail Bin Mohamed Yazid, University of Cambridge
4. “Disrupting the Canon: Decolonizing Natural History Drawings through Curation”, by Syafiqah Jaaffar, National Museum of Singapore

In addition, we had a bumper year of MSB-related presentations. This year, we have four panels and 33 papers that have Malaysia, Singapore, or Brunei content as their primary or sole focus. In addition, five panels, 10 papers and

two roundtables that have significant MSB content. In addition, for the Virtual component of this year’s Annual Meeting, held on February 17-18, there was one panel that had Malaysia, Singapore, or Brunei content as its primary or sole focus; two other panels with significant MSB content, and a total of 10 MSB papers.

Report from SEAC

The chair gave an update from the Southeast Asia Council (SEAC) meeting held earlier that week. The first item was the extension of the deadline for SEAC’s Pattana Kitiarsa Prize for Best Graduate Student Paper prize. SEAC also approved MSB’s request for \$1,000 in funding for its activities (2023-2024), but SEAC also discussed the looming financial challenges facing the AAS and its future impact on available funding for country groups such as the MSB. SEAC also appealed to the country groups to encourage more of its participants to join the AAS as SEAC’s share of AAS members is low.

All the country groups presented their report at the SEAC meeting. Some ideas applicable to MSB include: (1) subsidized travel (and other) funding for Designated Panels, and (2) sponsorship of AAS membership for graduate students.

Awards

Three awards were presented at the 2023 meeting.

The Ronald Provencher award consists of travel funds to support presenters attending the AAS Conference. In the past we gave out one award of \$750, but last year (2022), because of additional funds in our account, we increased that to two awards. This year, we were prepared



to continue with two awards but received only one application.



Photo 2 The MSB Chair, Dr. Cheong Soon Gan conferring the award to Mohammad Khamsya bin Khidzer.

Thus, this year's award of US\$1,050.00 went to **Mohammad Khamsya bin Khidzer**. Mohammad Khamsya presented a paper titled "Developing Diabetes in Postcolonial Singapore" in the panel "Constructing National Progress: The Politics of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Contemporary Southeast Asia".

Mohammad Khamsya was a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology and Science Studies, University of California San Diego. He received his B.A. in Sociology and a Master of Social Science, also in Sociology, from the National University of Singapore (NUS). He is active in publishing and presenting – in fact, he presented a paper at last year's AAS Annual Meeting in Hawai'i. That paper, "Sickly, Idle and Risky Minorities: Race and Diabetes under Singapore's Emergent Insurantal Imaginary",

was under review for publication in the journal *East Asian Science Technology and Society*.

The **John A. Lent Prize** is awarded to the best paper presented at the previous year's AAS, which was in Hawai'i and carries a prize of \$250. This year's John A. Lent Prize went to **Laavanya Kathiravelu**, for her paper "Infrastructural Risk: Tamil Low Wage Migrants, Covid-19 and the individualisation of vulnerabilities", which was part of the MSB-organized panel that received the SEAC designation. Laavanya is Associate Professor in the School of Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University. She also presented a paper in Boston titled "Beyond Racialized Exceptionalism: Ethnicized Tensions in Contemporary Singapore".

The Lent Prize judging committee was chaired by Hallam Stevens of Nanyang Technological University (the honor we give to the previous year's awardee). Hallam's committee consisted of Kersten Steiner of La Trobe University and Patricia Hardwick from Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI). The committee's commendation of Laavanya's paper reads:

Lavaanya Kathiravelu's essay "Infrastructural risk: Tamil low-wage migrants, COVID-19, and the individualization of vulnerabilities" draws on the voices of migrant workers and their families in order to broaden our understanding of the effects of pandemic on low-wage labourers in both Singapore and the Persian Gulf. Deftly weaving together social theory from Ulrich Beck, Xiang Biao, and Mimi Sheller, Kathiravelu uses an infrastructural frame to demonstrate how state responses to the pandemic served to



deepen the vulnerability of migrants by further individualizing responsibilities for self-care and self-maintenance. The Lent Prize Committee commends this essay for its critical empirical contributions to migration studies and to COVID-19 studies as well as its theoretical contributions to the concepts of risk societies and migration infrastructure.

As winner, Laavanya will chair the judging committee for next year's prize. On the committee will also be Mohammad Khamsya and Yi-Ning Chang.

The **inaugural Craig A. Lockard Prize** is for the best journal article published in a calendar year 2022 by a junior or early-career scholar addressing research on Malaysia, Singapore, or Brunei in any field of study, and it comes with a prize of US\$300. The prize goes to **Hema Kiruppalini** for her article "Imperial inheritance: The transnational lives of Gurkha families in Asian contexts, 1948–1971" published in the journal *Modern Asian Studies*. Hema is a Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, and this year, she also presented a paper at the Virtual Session of the Annual Meeting in February. She accepted her prize in abstentia.

The commendation reads:

This interesting, innovative and well-written paper expands our knowledge by giving us, partly through interviews, valuable insights into the Nepali Gurkha military forces and their wives and families who served the British in Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and Hong Kong while also building the small and

understudied but important Gurkha diaspora in the region during the period of colonialism and decolonization. The material is highly original, uses unique sources, and addresses well a gendered and historical gap that is enormous. Addressing India, Malaya, Singapore, and Brunei it confronts post-coloniality in a meaningful (as opposed to merely fashionable) way and redefines a theory of "gurkha-ness" that is truly important for going beyond the "brave soldier" trope. The author is particularly successful in fleshing out and conveying the flavor of transnational Gurkha life and society and their adaptation to local conditions and political changes. While the rules of the Lockard Prize do not require any review of the articles by or comment from Professor Lockard himself, after reading the paper awarded the prize, Professor Lockard wrote: Given my own scholarly interests in Asian diasporas, and occasional conversations with Gurkhas in Sarawak, Hong Kong, and Nepal, I am especially pleased to see this fine article published in a top journal and win the first Lockard Prize."

The judges of the prize, the Executive Committee of the Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Studies Group stated, there is no question in our minds that this is a deserving article of the first-ever Lockard Prize. It deals with generational social history, memory, and the circulation of people over time and locale with exceptionally good writing and important contemporary retheorizing based on long-ignored archival material.





Photo 3 Hema Kiruppallini receiving her award from the MSB Chair.



Photo 4 Quah Say Jye and his certificate of award.

The committee also awarded an Honorable Mention to **Quah Say Jye** for his article “Technocratic Socialism: The Political Thought of Lee Kuan Yew and Devan Nair (1954-1976)”, published in the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. That carries a prize of US\$100. Say Jye is with the Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Cambridge.

The commendation reads:

This well-written, organized, and thought-provoking paper improves our historical knowledge of the ideological roots of the People’s Action Party in Singapore, one of the longest dominant ruling parties in the world, by re-examining and re-contextualizing the socialist political writings and speeches of the party’s top two founding leaders – Lee Kuan Yew and Devan Nair. Eschewing neither a cynical dismissal nor an unrealistic standardization of their views, Quah argues for a thoughtful and measured analysis and critique of their ideology, which can then reveal future opportunities for debate and contestation. In that regard, the author usefully highlights how Lee and Nair’s views of socialism emphasizes the material (as opposed to non-material) bases of economic progress, privileges the technocratic elite as the vanguard of national (as opposed to class) interests, and how the equality of opportunity (as opposed to outcomes) is best reflective of their interpretation of socialism. Prevailing public policies in Singapore, such as those regarding education and public housing, contain echoes of these views, even if they have been modified for contemporary society.

The judges of the prize, the Executive Committee of the Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Studies Group agree that the article is a well-crafted piece of scholarship deserving of an Honorable Mention of the first-ever Lockard Prize.

Report on MSB Funds

Due to transitions in the AAS department dealing with finances, the 2022 MSB accounts were



provisional, and the figures reported are subject to change. With that in mind, broadly speaking, the MSB Studies Group has about **US\$6,200** to fund its activities.

We had started 2022 with a healthy balance of around \$5,400. Additional funds came principally from a \$1,000 allocation from SEAC last year, dues (possibly \$955) and \$550, which is the 5% administrative fee earned from hosting AcademiaSG's funding. As stated above we awarded our Lent prize and two Provencher Awards, totaling \$1,750.

Last year we had a discussion on various ideas to continue to promote the study of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei. An initial list of ideas was presented to attendees as a starting point for discussions.

- Awarding a Book Prize in the amount of \$500
- Expand the number of Provencher Travel awards to three
- Honorarium for our Annual Lecture series
- Funding for sponsored panel
- Funding for grad student travel to non-AAS conference
- Funding grad student AAS membership
- 2025 is 50th anniversary of *Berita* and 2026 is 50th anniversary of MSB. First *Berita* issue: Spring 1975.

Ideas from the floor included:

- Funding open access fees for articles or books.
- A publishing fund to assist with publishing costs.
- Fieldwork funding for graduate student.

- Small grants for independent scholars or contingent faculty, especially scholars who do not have funds from their universities.

One recurring issue that came up was the problem of communication. Many in the audience noted that they were unaware of MSB's awards and announcements. The chair noted that this was a problem faced by other country groups under SEAC. MSB currently runs a public Facebook page with over 1,200 members from North America, Southeast Asia, Europe and Australia/New Zealand. The FB group is an active outreach tool, with over 710 posts from March to December 2022. MSB also has a mailing list of 84 and growing (as of the publication of this edition of *Berita*, the list stands at 111). The MSB executive committee also posts important MSB announcements on other Southeast Asian, Malaysian, Singaporean and Bruneian Facebook interest groups. Despite this, there is room for improvement.

One suggestion from the younger scholars in attendance was to add a more "modern" communication tool, i.e., WhatsApp and/or Telegram, that is more relevant to the new generation.

The chair reported that he had suggested to SEAC that the AAS overhaul its Annual Meeting application process, in which any person applying for a panel submission that has MSB content will automatically be informed of MSB's prize and travel award offerings. This would solve the problem voiced by some in the audience about the lack of knowledge of these opportunities. The feedback from SEAC is that



administrative and procedural overhaul at the AAS takes time.

2022 MSB Lecture

Last year, the MSB organized the Zoom talk by Meredith Weiss titled “GE15: Rain or shine on the road to Putrajaya” on November 14, 2022, five days before the Malaysian General Elections. Elvin Ong served as the discussant. Both Meredith and Elvin were on the ground observing the elections and brought their scholarly and timely perspectives. Over 100 participants attended the Zoom talk or watched the recorded video on MSB’s YouTube page. There are plans to organize a lecture for 2023.

Berita Update

Last year saw a re-design of the MSB newsletter *Berita* under the guidance of our new editor, Sarena Abdullah, who gave the following update:

Berita publishes twice a year and includes fieldwork articles/reports, short articles, book reviews. As a newsletter/bulletin (and not a journal), there is a higher level of flexibility in terms of suitable articles, in both length and scope. Suggestions for types of articles include

short fieldwork notes and research proposals to funding agencies.

50th anniversary

The chair noted that 2025 will be the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Berita* and 2026 the 50th anniversary for the formation of the MSB. The former was a rallying point/proof of concept for the viability of a scholarly group focused on Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, and the success of *Berita* led to the formation of the MSB. The executive committee is preparing to mark both occasions in 2025/2026. Some of the current funds may be earmarked for those purposes.

Other business

One member suggested the MSB host a reception at the AAS. Another queried whether the MSB will mark the 60th anniversary of the formation of Malaysia in 2023.

Those attending were reminded of the MSB dinner later that night.

Note: The dinner was one of the best attended in recent years, with 24 members showing up.



Photo 5 MSB attendee group photo after the meeting.



Special Feature

KNITTING A COMMUNITY TOGETHER: THE EARLY YEARS OF *BERITA* AND THE MSB

Cheong Soon Gan

University of Wisconsin-Superior

In 2025, *Berita* will turn 50, and a year later, so will the Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group. In the run-up to both milestones, *Berita* will be spotlighting aspects of MSB's early years in its upcoming issues.

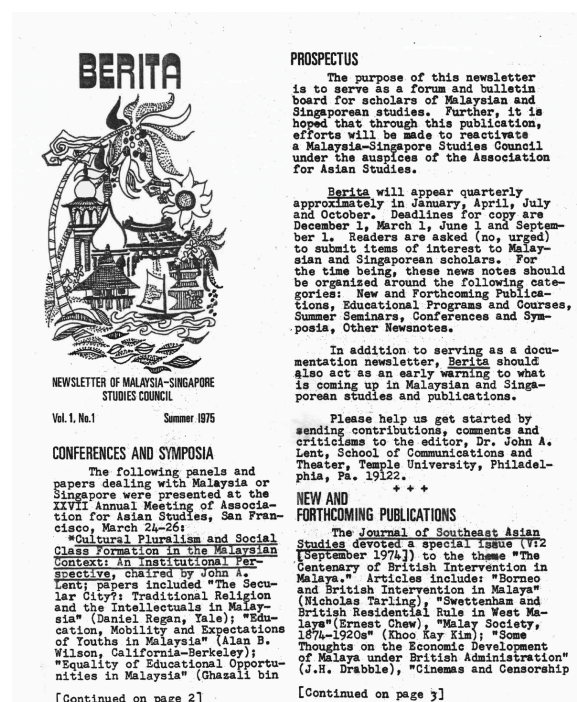


Figure 1 The frontpage of the first *Berita* produced in Summer 1975.

The first issue of *Berita*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Summer 1975, announced that its purpose was to “serve as a forum and bulletin board for scholars or Malaysian and Singaporean studies. Further, it is hoped that through this publication, efforts will be made to reactivate a Malaysia-Singapore Studies Council under the auspices of the Association for Asian Studies.” A 1971 effort to get a group failed to launch due lackluster response, but a healthy attendance of 35-40 at a 1975 AAS annual meeting panel convinced its organizer, John A. Lent, that there was sufficient support to revive the effort.

Lent produced and edited the first issue of *Berita*, which had a circulation of between 130 to 158. The mailing list was put together with the help of the Southeast Asia Council (SEAC) with Temple University, Lent's home institution, providing the production facilities.

Directory of Scholars

The early issues of *Berita* showed how effective it was in knitting together a community of scholars in two related ways. The first was being the successful launchpad for the creation of the MSB Studies Group. The second was through the more nitty-gritty process of connection, communication, gathering of information and re-distributing that information to generate more communication and connections. Readers of the initial circulation list responded with comments, suggestions and introductions that helped link a growing community of scholars that otherwise would have had no platform to be informed of what was happening in the scholarship of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei.



The sections in the early issues directly helped create this community of scholars, especially “Newsnotes”, “Directory of Malaysian and Singaporean Scholars”, and “Recent Dissertations”. The latter two reflected *Berita’s* strategy of roping in established and emerging scholars into a shared community, while the dissertation list and another section, “New and Forthcoming Publications”, catalogued current and future topics and areas of research.

The “Directory of Malaysian and Singaporean Scholars” is a good example of *Berita’s* community-knitting efforts. This section made its first appearance in the third issue (Vol. I, No. 3, Winter 1975) with 27 names, which then expanded with 18, 33 and 33 new additions over the subsequent 3 issues. By the 10th issue (Vol. III No. 2, Fall 1977) *Berita* had listed 149 names, some of whom are still active today, like Barbara Watson Andaya, Craig Lockard and Paul Kratoska.

Dissertations

Another stated aim of *Berita*, laid out in its inaugural issue, was to “act as an early warning” to what was coming up in Malaysian and Singaporean studies, and no section captured this to the fullest than “Recent Dissertations”. The first list of dissertations – reproduced below – appeared in the second issue (Vol. I, No. 2, Fall 1975) initially under the “New and Forthcoming Publications” section. It had 28 entries, most of which came from Frank J. Shulman’s first issue of *Doctoral Dissertations on Asia*, published by the Association for Asian Studies, and covered those filed between 1971 and 1976.

It was not, and did not claim to be, comprehensive, but the range of subject matters and disciplines must have been encouraging to any scholar interested in the health and future of the scholarship of Malaysia and Singapore at that time. Dissertations came from the fields of education, economics, history, international studies, political science, sociology, agricultural economics, anthropology, law, geography, Asian civilizations, and the arts. Among the names are those who are familiar to many MSB member today, as they went on to have long and distinguished careers in their fields – Barbara June Watson Andaya, Craig Lockard, and Paul Kratoska, already mentioned in the Directory, and others including Ghulam Sarwar.

Most of the dissertations in the first list were conferred in institutions in the United States, Britain and Australia, but there were also two from Israel and one from France, Michel Folliot’s *L’ensemble malais: formation, structures et situation internationale (1945-1970)*, or Malay Unity, Its Formation, Structure and International Position, 1945-1970 (political science, Univ. de Paris II (Cujas).

Two dissertations focused on East Malaysian topics, including Lockard’s *The Southeast Asian Town in Historical Perspective: A Social History of Kuching, Malaysia, 1820-1970* (Ph.D. in history, University of Wisconsin, 1973). Interest in gender studies was also strong, with three looking at women’s roles in various fields: Monica Skantze Fong, Leslie Nola O’Brien’ and Lenore Manderson’s.

There were a further 30 and 35 dissertations in the 3rd and 5th issues. The former saw entries



from the Netherlands and Germany, while the latter was the first listing to have dissertation from the Universiti Malaya and the University of Singapore, including Chan Heng Chee's 1974 work, *The Dynamics of One-Party Dominance: A Study of Five Singapore Constituencies*.

"Newsnotes"

A most interesting feature of the early *Berita* editions was "Newsnotes", a grab-bag of updates on what scholars and academics are doing in terms of appointments, travel, research and so on. Interesting bits included the announcement from the inaugural issue that "Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, has obtained what it claims to be the "biggest computer in any university in South-east Asia." The computer becomes operational May 1975."

A number of items over the first issues highlight the state of academic freedom in Malaysia. In the second issue (Vol. I, No. 2, Fall 1975) it was noted: "A correspondent in Malaysia reports that the new university and college act is extremely repressive and that at the Universiti Sains Malaysia, at least, the student union has been dissolved, student organizations are banned, etc. Anyone with more recent and fuller details?"

News updates from the region, especially in politics, become a feature of subsequent editions of Newsnotes. An item on the resignation of Tun Mustapha as Chief Minister of Sabah led the section in the third issue (Vol. I, No. 3, Winter 1975) which also included updates on two bombings in Kuala Lumpur and the launch of the *Rukun Tetangga* scheme.

Also in that issue were two updates on freedom in Malaysian campuses. The first was: "As if the University and University Colleges Act were not enough to instill the proper spirit of discipline in University of Malaya students, university officials have established an internal court system and a new set of rules on student conduct. A 35-member department, headed by Dr. Awang Had, deputy vice chancellor, will administer the six courts, one for each major department. The courts will have jurisdiction over a wide range of student affairs, from traffic offenses to moral charges, and will be empowered to suspend or expel students or levy fines up to \$M200. Appeals can be made only to the Minister of Education."

The second involved faculty: "Clive S. Kessler (Barnard College, Columbia University, New York) informs us that Oxford University Press (Kuala Lumpur) has just published S. Husin Ali's *Malay Peasant Society and Leadership*, based upon that author's Ph.D. dissertation in anthropology, University of London. Dr. Kessler also writes that S. Husin Ali, a member of the University of Malaya faculty, was arrested by the Malaysian government under its Internal Security Act following the student unrest of late 1974 and remains under detention. Expressions of concern for S. Husin, even of protest against the government's action, may be directed to the Ministry of Home Affairs, Jalan Datok Onn, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia."

Berita continued posting items related to Syed Husin and the Malaysian state's crackdown on university-based dissent continued through the rest of the 1970s, and this culminated in a 1980



interview, running 4½ pages with Syed Husin upon his release.

Among the notable items regarding scholars' academic pursuits was the announcement that Linda Lim, then Ph.D. candidate in economics at the University of Michigan, had been awarded the international doctoral research fellowship by the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies for her research in Singapore and Malaysia on the costs and benefits to less-developed countries of multi-national firm investment in an export-oriented manufacturing industry, electronics.

It is clear from the first issues of *Berita* that vibrant community of scholars working on Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei existed in North America, and the bulletin proved to be an effective vehicle of bringing together those scholars and connecting them with their colleagues in Europe, Australia, Southeast Asia and elsewhere. The range of work reflected in the lists of scholars, publications and dissertations reflected a healthy and robust scholarship agenda for the MSB countries.

Excerpt

This is the first list of dissertations extracted from *Berita's* second issue, Vol. 1, No. 2, Fall 1975.

Ahmad, Zahoor, "Analysis of the Effects of Changes in Administrative Policies of the Singapore Ministry of Education on the Operation of the Singapore School System 1960-1972," PhD in Education, University of Kansas, 1973. 206 pp.

Akil, Ridzuan, "Growth, Structural Changes and Employment Creation in the West Malaysian Manufacturing Industries After Independence," Ph D in Southeast Asian Studies, University of Hull (England), 1972. 350 pp.

Andaya, Barbara June Watson, "Perak, the Abode of Grace: A Study of an Eighteenth Century Malay State," PhD in history, Cornell University, 1975. 732 pp.

Andersen, Robert Allan, "The Separation of Singapore from Malaysia: A Study in Political Involution," PhD in international studies, American University, 1973. 283 pp.

Bass, Jerome Ronald, "Malaysian Politics, 1968-1970: Crisis and Response," PhD in political science, University of California at Berkeley, 1973. 787 pp.

Butcher, John Glover, "A Social History of the British in Malaya, 1880-1940," ADC June 1975, University of Hull.

Crouch, Khasnor Johan, "The Administrative Elite in the Federated Malay States: An Aspect of Malaysian Social History," PhD in history, Monash (Australia), 1974. 352 pp.

Derauh, Harun bin, "Membership Participation, Organization Performance and Social Change: A Study of Selected Farmers' Associations in West Malaysia," PhD in sociology, Kentucky, ADC December 1974.

Doering, Otto Charles, "Malaysian Rice Policy and the Muda River Irrigation Project," PhD in agricultural economics, Cornell University, 1973. 274 pp.

Emrich, Keith Ross, "A Behavioral Approach to Rural Development: the Malaysian Case," PhD in political science, University of Pittsburgh, 1973. 366 pp.



- Folliot, Michel G., "L' ensemble malais: formation, structures 'et situation internationale (1945-1970)," [French: Malay Unity, Its Formation, Structure and International Position, 1945-1970.] Doctorat d'Etat es sciences politiques, Univ. de Paris II (Cujas) 1973. 374 pp.
- Fong, Monica Skantzé, "Social and Economic Correlates of Female Labor Force Participation in West Malaysia," PhD in sociology, University of Hawaii, 1974. 269 pp.
- Harrison, Robert, "An Analysis of the Variation Among Ranau Dusun Communities of Sabah, Malaysia," PhD in anthropology, Columbia, 1971. 565 pp.
- Hill, Kim Quail, "Distributional and Impact Assessment of Public Policy: A Two-Nation Study for Education and Health Policy," PhD, Rice University, 1974. 254 pp.
- Issalys, Pierre Francois, "Ethnic Pluralism and Public Law in Selected Commonwealth Countries," PhD in laws, University of London, 1972. 522 pp.
- Kratoska, Paul Harold, "Local Administration and Ethnic Cultural Categories in British Malaya," PhD in history, University of Chicago, ADC June 1975.
- Lo-Lim, Miriam Kui Kiaw, "Inter-Cultural Spatial Perception: the Case of Malaysia," PhD in geography, University of Western Ontario, 1973. 230 pp.
- Lockard, Craig Alan, "The Southeast Asian Town in Historical Perspective: A Social History of Kuching, Malaysia, 1820-1970," PhD in history, University of Wisconsin, 1973. 727 pp.
- Low, Kwai-Sim, "Rainfall and Runoff on the Sungei Lui Catchment, West Malaysia," PhD in geography, University of Hull, 1971. 261 pp.
- Manderson, Lenore, "The Participation of Malay Women in Politics Since 1945," PhD in Asian civilizations, Australian National University, ADC March 1976.
- Mokhzani, bin Abdul Rahim, "Credit in a Malay Peasant Economy," PhD in arts, University of London, 1973. 472 pp.
- O'Brien, Leslie Nola, "The Role of Women in the Economic Development of West Malaysia," PhD in anthropology, Monash, ADC June 1976.
- Rau, Robert Lincoln, "Singapore's Foreign Relations 1965-1972 with Emphasis on the Five Power Commonwealth Group," PhD in political science, University of Michigan, 1974. 510 pp.
- Regan, Daniel, "Intellectuals in Malaysia: Reactions to Modernization," PhD in sociology, Yale University, ADC 1975
- Rudner, Martin, "Education and the Political Process in Malaysia and Singapore," PhD in East Asian studies and political science, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1974. 330 pp.
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Article

PERANGKUMAN BERKERENCAMAN: PEMERKASAAN KEMAJMUKAN BAHASA DAN TRADISI MELAYU DEMI KEMAKMURAN SAKSAMA MASYARAKAT

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Seringkali kita mendengar dua pola yang agak melampau apabila kita menyentuh perihal Bahasa Melayu. Satu pendapat menegaskan perihal pentingnya kita mengembalikan martabat Bahasa Melayu kepada tahap tinggi daripada orientasi romantisme sejarah. Pada mereka, Bahasa Melayu dianggap sudah diperlekehkan daripada segi peri pentingnya di kalangan masyarakat. Yang belia dan yang diangkat atau diharapkan sebagai pelapis pembela Bahasa Melayu dituduh sebagai punca di peringkat ketandusan pemberdayaan, mengapa Bahasa Melayu tidak lagi diendahkan, berbanding dengan bahasa-bahasa lain. Satu lagi gagasan pula memasrahkan diri dan menyepikan suara sokongan terhadap pendabik dada sebagai pengislah kebangkitan semula prestasi Bahasa Melayu. Mereka yang berpendapat demikian sebenarnya tidak peduli atau mengambil kisah. Bahasa Melayu bagi mereka adalah semata-mata mengganggu-anggu dan menggeling-geleng kepada perihal pragmatis mengikut bangsa, suku etnik atau ras yang tertera di kad pengenalan, sebagai contoh Ini dikaitkan dengan bahasa bangsa tersebut di bawah naungan dasar kepelbagaian bangsa etnik Cina, Melayu, India dan lain bangsa.

Tetapi, kedua-dua kecenderungan itu bergantung kepada landasan yang palsu dari segi natijah yang berbuah dan berhasil bagi individu dan masyarakat - iaitu, Bahasa Melayu hak milik Bangsa Melayu, atau penutur Melayu, ataupun tradisi Melayu. Kaca mata yang sempit visinya ini mengkaburkan kita kepada kesejagatan dan penyejagatan Bahasa Melayu. Bahasa Melayu tidaklah dan tidak patutlah dimiliki secara eksklusif dan posesif yang keterlaluan orang Melayu, tradisi Melayu, budaya Melayu, penutur Bahasa Melayu dan para eksklusivis yang menyeru untuk mengongkong dan memperkecilkan luasnya potensi Bahasa Melayu. Lagipun, Professor Maya Angelou berkata bahawa pendiaman atau pemilihan seseorang yang terrantai kepada satu tempat secara eksklusif dan terpencil sangat menghambat kebebasan yang emansipatif dan bukan kebebasan yang liar tanpa bertanggungjawab. Menurut beliau:

Saudara dan saudari hanya bebas apabila menyadari bahawa saudara dan saudari tidak berdiam di satu tempat — saudara dan saudari berdiam di setiap dan segala tempat — yakni, saudara dan saudari tidak berdiam di mana-mana tempat sama sekali. Harga kebebasan ini tinggi. Besar ganjarannya... (Papova, 2023).

Demikian, Bahasa Melayu itu harus dibebaskan dari mereka yang mahu menganggap diri sebagai penjaga ketulenan dan kesucian Bahasa Melayu atas dasar visi miopik mereka, ataupun mereka yang berbuat tidak tahu dan mengaitkan Bahasa Melayu sebagai bahasa si penutur Bahasa Melayu sahaja atau mereka yang melihat diri mereka sebagai tuan pemilik yang menjaga



“ketulenan” bahasa dan tradisi Melayu. Apatah lagi untuk mereka yang menegakkan benang yang basah bahawa Bahasa Melayu hak milik orang Melayu sahaja. Memikir sebegitu bermakna bahawa kita bak tangkai jering dan lokek -- bakhil yang tidak tentu hala. Bahasa Melayu adalah hak milik manusia sejagat, dan boleh menjadi sumber, pemangkin dan inspirasi untuk membuahkan nilai-nilai, ilmu dan amal yang murni bagi individu-individu dan kaum-kaum di medan dunia.

Tetapi, apa maknanya Bahasa Melayu sebagai hak milik manusia sejagat? Hak asasi manusia kepada Bahasa Melayu tidak boleh terasing daripada tanggungjawab. Kebertanggungjawaban harus berakar dan mekar daripada dua hala -- dorongan dalaman (motivasi intrinsik) dan dorongan luaran (motivasi ekstrinsik) (Reiss 2012, p.152-156) .

Daripada segi dorongan luaran, Bahasa Melayu itu dipupuk, dilestarikan, diperbaiki, diwarisi dan sebagainya, kerana menganggap matlamat Bahasa Melayu sebagai satu alat untuk mencapai tujuan yang lain. Cara pemikiran rasionaliti berperalatan ini atau istilahnya dalam Bahasa Inggeris, *instrumental rationality* (Oakes, 2003, p. 27 – 45), menggapai pencapaian satu tujuan, penyelesaian permasalahan, penyelarain, pemangkinan atau sebagainya melalui memperkasakan Bahasa Melayu dan pemerksaan melalui Bahasa Melayu ini dijalankan tanpa menitik beratkan nilai intrinsik Bahasa Melayu yang bersifat dan bersikap dinamis mengikut konteks.

Bahasa Melayu pada hari ini merupakan cara untuk mencapai sesuatu matlamat atau

dijadikan alat. Sebagai alat, nilainya sangatlah rendah berbanding dengan matlamat yang mahu dicapai. Ini adalah satu cara pemikiran songsang di kalangan mereka yang memperalatkan Bahasa Melayu untuk nasionalisme atau kebangsaan eksklusif dan chauvinis, serta penuaan Bahasa Melayu yang berorientasi menghisap darah mereka yang tidak tergolong dalam puak mereka, seperti Raja Bersiong. Ini juga satu lensa minda mereka yang melihat Bahasa Melayu sebagai tidak lagi berkesan, bernilai dan laku kerana hanya dipandang dan digunakan sebagai alat dalam konteks tempatan mereka. Oleh kerana ia bentuk bahasa yang tidak dapat membuahkan modal, wang, duit, taraf sosial dan sebagainya dalam ekonomi politik kapitalis di mana ada yang di pinggir, ada yang di tengah dan ada yang di bawah aras, dengan memperalatkan Bahasa Melayu, mereka yang rasa sebegitu menggalakkan pihak-pihak yang berpragmatis dengan tujuan menimba modal ekonomi sahaja sebagai pengukur nilai satu bahasa. Mereka yang terasa diri terpinggir dan sangat kecil jika berkemelayuan atau menggunakan Bahasa Melayu, hanya memandang Bahasa Melayu sebagai alat untuk mencapai satu yang ekstrinsik dan menganggap Bahasa Melayu tidak layak bernilai, berbaloi dan patut diambil berat daripada segi kewangan, bersifat materialisme, nilai-nilai kapitalisme, konsumerisme dan sebagainya, mengikut persepsi mereka, walaupun perangai ini tidak cocok dengan yang hakiki.

Daripada segi dorongan luaran, Bahasa Melayu, sebagai hak milik kemanusiaan sejagat, boleh dianggap sebagai pengantara tradisi-tradisi masyarakat Melayu yang membumikan namun berkewibawaan mempertingkatkan darjat



keperadaban dalam mengharungi cabaran-cabaran marcapada dalam pendekatan sosio-sejarah yang kreatif dan bersifat antara dan pelbagai disiplin. Daripada sudut ini, Bahasa Melayu menjadi wadah dan cara mencapai matlamat yang lebih besar. Kalau kita melihat kepada tradisi-tradisi dalam sejarah manusia secara alamiah sangat dinamis, persaingan dan bergabung, dan bukan membeku. Sayugia, Bahasa Melayu, yang berkesinambungan, berdiam di dalam, dan merangkumi tradisi Melayu harus dianggap sebagai dinamis, semarak, pencipta, kreatif, kritis dan sebagainya, seperti sifat tradisi. Sifat yang tidak nyahsosiologi, nyahsosiosejarah, serta nyahpembaharuan ini penting bagi timbulnya sikap yang progresif, reformis dan mandiri. Ini akan mengizinkan Bahasa Melayu menjadi sesuatu yang emansipatif atau dibebaskan daripada segala penzaliman. Ini adalah cadangan mereka yang mahu mengatasi masalah keterbelakangan Bahasa Melayu memainkan peranannya sebagai pencelik masyarakat, golongan pembawa dan pelentur budaya.

Daripada segi dorongan dalaman, Bahasa Melayu sebagai satu bahasa harus dipelajari oleh kerana bahasa itu sendiri, dan tidak ada iltizam yang ada melainkan pelestarian dan pewarisan bahasa tersebut. Tetapi, kita terbelenggu dengan wabak dorongan dalaman yang bersikap eksklusif dan miopik yang berleluasa sekarang, kerana ramai yang dambakan Bahasa Melayu sebagai Bahasa yang dibangunkan, tanpa merujuk kepada dorongan luaran, konteks, dan hubung kaitnya penyejagatan dengan tempatan melalui pemahaman sosio-sejarah.

Tetapi, sebenarnya dikotomi dwidorongan ini adalah satu maya atau ilusi yang tidak memberi hembusan nafas yang membaharukan kepada Bahasa Melayu mengikut konteks marcapada kita. Pemisahan antara dorongan luaran dan dorongan dalaman harus diatasi dengan keadaan dikotomi itu digabungkan secara inklusif dan emansipatif.

Bahasa Melayu bernilai sebagai bahasa secara dorongan dalaman, kerana ia harus dicerakin, diperbaiki, dikaji, ditulis, dicereka dan sebagainya, tanpa tujuan yang bertunggakkan rasionaliti instrumental atau berperalatan. Ini kerana pencoret Bahasa Melayu akan terhempit kebebasannya berkreativiti kalau terlalu taksu kepada rasionaliti berperalatan yang seringkali akan ditarik ke dalam penjana modal bagi ekonomi politik kita, kapitalisme, yang memupuk nilai-nilai dan sistem yang makin giat menjurangkan daya pengeluaran kekayaan dan modal serta pengedaran kekayaan dan modal, antara yang berada dan miskin, antara yang menakluk dan ditakluk dan antara yang menzalim dan dizalimi. Oleh kerana si pembawa, pelestari dan pengislah Bahasa Melayu dan tradisi dan sumber kebudayaan di dalamnya harus berjuang sebagai intelektual yang menggunakan bahasa, mereka harus berkemandirian, dan kebebasan berbahasa Melayu bersabit dengan dorongan dalaman bahawa Bahasa Melayu, secara instrinsik, berharga, bernilai dan bermutu, dan kerja intelektual yang memupuk perhatian kepada Bahasa, haruslah bersifat bebas dari rasionaliti instrumental yang melampau. Ini akan memupuk keadaan aliran atau *flow state* (Csikszentmihalyi et al. 2005, p. 598 – 608) bagi mereka yang mendalami dan melebarkan



skop, visi dan kemampuan Bahasa Melayu, tatkala mereka memperdayakan diri untuk memperdayakan Bahasa. Menurut Professor Mihály Csikszentmihályi, mereka yang berada dalam keadaan aliran atau *flow state* akan tenggelam dalam aktiviti tersebut, mereka akan kehilangan masa, konsentrasi dan pemerhatian mereka akan bersifat sangat tajam dan mencengkam, dan mereka akan berupaya menghasilkan pencapaian kreatif dan berkesenian yang melambung tinggi.

Tetapi tanpa rasionaliti instrumental yang melampau, ini tidak bermakna bahawa Bahasa Melayu tidak harus dihampiri melalui orientasi dorongan luaran. Dorongan luaran penting bagi menempatkan penghasilan dan penjaan bahasa menurut nilai-nilai sejagat yang bersifat kontekstual dari segi penyejagatan yang membumi di satu konteks, tempat dan masa. Tanpa dorongan luaran ini, kebebasan yang dialami dan dipergunakan melalui dorongan dalaman akan bernatijah negatif, kerana ia hanya di awang-awangan. Ia harus membumi supaya hak asasi sejagat setiap manusia terhadap bahasa Melayu dapat direalisasikan melalui pembumian tanggungjawab mengikut keperluan kerencaman konteks setiap pelosok dunia yang berlandaskan nilai-nilai sejagat dan merentas sejarah yang didorong matlamat luaran, untuk mengimbangkan dorongan dalaman.

Maka kedua-dua zahir dan batin haruslah diseimbangkan melalui pergabungan inkusif dan emansipatif dorongan luaran dan dorongan dalaman. Justeru, dorongan dalaman kasih sayang terhadap bahasa mencerminkan dorongan luaran merealisasikan keadilan sosial,

iklim, iktisad, politik dan sebagainya. Hak berlandaskan tanggungjawab, dan tanggungjawab menimbulkan hak.

Tetapi untuk mencapai perseimbangan kontekstual antara dorongan dalaman dan dorongan luaran, kita harus mengharungi dua aliran falsafah kebaratan yang menusuk kalbu wacana masyarakat oleh kerana berkegantungan kita kepada pusat-pusat sumber penghasilan ilmu yang bertakhta di Barat. Imperialisme, penjajahan dan kapitalisme merebakkan dan menerukkan fenomena masyarakat bertongkat terhadap kecenderungan kepada falsafah, teori-teori, suara-suara dan sebagainya dari Barat yang menganggap kami sebagai objek sahaja dan bukan subjek yang berhak bertanggungjawab bersuara di pentas dunia dan untuk perihal sendiri. Ini sudahpun dibahaskan dalam istilah kebergantungan akademik dan imperialisme akademik (Alatas 2003, p. 599 - 613, 2008, p. 4-29).

Dalam konteks demikian, ada dua aliran falsafah bermasalah yang membelakangkan perkembangan mandiri dan progresif Bahasa Melayu dan tradisi-tradisi Melayu yang ditempatkan dalam tradisi-tradisi dunia yang plural dan semakin sering dan giat atau liat berinteraksi dan saling mempengaruhi. Kedua-dua falsafah yang bertempur antara satu sama lain dan meleluasa sekarang dalam dunia yang berkekejahan bawah naungan ekonomi politik sejagat yang terjebak dalam ketidakadilan imperialisme dan kapitalisme yang melampau yakni:



1. Falsafah modernisme yang meneraskan
 - a. perpaduan
 - b. kewajiban
 - c. kesejagatan, dan
2. Falsafah pascamodernisme yang menegakkan
 - a. kemajmukan
 - b. kebergantungan
 - c. pensejarahan

Modernisme melampau membasmi tradisi-tradisi dan pascamodernisme melampau pula menjanakan ketidakberbandingan antara tradisi-tradisi. Sebagai contoh, seorang modernis yang melampau akan mengatakan secara bahawa adanya wujud sifat manusia yang sangatlah padu, wajib dan sejagat, tidak kira konteks, keadaan tempatan, kekhususan kondisi, sosiologi, sosiosejarah dan sebagainya. Maka versi keagamaan yang mereka ajukan ditekankan seperti menegakkan benang yang basah dengan semangat anti-rasional atau anti-intellektual, sementelah lagi, yang berlandaskan tradisi-tradisi Islam yang berorientasikan penolakan modernis ekstrim. Maka versi agama yang ketandusan sifat-sifat yang dinamis, kreatif dan kritis ditegaskan tanpa mengambil kira keupayaan agama dan tradisi yang tidak membeku -- mampu membezakan antara yang hakikat dan tidak yang tidak dalam perihal dan peranan sosiosejarah, kebergantungan kepada struktur, elit, ekonomi, politik serta geopolitik, dan kemajmukan alamiah, walaupun di kalangan agamawan Islam timbul perbezaan adab (ikhtilaf) atau adab berdepan dengan pluralisme, kerencaman dan kemajmukan tradisi intelektual.

Pascamodernisme melampau pula akan membanteras tanggapan ini dengan mengatakan bahawa tiada sifat manusia yang sejagat langsung mahupun pada masa kini atau dalam sejarah, kerana taksu sangat dengan kemajmukan keadaan manusia yang menenggelamkan manusia dalam kuasa yang meresap dan tidak berpusat, bergantung kepada konteks sehingga tidak wujud tanpa hakikat dan melihat peranan sosio-sejarah sebagai pembasmi agensi, daya memilih dan kebebasan kehendak diri. Daripada sudut falsafah pascamodernisme ini, Lyotard mengatakan bahawa, "Mempermudahkan secara melampau, saya mentakrifkan pascamodern sebagai ketidakpercayaan terhadap metanaratif" (Lyotard, 1994, p. 27 -38). Tiada lagi naratif besar seperti kapitalisme, komunisme, sosialisme, nilai-nilai universal, idea tentang ketuhanan yang berpotensi sifat transenden di luar masa dan tempat dan sebagainya. Terdapat hanya kemajmukan naratif-naratif kecil yang tidak dapat dibandingkan. Maka kita tidak boleh memperbandingkan antara naratif dan dalam sebuah naratif. Tidak ada nilai ukur sejagat, wajib dan padu untuk membuat penelitian yang mana yang baik dan buruk. Semuanya mengikut nilai ukur tradisi atau naratif kecil mereka tersendiri, terasing daripada yang lain.

Maka, untuk mencapai tujuan "perangkuman berkerencaman" yang menggabungkan kemajmukan unsur-unsur tradisi-tradisi daripada tamadun Melayu, Islam, Barat dan lain, dan tradisi-tradisi pribumi, kita harus mengambil ukur dengan unsur-unsur berikut:

1. Humanis di mana dalam humanisme di dalam masyarakat Melayu Islam, kita



merujuk kepada humanisme Islam dan keagamaan yang mengambil sikap dan sifat humanisme dari ilahi, dan tertera dalam karya Melayu seperti Tajus Salatin di mana humanisme kelslaman mengaskan “pengutaraan individualisme positif, kedudukan sama di mata hukum, pencapaian kecemerlangan, maruah individu, maruah kerjaya, kebebasan memilih antara baik dan buruk serta keadilan sosial” (Ridzuan 2023).

2. Reformis dan progresif yang bertunggak kepada penghampiran tradisi yang penggunaan logika atau mantiq, sumber pengetahuan dan ilmu seperti akal, panca indra, insipirasi, ilham, wahyu dan sebagainya, dan juga menggunakan rasionaliti saintifik moden dan bersifat multi dan inter-disiplin
3. Melentur orang-orang dan masyarakat budiman yang bebas dari orientasi hegemoni (Alatas 2022). Contoh orientasi hegemoni adalah Eurosentrisme, orientalisme, penjajahan dan imperialisme Barat yang menepikan, menyenyapkan dan meminggirkan yang lain secara eksploitatif dan nyahkebebasan dan nyahkemandirian, dan lebih teruk lagi, ditambah lagi dengan orientasi hegemoni yang mendahului kolonialisme di Asia, seperti sektarianisme, feudalisme dan tradisionalisme, yang turut membebaskan pembinaan multikulturalisme egalitarian.
4. Perihal pendayaan (*empowerment*) untuk menimbulkan penyedaran kritis yang bertunggakkan falsafah etika-moral dan pendidikan, pengilmuan atau ta’dib yang

bersifat manusiawi sejagat, tanpa mengikikiskan kemandirian tradisi dan arah perkembangan peradaban Melayu, serta masyarakat dan individu yang menggunakan bahasa Melayu, bersama tradisi dan masyarakat yang lain. Maka mereka boleh menyumbang dan berusaha untuk melentur, mengubah dan mengemansipasikan takdir mereka daripada penzaliman luaran dan dalaman, secara mandiri.

Kita harus kerap mengintipatkan sikap merangkumkan unsur-unsur yang di atas daripada tradisi-tradisi lain. Sebagai contoh, feudalisme merupakan satu istilah yang menggambarkan ekonomi politik di Eropah, tetapi ianya relevan kepada sosiosejarah orang Melayu. Memang tentu, feudalisme di sini mempunyai unsur-unsur yang berbeza dengan di Eropah. Tetapi ini sama dengan istilah kapitalisme yang mempunyai aspek-aspek yang sama walaupun berbentuk lain mengikut konteks tanpa menanduskan penyejagatan unsur-unsur persamaan seperti kapitalisme dan feudalisme. Kita harus mempunyai sikap dorongan dalaman untuk menggunakan Bahasa Melayu secara inklusif. Satu lagi contoh yang saya gunakan adalah “rahmah berkesedaran”. Berkesedaran merupakan *mindfulness* yang ada persamaannya dengan khusyuk, tetapi agak berlainan kerana datangnya daripada konteks psikologi, yang memupuk inspirasi praktik penganut dharma Buddha. Ia digabungkan dengan rahmah atau “compassion” dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Seperti saya huraikan, “rahmah berkesedaran” “mengingatkan kita bahawa kita semua berkesinambungan dalam kemanusiaan yang sama dan harus berbaik hati terhadap diri



sendiri dan orang lain” (Faris, 2020) dan mengikut kajian-kajian penyelidik seperti Professor Kirsten Neff, ada teknik-teknik untuk memperkasakan diri kita, dan “salah satu teknik melatih diri untuk mempraktikkan rahmah berkesedaran bagi diri sendiri, adalah teknik memerhatikan perasaan dan fikiran yang melintasi minda dan hati dengan pendekatan yang objektif dan dengan sikap ingin tahu, tanpa menilai atau menghukum fikiran atau perasaan kita dengan nilai baik atau buruk” (Faris, 2020). Sementelahan, kita juga boleh mendalami apa maksud maitri, karuna, budh, nirvana, dan sebagainya dalam tradisi Buddhisme, dan melihat kalau aplikasi konsep-konsep tersebut dapat memperkayakan Bahasa Melayu, penuturnya, dan tradisi-tradisi dalam peradaban Melayu/Indonesia.

Keterbukaan kepada konsep-konsep, teori-teori, falsafah-falsafah daripada tradisi dan bahasa lain akan memperkayakan diri kita, terutama sekali apabila kita membumikan mereka dalam iklim, konteks dan keadaan setempat. Lebih-lebih lagi, dengan memupuk sikap dan pendekatan ini, kita akan menguatkan dan mengeratkan dorongan dalaman dan dorongan luaran kerana yang dihajat dan wadah mencapai matlamat tidak lagi menjadi dikotomi, kerana keterbukaan yang menempatkan diri dalam tradisi Bahasa Melayu digabungkan dengan tradisi-tradisi lain yang bergabung dengan pendekatan membumikan keterbukaan inklusif tersebut dengan kritis, kreatif dan kontekstual.

Akhir kalam, perangkuman berkerencaman perkongsian ekosistem yang saling bergantung dengan dorongan dalaman dan dorongan luaran, dan mensejagatkan Bahasa Melayu sebagai hak

asasi semua manusia, yang diperkaya, diperkasa dan berlaku adil dalam menegakkan keseimbangan saksama antara hak asasi yang dikurniakan dan harus ditegakkan dengan tanggungjawab terhadap diri sendiri dan yang lain. Sementelahan, "perangkuman berkerencaman" akan membina kerjasama, keupayaan dan agensi kolektif di kalangan golongan intelektual berfungsi dan berkemandirian yang bergotong-royong bersama intelligentsia dan masyarakat celik yang semuanya berkesedaran kritis dan bebas daripada belunggu sistem, struktur, nilai, budaya dan diskurs penindasan, penyenyapan dan peminggiran. Kerjasama rapat semua lapisan masyarakat yang melabuhkan diri dalam pemandirian progresif dan manusiawi melalui "perangkuman berkerencaman" dalam bahasa dan tradisi Melayu berpotensi menyeleraikan masalah-masalah pembangunan serta melakarkan masa hadapan yang lebih adil dan berkemakmuran yang saksama bersama masyarakat majmuk sejagat.

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Biographical Note

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Symposium Report

A Brief Report on MASSA: Looking at Malaysian Studies: Historiography and Political Literacy

By Soon Chuan Yeap
Universiti Sains Malaysia

On July 7 and 8, 2023, the MASSA (Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia) organized a 2-day conference at New Era University College at Kajang, entitled: “Who are you, Malaysia? Representations of Malaysia’s Past, Present and Future after 60 years of nationhood.”

From the title of the conference, the organizer has invited speakers of various disciplinary backgrounds to reminisce on Malaysian studies especially after the challenges that Malaysian society has faced in recent years of political mayhems, socio-economic upheavals. MASSA has provided a much needed platform and space for scholars, activists, and the public to discuss contemporary Malaysian society from economics to development, from literature to culture, from politics to nationhood.

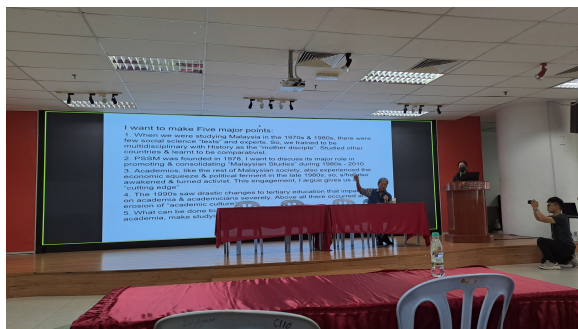


Photo 1 Francis Loh delivered his keynote during the symposium.

Two observations, or rather enactments that I could derive from the conference: One, bringing back the history. Political scientist, Francis Loh Kok Wah, was one of the keynote speakers of the MASSA conference. In his keynote speech, he raises five points in his speech, and one of the points was the emphasis on history, or historical studies on Malaysia. Francis Loh argues that during his generation of scholars and scholarship, they were trained to be multi-disciplinary and that history was the “mother discipline.” Such reminiscent is not new but necessarily timely and much needed in contemporary Malaysian studies.

Two is the (re)introduction of political literacy. Though the conference does not emphasize this part, in the several panels I attended, the impression I gained from several paper presenters was the essence of political literacy. I will explain my views on this aspect later in the essay.

History Matters

Let’s focus on history first. Even though I am not trained as a historian, I would like to share my position on history based on my experiences when I was a postgraduate student writing on the Philippines and how history has shaped my approach in teaching Malaysian politics and society.

I was trained in an area studies program and was exposed to a multi-disciplinary approach in my research. I was supervised by a historian even though I was writing on Philippine local politics. However, my exposure to history and historiography has shaped my research approach on the essence of history. In the



Philippines, history plays a significant role in comprehending Philippine political development and change. The debate was on its revolutions against colonial powers. In the discipline of political science, the position of Philippine revolutions, which encompasses the role of the elites and the masses, shape how Philippine political change and development is understood, received, and debated. Simply put, one spectrum of the debate is the orientalist position that Philippine political under-development was due to the control of the political elites, or the *caciques* in controlling the masses underpinned by Philippine culture and values in the polity. Another spectrum is that one should re-look and re-visit Philippine historiography or knowledge production in which the masses or the subaltern do exert political autonomy embedded in local culture and idioms.

When I teach Malaysian politics and society at university, history plays an important component in my course design. To comprehend political change and development in Malaysia, important “junctures” in Malaysian society are the contexts that I discuss with my students. I began the discussion from the British colonial period, with a caveat that I always tell my students that Malaysian history does not start from the British colonial period, it depends on one’s preferences and politics to make a juncture for the discussion. So we discuss the formation of British Malaya, the transformation of Malayan society, the role of the Sultan and the subsequent political elite’s formation. We also discuss the leftist movements, political actors, and ideologies. I introduce my students to the work of Cheah Boon Kheng on the term “*Melayu*” that was once interpreted as a

“region” instead of race; Syed Husin Ali’s “A People’s History of Malaysia” and Fahmi Reza’s documentary on “Ten Years before Independence” (*Sepuluh Tahun Sebelum Merdeka*) to deconstruct conventional history of Malaysian independence movements; and David Brown’s works on “The State and Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia”, in particular on Malaysia as a case study for how the ideology of ethnicity is used as a political construct to obscure the inter- and intra-class conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the 1960s and 1970s. These are interesting readings to comprehend Malaysian historiography critically beyond the race-based framework especially in the formative years of post-1969 riots and the subsequent establishment of New Economic Policy in 1971, which were the important historical junctures to Malaysian society and politics.



Photo 2 One of the morning panel on the first day -- Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid & Che Hamdan Che Mohd Razali, Azmil Tayeb, Teo Ann Siang, Hew Wai Weng & Nicholas Chan.

Political Literacy

Another component of MASSA’s conference worth articulating is the paper presenters’ take on political literacy. Even though their respective works were not focusing on political literacy, yet



their concern and solution, so to speak, is the essence of political literacy. In its simplest term, political literacy means the capabilities of the sovereign citizens to participate in matters of politics of the state, or governance. Whether it pertains to casting vote; exercising rights to freedom of speech vis-à-vis hate speech; the consumption of social media such as Tik Tok for information; the people's level of political maturity matters most. One of the panelists talked about the role of young Malay-Muslim voters in GE15 and the winning of *Perikatan Nasional* (PN) due to mobilization and utilization of Tik Tok. An interesting observation from the speaker was that the reason Tik Tok was popular among the young Malay-Muslims was not because they were hardcore conservative Muslims, it was simply because Tik Tok serves as the political education platform for this generation of young voters to make sense of their ever-changing surroundings. This begs the inquiry on whether Malaysian political education and literacy?

In the Philippines, one analysis on the rise of populist leaders was the decline of political education from the civil society organizations, the church, and the left organizations. The masses were relying on a morally-upright leader such as Joseph Estrada for legitimacy and support, to make sense of their hardship in life.

Some of us, among the colleagues (including media platforms) have discussed that political education should begin not at tertiary level but secondary level. With my limited knowledge, I could only recall that we studied matters of constitution and political structures at Form Six's General Paper to prepare for university entrance

examination. Even then, it was bits and pieces of civic education. As I always tell my students, despite the Philippines' weak state institution and chaotic democracy, its citizens are aware of their political rights at the lowest rank of political structures, the *barangay*, where regular meetings and people's access to information are made available. In Malaysia, political literacy should start from a young age, at the secondary school level on civic education and basic political rights.

Conclusion

Just to sum up, MASSA or any workshops, seminars, conferences, symposiums, or scholarly meetings alike, ought to be enhanced and made more frequent. It is about exchanging views and updates on research, it is about getting inspired and being alerted to what is happening surrounding us. It is about continuing to be puzzled and maintain the curiosity of the order of things so that we continue to question and to make inquiry on society. In MASSA, history and political literacy are the two inspirations I gained. More ideas ought to develop for Malaysian studies.

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Biographical Note

Soon Chuan Yean is a political scientist. His research interests revolve around the location of political dynamics at local level; politics from "below"; Philippine local politics; and Malaysian politics and society. Trained in an area studies program, his research approach is oriented towards a multilayered and multidisciplinary lens of viewing politics and society in Southeast Asia.

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Exhibition Review

THE SUBVERSIVE POTENTIAL OF TREES AND THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEM: AN ARTIST'S ALTERNATIVE VIEWS OF SINGAPORE THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY

Review of *Singapore, Very Old Tree*, National Museum of Singapore exhibition produce by Robert Zhao Renhui

Review by Sarah Moser, McGill University

The city-state of Singapore is known globally as an ambitious, efficient, and economically vibrant city-state, run by a 'plan-rational technocratic elite' (Han, 2017). For decades, decisions relating to spatial planning and land use have been made in a top-down manner by state experts with little to no consultation with residents. One casualty of Singapore's astonishing urban and economic development is the 540 square kilometers of original vegetation that blanketed the island, an estimated 95% of which has been destroyed since the British established their colony in 1819. Decisions about destroying and transforming Singapore are made a highly entrepreneurial state that is unsentimental about citizens' emotional attachment to particular places, if their preservation is perceived to impede economic growth and efficiency.

Unsurprisingly, the National Museum of Singapore supports the state's narrative about the Singapore success story and does not challenge the state-created metrics of success that serve to frame the state as having an unblemished record of successful decision making. The various museum exhibits showcase the colonial history of the port and the diversity

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of immigrants it has attracted, the many state development initiatives that have dramatically increased the standard of living since independence, and the nation's effort to foster multiculturalism in a sometimes tense and politically charged environment, particularly in the decades following the split with Malaysia. A rather large portion of the museum is dedicated to the horrors of the Japanese occupation during World War II. While the violence of this episode traumatized several generations of Singaporeans, the size of the exhibit and the general lack of alternative viewpoints about Singapore's path to development suggests that the Japanese occupation is a safe and unifying topic around which all Singaporeans can rally. The post-independence state is presented as an unstoppable juggernaut that implements unpopular and controversial choices for the greater good, such as rapidly bulldozing much of Singapore in the 1960s in the name of urban renewal and the creation of modernist high-rise new towns.

A contrast to the rest of the museum is a fascinating permanent exhibition titled 'Singapore, Very Old Tree', curated by the Singaporean multi-media artist, Robert Zhao Renhui, which provides rare alternative narratives to life in Singapore that stand in stark contrast to the endless succession of achievements claimed by a top-down technocratic state (Photo 1). The view of Singapore presented in this exhibition is nostalgic, at times mystical and superstitious, and is centered around direct action taken by regular Singaporeans to try to preserve trees that hold meaning to them against the constant destruction to make way for urban development, the widening of roads, and other urban transformations deemed by the state as 'progress'.



Photo 1 Photographs of special trees and Singaporeans who cherish them, Robert Zhao Renhui's 'Singapore, Very Old Tree' exhibit, National Museum of Singapore. (Source: Author)



Zhao's exhibition draws inspiration from a colonial-era postcard (1904) – one of the oldest postcards in the National Archives of Singapore – depicting a gigantic unspecified tree and an unidentified man and horse cart, which serve to provide a sense of scale. The origin and photographer of the postcard are unknown, and it was labeled simply 'Singapore. (very old tree)'.

Inspired by the 'vagueness of the photograph and the ambiguity surrounding the tree's existence' (exhibition text), Zhao provides 17 of his own photographs that depict a person or several people in front of a single tree. Each photograph is accompanied by a brief story about how each tree is uniquely cherished and how each was either saved from the bulldozer through petitions and protest or has somehow survived by being overlooked by the state. The trees featured include indigenous species that predate the arrival of the British, while others were part of colonial plantations.

The exhibition provides fascinating insight into citizen battles to save trees and the personal relationships people have with trees, while offering a fascinating juxtaposition to Singapore's national identity as a (state-created) Garden City. After the main content of the National Museum, the exhibit is surprisingly subversive, albeit in a gentle, Singaporean way, representing the tastes, preferences, and direct action of a people who often find themselves powerless in the context of a state that deeply prioritizes projecting a sophisticated and rational image.

In the text accompanying the photographs, we learn that people experience trees as having

calming effects, even helping to avert panic attacks. Couples regularly line up at a particular casuarina tree for wedding photographs, with one photographer claiming to have photographed over 100 couples in front of the tree. Others forage for fruit on durian trees left behind from a former kampung evacuated in the 1980s and have developed a fascinating informal system of harvesting the fruit in which an individual cannot lay claim to a tree but can take what they wish within a roughly two-hour time slot. Since these trees are 'off the map' and not part of 'official' Singapore managed by state actors, the trees are not maintained so foragers wear safety helmets to avoid injury from falling fruit.

Other trees are believed to have auspicious properties. One tree that had its bark scraped off during a car accident revealed what appeared to be the outlines of two monkeys. Devotees flocked to offer prayers at the tree, which they believe to be a manifestation of either the Taoist Monkey God or Hanuman, the Hindu monkey god. Worshipers maintain a small shrine at the base of the tree and continue to visit the tree to 'pray for good luck and in a lot of cases, lottery wins' (exhibition text). Practitioners of Ba Gua, a walking meditation, use a rubber tree in their regular walks. Believing that energy from a tree can be transferred to humans, Ba Gua practitioners circumambulate trees around Singapore in groups between 6 and 7 a.m., even wearing circular paths in the grass, as can be seen in the photo below (Photo 2).

Some of the stories accompanying the photographs tell us about the initiative Singaporeans have taken to protect trees to





Photo 2 A group of practitioners of Ba Gua, a walking meditation, have worn a path from circumambulating a colonial-era rubber tree. Robert Zhao Renhui's 'Singapore, Very Old Tree' exhibit, National Museum of Singapore. (Source: Author)

which they feel connected. Some people have relocated trees that were slated for destruction at their own expense, or have guerilla planted trees, most of which the state eventually discovers and destroys. One family's pastime is to collect seeds from saga trees and map the location of seed-producing saga trees on Google Maps for others to find. Citizens maintain a bamboo grove that was once behind a small Chinese temple along the train tracks. While the train tracks and temple are now gone, regular visitors to the bamboo grove report that they

have made friends with squirrels that live in the grove. A majestic Malayan banyan tree was slated for destruction to make way for a new building at a private school. Students protested (peacefully, as the artist points out), consulted the Nature Society, which determined that the tree predated the creation of Portsdown Road as a British military area, and managed to save a portion of a tree that was shifted about 60 meters. When the tree was pulled from the ground, it was placed on its side for three days to allow wildlife a chance to exit, and observers



spotted squirrels, king cobras, frogs, and giant centipedes.

One rubber tree featured in the exhibition embodies the constant land use changes in Singapore since the arrival of the British. A Muslim cemetery was cleared to make a rubber plantation, a lucrative colonial crop. By the 1940s, the rubber plantation was cleared to make way for a village to accommodate workers at the nearby Sembawang naval base shipyard. The rubber tree is the last to exist from the plantation and has survived multiple attempts to tear it down. Some people come to pray at it, and it is seen by users of the neighbouring mosque as a 'majestic tree guarding the mosque'.

The exhibition gives us a look at a very different Singapore from official promotional material that emphasizes Singapore's 'global city' status, the triumphs of an ambitious and competent state, and the singular narrative of progress. Through these beautiful photographs accompanied by insightful text, we see a side of Singapore that is emotional, quirky, and independent-minded. The spiritual connections the Singaporeans in the photographs feel to particular trees demonstrates that many crave a more active role in shaping and caring for their landscapes. Singapore's street trees and parks, while truly spectacular and lush, are intended to be looked at and enjoyed but not actively created and managed by the citizenry.

Zhao has created a poignant and quietly subversive exhibit that honours regular Singaporeans who engage with the natural world in ways unanticipated by city planners and in many cases have successfully defied state

directives. The exhibit provides a compelling incentive to push back on top-down, non-consultative decision making, and will hopefully inspire some state officials to let grassroots initiatives guide some decision making. This sort of content in the National Museum is commendable as it enriches our understanding of Singapore and hints at the limitations of the power of the 'plan-rational technocratic elite' charged with crafting an ever-modernizing, ever-rational state.

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Biographical Note

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As an urban and cultural geographer, Sarah is interested in how new cities are being created by ruling elites to project their power and ideology, the official and unofficial rationales for creating new cities, the rhetoric used to attract investors and garner public support, and colonial legacies in new city projects.

Members' Recent Publications

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Call for Book Chapters

UNVEILING DIMENSIONS: TRANSFORMATIVE CHALLENGES IN ART AND DESIGN HIGHER EDUCATION

Editors: Sarena Abdullah, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), and Roslina Ismail, Universiti Malaya (UM)

This book project aims to comprehensively explore the development, challenges, and successes in the field of art and design education in Malaysia. With its rich cultural heritage and rapidly growing creative industry, Malaysia has witnessed significant advancements in art and design education, rendering it an ideal subject for this book.

The book will delve into various aspects of art and design education, highlighting its historical roots, contemporary practices, pedagogical approaches, and the impact of technology. It will feature contributions from leading scholars, practitioners, and educators who possess a profound understanding of the Malaysian art and design education landscape. The goal is to provide readers with a comprehensive overview, critical insights, and practical knowledge to inform and shape future developments in the field.

This book aims to be a definitive resource for educators, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to understand and contribute to the field of art and design education in Malaysia. By examining the historical, cultural, and contemporary aspects of art and design education, this book will serve as



a catalyst for discussions, collaborations, and improvements in the field.

We invite scholars and professionals from art and design academia, scholars, policymakers, creative practitioners, and other related professionals in Malaysia to contribute their expertise to this project, ultimately fostering the growth and advancement of art and design education in Malaysia. We welcome submissions addressing the issues mentioned in this call, and we also encourage proposals that explore related issues beyond the suggested topics listed below.

To all interested contributors, please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words outlining your proposed chapter, along with a brief bio and contact information, to sarena.abdullah@gmail.com and roslina_i@um.edu.my.

The deadline for abstract submission is October 23rd, 2023. Selected contributors will be notified by November 15th, 2023.

Proposed Book Subsections and Topics

1. The historical development of art and design education in Malaysia

Potential topics:

- Cultural influences on art and design education
- The role of art and design education in preserving and promoting Malaysian cultural heritage
- Key stakeholders and institutions

2. Government initiatives and policies supporting art and design education

Potential topics:

- Universities and colleges offering art and design programs
- Art and design associations and professional bodies
- Curriculum development and pedagogical approaches

3. Designing a contemporary art and design curriculum

Potential topics:

- Integrating traditional and digital art forms
- Innovative pedagogical practices in art and design education
- Challenges and opportunities

4. Funding and resources for art and design education

Potential topics:

- Addressing societal perceptions and stereotypes about art and design careers
- Promoting inclusivity and diversity in art and design education
- Technology and art education

5. The impact of technology on art and design education

Potential topics:

- Integrating digital tools and techniques into the curriculum
- Virtual and augmented reality in art and design learning
- Art and design education and industry collaboration

6. Building bridges between academia and industry

Potential topics:

- Internship programs and industry partnerships
- Addressing industry needs and trends in art and design education
- Contemporary art and design practices



7. Exploring emerging trends and practices in Malaysian art and design

Potential topics:

- The role of art and design education in fostering creativity and innovation
- Case studies showcasing notable artists and designers who have emerged from the Malaysian art education system
- Future directions and recommendations

8. Identifying areas for improvement in art and design education

Potential topics:

- Proposing strategies to enhance the quality and relevance of art and design programs
- Envisioning the future of art and design education in Malaysia

Editorial Information

Berita is the official publication of the Malaysian/Singapore/Brunei (MSB) Studies Group. A part of the Association of Asian Studies, we are a cross-disciplinary network of scholars, students, and observers with research and other professional interests in Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei.

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