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WINSTEDT, COLONIALISM AND THE MALAYSIAN HISTORY WARS

Anthony Milner and Wilbert W. W. Wong

ABSTRACT

European colonialist thinking continues to influence history writing after national independence – even in the construction of national narratives. In the case of Malaysia, the work of the scholar-official, Richard Winstedt, has had a far-reaching impact – and one that is seldom recognised. The 20th century was a crucial period in the political and historical construction of 'Malay(si)a' – a time when a colonial state was imagined, and then positioned as a foundation for post-colonial nation-building. Malay(si)a did not exist as a political entity before this time – it had to be carved out of the Indian (or 'Malay') Archipelago, an enormous region largely under Dutch authority. The historical construction of Malay(si)a was never a homogenous process, even in colonial narratives. This article examines the strategy Winstedt undertook to develop a state narrative – suggesting how his work moved beyond that of earlier British historians. Although Winstedt's project was explicitly 'modern' in its purpose and style, we also note ways in which he was influenced by pre-modern Malay writers. The final section examines Winstedt's impact on local Malay(si)an writing, including Malaysia's standard national narrative. Some local historians, however, resisted Winstedt – and sought to write the Malaysian nation from alternative perspectives. Nation-making in this and other regions of Southeast Asia is all the more interesting because it has been a dialogic rather than merely integrative project.

ABSTRAK

Pemikiran kolonial Eropah masih terus mempengaruhi penulisan sejarah sesebuah negara selepas kemerdekaan – walaupun dalam pembinaan naratif kebangsaan negara tersebut. Dalam kes Malaysia, karya sarjana dan pegawai kolonial British Richard Winstedt telah memberikan satu kesan yang amat meluas – dan yang jarang diiktiraf. Abad ke-20 merupakan satu tempoh yang penting dalam pembinaan politik dan sejarah 'Malay(si)a' – di mana sebuah negara kolonial telah dibayangkan, dan kemudiannya dijadikan sebagai asas untuk pembinaan negara pascakolonial. Malay(si)a belum wujud sebagai satu entiti politik sebelum ini – ia perlu dibentuk daripada Kepulauan India (atau 'Melayu'), sebuah wilayah besar yang sebahagian besarnya di bawah kuasa Belanda. Pembinaan sejarah Malay(si)a tidak pernah merupakan satu proses yang homogen, walaupun dalam naratif-naratif kolonial. Artikel ini mengkaji strategi

KEYWORDS
colonial discourse; history of ideas; historiography; Malay history; Malaya/Malaysia; nation building

KATA KUNCI
wacana kolonial; *sejarah idea*; *pensejarahan*; *sejarah Melayu*; *Malaya/Malaysia*; *pembentukan negara*

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yang digunakan oleh Winstedt untuk membangunkan satu naratif kebangsaan – ia mencadangkan bagaimana karya-karyanya melangkaui karya-karya ahli-ahli sejarah British sebelumnya. Walaupun projek Winstedt adalah 'moden' dari segi tujuan dan gayanya, kami juga perhatikan bagaimana beliau telah dipengaruhi oleh penulis-penulis Melayu pramoden. Bahagian terakhir meneliti kesan Winstedt terhadap tulisan Malay(si)a tempatan, termasuk naratif kebangsaan Malaysia yang lazim. Beberapa ahli sejarah tempatan, bagaimanapun, menentang Winstedt – dan berusaha untuk menulis tentang negara Malaysia dari perspektif-perspektif yang alternatif. Pembentukan negara di sini dan di kawasan Asia Tenggara yang lain adalah amat menarik kerana ia merupakan satu projek yang dialogik dan bukannya berpadu semata-mata.

Introduction

Historians help to create nations – and ironically perhaps, it was a British scholar-official, Richard Winstedt (1878–1966), who did most to create the idea of 'Malaya'. Though the fact is seldom remarked on,[1] his formulation of the nation continues to exert force, even on seemingly nationalistic narratives – a reminder that modern Malaya (along with Malaysia) is more a colonial than a post-colonial construct. This said, however, Winstedt's views were in certain ways influenced by Malay authors, specifically pre-modern Malay authors. Also, although his work had a major impact on local Malaysian historians, it also provoked contrary perspectives. The writing of the Malayan/Malaysian nation has long been a contested endeavour.

This article approaches Winstedt's work intertextually – examining it in dialogue with other historical accounts from pre-colonial, colonial, and modern times, even including apparently prosaic school textbooks. We seek to show how his writing on 'Malaya' was both shaped and resisted. Such a history of ideas highlights both the discursive potency of colonialism and the presence of local narrative agency. In what way was Winstedt's history innovative? His Malay language *Kitab tawarikh Melayu* ('Book on Malay history'), published in 1918, has been referred to as 'the first scientific work on Malay history' (cited in Cheah 1996: 44)[2] – but this may be an exaggeration.[3] What really makes Winstedt's history innovative is the way he approached what was euphemistically termed the 'British Protected' region of the Peninsula. He portrayed these states as a separate entity within the sprawling Dutch-governed Archipelago – referring to them first, with the previously vague term, *Tanah Melayu* ('Malay land'), and later, by the name 'Malaya'. In developing this perspective, looking ahead as well as backwards, Winstedt helped to lay the foundations for a post-colonial nation state.

[1]Winstedt is not in the index of the impressive study by Abu Talib Ahmad (2018).

[2]The 1918 edition was co-authored with Daing Abdul Hamid bin Tengku Muhammad Salleh, a Bugis from Selangor. The 1921 edition gives only Winstedt's name as author.

[3]If 'scientific' refers to the historian's critical use of primary sources, British scholar-officials had carried out such work in earlier years – for instance, R.J.Wilkinson's 'Notes on Perak History' of 1908, or 'Notes on the Negri Sembilan' of 1911 (Wilkinson 1971a: 7, 277–322). Despite its traditional title, the *Hikayat Johor*, produced in 1908 by Singapore-educated Haji Mohd. Said bin Haji Sulaiman, is modern – at least in the sense that the author claims to have gathered his sources 'from various recollections and reports which have been proven to be true … '. He commits himself to 'investigate' all types of sources to 'see things as they are in the world' (cited in Milner 2002: 201).

Winstedt and his British predecessors

Winstedt was not the first to write of a specific 'Malayan' political unit. Frank Swettenham (1850–1946), the great British empire-builder of the late 19th-century Malay world, published a book in 1907 with the title *British Malaya.* Although concerned with the wider 'progress of British influence' on the Peninsula, this book defines the specific term 'British Malaya' simply as the 'British possessions in the Straits of Malacca' – that is the 'British Crown Colony known as the Straits Settlements, comprising Pinang, Province Wellesley and the Bindings, Malacca and Singapore' (Swettenham 1907: 1). Also, Swettenham used 'Malaya' on its own when writing of the Thai- as well as the British-governed parts of the Peninsula (ibid.: 313).[4]

The book also differs from Winstedt's later writing in its treatment of pre-British Peninsular history. Referring to the classical Malay account of the ruling dynasty of 15th-century Melaka – *Sulalat al-Salatin,* the ('Genealogy of Kings'), which the British had called the 'Malay Annals' – Swettenham discusses how the dynasty moved from Palembang (Sumatra), to the islands of Bintan and Singapore, and then to Melaka. Swettenham ponders on references to Melaka in Western sources: some, he says, portray Melaka as a 'nest of pirates'; others indicate it was 'a place of great repute as a harbour and mart' (ibid.: 18).

The handling of 15th-century Melaka in colonial and post-colonial historical writing, as we will discuss, is a critical consideration in the study of Malayan nation-building. Compared to Swettenham, Winstedt – and numerous later writers – gave far greater importance to Melaka. Swettenham did not link Melaka and 'Malaya' in the way Winstedt was to do – to provide the historical foundation for a modern nation. Another scholar-official precursor, R.J. Wilkinson (1867–1941), published a 'History of the Peninsular Malays' in a series called *Papers on Malay subjects,* which commenced in 1907. The focus of this history, as the title indicates, is on the 'Malays' not on a territorial unit or an emerging political entity. It is not a 'history of Malaya'. Furthermore, Wilkinson (1971b: 27) highlights 'Southern Malaya' – which, like Swettenham's use of 'Malaya', adds to the notion of a territorial sphere called 'Malaya' which would include but not be confined to regions under British influence.

In relating how the Melaka dynasty moved from Sumatra to the Peninsula, Wilkinson stresses the Palembang background and the 'Palembang tradition' (ibid.: 34). His narrative is also more concerned with monarchy than a Malay ethnic group. For instance, in the discussion of British intervention in Perak in the 1870s – and the short war that followed – it refers to the way the British 'remove[d]' from the country 'all the leading figures' of the previous years. Wilkinson conveys here that his 'history of the Peninsular Malays' is not just about sultanates, but essentially about pre-British sultanates. Noting the forced exile of the Perak sultan and members of his elite, he comments that 'Malay history proper ends with them' (ibid.; 118).

Winstedt was more focused on state-building than his predecessors. True, his 1918 Malay-language text is also on 'Malay' not 'Malayan' history. Furthermore, the phrase *Tanah Melayu* – the 'Malay lands' – sometimes seems to be used in the way Swettenham

[4]Someone who anticipated Winstedt in using 'British Malaya' more broadly, to describe a sphere of British influence extending beyond the Straits Settlements, was Sir Frederick Weld (Governor of the Straits Settlements, 1880–1887) (Weld 1883–1884).

and Wilkinson used 'Malaya'. Winstedt's refers to 'northern' and 'southern' *Tanah Melayu* to signify a wider area than the British 'protected' states (Winstedt 1921: 13). Ligor, which continues today to be a part of Thailand, is included in a discussion of *Tanah Melayu* (ibid.) – as are Palembang, Siak and Kampar, all in Sumatra (ibid.: 94–95, 24, 27).[5] Where Winstedt was innovative was in his references to 'our *Tanah Melayu*' (*Tanah Melayu kita*) and also to 'this *Tanah Melayu*' (*Tanah Melayu ini*) – the two phrases appearing to be linked (ibid.: 1; 68–69). He makes the point that although Java has such monuments as Borobodur, there happen to be few such structures in 'our *Tanah Melayu* (ibid.: 12). When he notes at another point that there are some stone inscriptions in 'the North side, in Kedah' (ibid.), it would seem he was viewing Kedah – by then under British 'protection' – as part of 'our *Tanah Melayu*'.

In certain places, Winstedt appears to use *Tanah Melayu* itself to refer specifically to the British sphere on the Peninsula. This is implied when he describes the rail line between the Perak towns, Taiping and Port Weld – built in 1884 – as the first such line 'in *Tanah Melayu*' (ibid.: 106). At another point, Winstedt refers to 'Muslims in *Tanah Melayu* and *Pulau Percha*' (Sumatra) (ibid.: 30) – here seeming to confine *Tanah Melayu* to the Peninsula. He states in another context that Kampar, Siak and Inderagiri (all in Sumatra) are situated 'opposite' (*bertentangan dengan Tanah Melayu*) (ibid.: 27).

In his 1918 book, therefore, Winstedt gives the impression of beginning to use *Tanah Melayu* – or 'our *Tanah Melayu*' – to refer to an emerging social or political sphere, positioned in the southern part of the Peninsula. Also, although the book has the title 'Malay history', this entity is not defined primarily in Malay ethnic terms. It is a grouping of sultanates – gradually coming under British authority. Beginning with British intervention in Perak and its southern neighbours, Winstedt then notes that Kedah, Perlis and Trengganu were surrendered by Siam and received British advisers; finally, Johor was the last of the states to come under British 'protection' (*naung*) (ibid.: 88–89). Winstedt does not use the term 'British Malaya' in the 1918 book – but he conveys that these states were now bound together, at least in the sense that they had all been brought into a British-led entity.

The role of Melaka

Critical in Winstedt's contribution to Peninsular state-building is the prominence he gave to 15th-century Melaka. Swettenham had pointed to Melaka as a significant polity – but noted the comment that it was just a 'nest of pirates'. Wilkinson placed Melaka in a narrative that tends to highlight Sumatra and the 'Palembang tradition' (1971b: 34). He stresses that the 'founder' of the 'native dynasties' had come from Palembang – or Srivijaya, a 'civilized and important state' (Wilkinson 1971b: 31) – and had then 'founded the city of Singapore', before later establishing himself at Melaka (ibid.: 27, 36). This is the narrative, as Wilkinson notes, presented in the 'Malay Annals'. He cites Chinese sources describing the vast region over which Palembang 'claimed suzerainty'; he adds that 'most of the Peninsular Sultans' claimed descent from the ruler who had come from Palembang (ibid.: 30) – and also 'accepted the Palembang tradition' (ibid.: 34).

[5]Winstedt (1921: 27) also uses the formulation *daerah Melayu* (or 'Malay territories') to cover population centres in Sumatra.

By contrast, in Winstedt's history it is Melaka not the 'Palembang tradition' which is highlighted. After stating that the ancestors of the Malays came from Sumatra, he moves quickly to Melaka. Like Wilkinson, he draws on the 'Malay Annals' to describe the steps by which the Melaka dynasty became established in *Tanah Melayu* (Winstedt 1921: 13–14). When he notes the genealogical links between this dynasty and the ruling families located in Perak, Kelantan and Johor (ibid.: 54, 68), however, he highlights the Peninsula-based Melaka not Palembang – and stresses that the customs (*adat*) of the later sultanates in *Tanah Melayu* were based on the customs of the Melaka Sultanate (ibid.: 49). Winstedt also distinguishes Melaka in civilisational terms. Like the 'Palembang tradition', the 'Melaka tradition' emerged from the pre-Islamic Archipelago world, as various Dutch and English-language histories have stressed (Krom 1931: chapter 13; Coedes 1968: chapter 14). But Winstedt's work – perhaps consciously written for a largely Muslim readership – gives most emphasis to the later, Islamic character of the polity. Melaka is 'famous' in the era (Winstedt 1921: 50) as a destination for religious scholars (ulama) as well as a centre of trade (ibid.: 33, 37) – and because of the role its rulers played in establishing the Islamic religion in many parts of the region (ibid.: 39, 37).

In relating 'Malay history' beyond the 15th century, Muslim Melaka continues to be central. After the Portuguese conquer the Melaka city in 1511, Winstedt explains that the ruling family eventually settled in Johor – and then he highlights the Melaka-Johor dynasty's role over the following centuries, even as he discusses the increasing European (Portuguese, Dutch and British) engagement in the region (ibid.: 62–65, 68–81, 87–89). Other major powers in the Archipelago – such as Aceh and the Bugis – are mentioned, but generally in relation to the Melaka/Johor sultanate (ibid.: 39–40, 74–77). When fighting occurs between Johor and Jambi in Sumatra, the narrative views developments from a Johor perspective (ibid.: 74). In quantitative terms, 66 out of 106 pages in the 1918 book deal directly or indirectly with matters concerning Melaka/Johor. To underline Melaka's importance even more sharply, the claim is made that there were no significant polities in the south of the Peninsula before the Melaka monarchy (ibid.: 13–14) – a claim which, as Winstedt would have known, would in fact require further research, including on Chinese sources (for example, Hirth and Rockhill 1911).

In contrast to the attention given to Melaka/Johor, the 1918 history says little about the other Peninsular sultanates. When they are mentioned – for instance, in the case of Pahang and Perak – it is in connection with the Melaka dynasty (Winstedt 1921: 55, 67–68). The history of the northern Peninsular states of Kelantan and Terengganu, which contained relatively large populations, is disregarded – except to report that they had once been under Srivijaya (ibid.: 26) and that, in later years, they were eventually handed over to Britain by Siam (ibid.: 88–89).

Reviewing Winstedt's handling of Melaka, there are historical grounds for treating this sultanate seriously – the Portuguese, who conquered the capital, certainly wrote of its importance, though some of their reports may have been deliberately exaggerated to persuade Lisbon to support the new conquest (Borschberg 2010: appendix 1). The 'Malay Annals' and Chinese descriptive accounts are also important sources – but they sometimes convey the impression that Melaka was just one among several significant Archipelago polities. The 'Annals', for instance, states that official letters from Pasai and Aru (both sultanates in Sumatra) were received in the Melaka court in a manner suggesting the 'Rajas of these two countries were regarded as equal in greatness to the Raja of

Melaka' (Winstedt 1938: 85). Also, the principal Portuguese account of Melaka explains that although the rulers of Perak and Pahang paid tribute to the Melaka ruler, the rulers of Kedah and Patani did not acknowledge his supremacy (Milner 2011b: 50).

Winstedt's promotion of Melaka is best understood as a strategy responding to the imperatives of British colonial policy, as well as historical evidence. As we have noted, he was more committed than his scholar-official predecessors to creating a historical foundation for the emerging 'Malaya' – a socio-political entity, a specific *Tanah Melayu* ('our *Tanah Melayu*'), carved out of the wider Archipelago. Providing historical support for such an entity was all the more difficult because Malays were accustomed to moving around the Archipelago. The seas did not enclose the Peninsular polities – rather, many subjects in Peninsular sultanates had come from Sumatra and other islands and would continue to travel back and forth. For modern state-building purposes, the strong Melaka foundation had to add substance for a Peninsular Malay heritage.

Such a Melaka strategy, of course, meant rejecting other ways of structuring a Malay historical narrative. Highlighting the 'Palembang heritage', as Wilkinson did, would not assist a Peninsular focus. In 1820, scholar-official John Crawfurd (1967: 371–372) also stressed Sumatra – insisting that the 'inland country' of 'Menangkabao' was 'beyond, dispute, the parent country of the Malay race'. It was in more recent times, he explained, that 'the peninsula' became 'the only great country of the Archipelago wholly occupied by this race [the Malays]' (ibid.: 377).[6] In the early 19th century before the British concentration on Perak, Selangor and other states made a Peninsular focus a priority – John Leyden and Thomas Stamford Raffles developed another Malay narrative. They discussed ambitions for what they termed a 'Malay league' led from the 'island of Madura, or some celebrated Malay place' (Raffles 1991: 25). This League, they thought, would be 'under the protection of the Governor of Java' – who would presumably continue to be a British official, the British having conquered the Dutch East Indies during the Napoleonic wars. In this context – before most of the Archipelago empire was handed back to the Dutch in 1814 – there could be no strategic disadvantage in having the 'capital' of the 'Malay league' located in the islands (Raffles 1991: 25).

Assuming the 20th-century need for a Peninsula-focused narrative, however, Melaka was not the only sultanate with strong claims. Kedah's historical importance was well known (Low 1908) – but its narrative is much entangled with Siam. Also, Kedah possesses a long pre-Muslim history, which has continued to discourage Muslim Malays from celebrating its achievements (Abu Talib 2018: 50–51).[7] By the same token, Patani – which was over a long period in the Siam sphere and was never brought into 'British Malaya' – was described in Eredia's 17th-century Portuguese-language account (available in a French translation in 1882) as the place where the 'Empire of the Malaios was founded'. The account adds that the 'seat of the Empire' then passed to Pahang – and after that, Melaka (Mills 1997: 231, 233, 135).[8]

As will be discussed, other significant Peninsular states – some possessing relatively large Malay populations and an historical and cultural heritage that could possibly rival that of Melaka – are also sidelined in the Winstedt strategy. Especially in later

[6]Crawfurd (1967: 373) adds that 'in time the coast [of the Peninsula] became generally known by that of Tanah Malayu, or the Malayan land';.
[7]Difficult to celebrate, even if Islam was adopted in Kedah before Melaka, as some argue (Abu Talib 2018: 66).
[8]Winstedt (1923: 124, 160, 167, 184, 245) certainly cites Eredia.

years, as Winstedt's approach began to influence nationalist historical writing on Malaya and Malaysia – and it did so profoundly – it could be perceived to disadvantage not only rival Peninsular dynasties but also a range of other interest groups. Among those perceiving themselves as losers in the Melaka strategy were members of the non-Malay population and, in addition, Malays who were unhappy about any monarchy-focused 'national' story.[9] Before examining historiographical contests around Winstedt's state-building, however, his own narrative strategy requires further analysis.

Royal-court agency

First, Winstedt did stress monarchy – and this should not be taken for granted. It is a further way in which his history would contribute to the making of modern Malaya – a federation of sultanates in which monarchy, at both state and federal level, is a vibrant and not merely ceremonial institution. Winstedt's ruler bias also throws light on how he went about crafting his *Tanah Melayu* story. It points to the role of local agency – particularly the essentially unintentional influence of pre-modern, royal court (*hikayat)* writings – in the colonial state-building process.

Winstedt drew on these writings – collaborating, it might be said, with these chroniclers from the past – and this was only one way in which British colonialism cooperated with the royal elites. What was the nature of the many royal *hikayat*? A good deal of history writing had taken place in the small Peninsular kingdoms before British intervention – and its style is very different from the historical writing developing in Europe (Milner 2011a). *Hikayat* accounts of the past are 'Malay' in terms of the language in which they are written, not because they are historical narratives of the 'Malay people'. They are concerned with the history of sultanates – of royal families and their relationships with royal subjects. In later years these *hikayat* might be given titles that disguise this purpose. The best example is the text dealing with the Melaka dynasty which, as we have noted, calls itself the 'Genealogy of Kings'. When it was renamed the 'Malay Annals' by the scholar-official Raffles in the early 19th century, the implication now was that it was a text about ethnicity not monarchy (Ng 2022: 337). Another famous text with Melaka connections, the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, has also been described as concerned with 'the Malays' or Malayness (see, for instance, Muhammad Yusoff Hashim 1992: 7). In fact, the *hikayat* begins by describing itself as 'an account of Hang Tuah, who was extremely loyal to his master'. It is a text about monarchy, or more precisely about being the subject of a monarch. It is not even focused on Melaka as a territorial entity. To take a further example, an East Kalimantan text is often referred to as the *Salasilah Kutai* – suggesting it focuses on a specific state. In fact, the title is 'Genealogy of Kings in the population centre of Kutai' (*negeri Kutai*) – which highlights the royal institution (Braginsky 2004: 454). When Winstedt (1969: 166) calls such texts as this 'Malay Histories' or describes them as 'chronicles of places in the archipelago', he tends to mislead us. The *hikayat* texts are clearly not about 'places' or about the 'Malay people', but about rulers and dynasties (Maier 1997: 676; Milner 2011b: 90-–94).

[9]Another 'loser', it might be argued, would be those highlighting Melaka, but in a narrative not focused on Peninsular Malaya. One example is Netscher (1870) – which commences with the ruler moving from Palembang to Melaka, and then presents a narrative concerning not just Johor but also Siak and other centres in Sumatra. Elisa Netscher was a senior Dutch official, stationed in Riau and ambitious for the expansion of Netherlands India.

Such writings as the histories of Melaka, Perak, Kedah and Patani, it is true, sometimes stress 'the edifying meaning of events' (Braginsky 2004: 344) – and also include information about the political culture of a sultanate, and the role of religion and ceremony (Kobkua 2003). But these texts are always framed around rulership. They provide little about the territorial dimensions and other physical or socio-economic characteristics of a state – or about a specific ethnic group, or events taking place independently of the royal court. Nor do they give a sense of structural development through time – of an earlier era being different from the society in which the text was written. They do not offer a vantage point beyond the workings of ruler-subject relations: rather, they are written in the idiom of monarchy.

Winstedt made a deliberate choice in favouring this royal literature. These were not the only Malay materials on which he might have focused. In fact, traditional or *hikayat* Malay writing, and traditional culture more generally, were losing popularity in the colonial period – becoming 'defamiliarized', to use Sweeney's word (Sweeney 1987: 274; see also Milner 2011b: 118). By Winstedt's time, discussion in newspapers and other writings was increasingly concerned with 'the Malays' – Malay ethnicity, Malay society, Malay economic and political problems – rather than with one sultanate or another (Iskandar 1973; Milner 2002; Roff 1967). This took place partly because of trends in European thinking – especially, since the 18th century, the tendency to discuss humanity in terms of racial categorisation. The accounts of such officials as Raffles were conceptualised as studies of 'the Malays'. The remarkable local author, Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (Munshi Abdullah), working in the early 19th century, appropriated this race/ethnicity discourse – his books providing a sharp contrast to traditional court writings in their preoccupation with 'Malay' issues and not the fortunes of specific royal courts (Milner 2002: chapters 1-3; Yamamoto et al. 2011). Abdullah, it can be argued, provided a conceptual foundation for the 'Malay' nationalist movement which gathered pace in the first half of the 20th century – a movement which, in a significant manner, competed with a raja-centric view of the world (Milner 2002).

Given this developing 'Malay' discourse it is not surprising that Wilkinson wrote a work with the title 'history of the Peninsular Malays', even though his attention was only on a few sultanates. Winstedt reinforced the trend with his 1918 title, 'Book on Malay history'. Also, at the end of this work, having related how one sultanate after another had been brought under British 'protection', Winstedt expresses his ambition for the future in a manner that reaches beyond royal court circles. He hopes that 'peace and prosperity' will now be achieved for the *bumiputra*, the 'sons of the soil' – or the general populace (Winstedt 1921: 89). There is a democratic aspiration conveyed here – and the term *bumiputra* is perhaps ambiguous enough to be seen as reaching not only to commoner Malays but also to peoples from the Archipelago who had come to settle in the British 'protected' states.[10]

These are nevertheless minor qualifications to Winstedt's royal bias. He did not go as far as Wilkinson, claiming that the removal of the old Perak elite brought 'Malay history proper' to an end – but the different sultanates, particularly the sultanate of Melaka, are

[10]Also, in his English-language history, Winstedt (1923: 127) tends to racialise his narrative – stressing, for instance, that Palembang was not merely where the royal dynasty of Melaka originated – but was in fact 'the cradle of the [Malay] race'.

certainly at the heart of his 1918 history. The influence of court writings on Winstedt is confirmed in the 1918 Preface, stating that the book drew from *hikayat* works as well as European sources ((ibid.: 1). He certainly makes use of the 'Malay Annals' (ibid.: 39–40, 48–49, 70) and the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (ibid.: 59) in this work – and *hikayat* are often referred to in the histories Winstedt wrote of Perak, Johor, Negri Sembilan, Selangor and Kedah. In the 'History of Perak', which Winstedt wrote with Wilkinson, the chapter on 'The Coming of the Malays' deals with the origins of the royal dynasty in Palembang – and draws heavily on the 'Malay Annals', which is described as 'the authentic account of the early Malay history of Perak' (Winstedt and Wilkinson 1934: 7). In the narrative that follows, the authors continue to use court texts – including a 'Malay history of Perak' (ibid.: 56). When dealing with the way European states began to engage with Perak, the text cites Malay texts as well as European records – and the activities and struggles of the ruler and the royal elite remain the principal concern.

The pattern is repeated in Winstedt's other sultanate histories. In the Selangor case, he draws on the *Hikayat Negeri Johor* and the *Misa Melayu* – as well as the *Tuhfat al-Nafis*. At one point, in a discussion of the origins of the Selangor sultanate, Winstedt (1934: 7) comments that 'on the evidence, one is inclined to believe the *Misa Melayu*'. In writing his history of Johor – which, he reminds the reader, was the successor of Melaka (Winstedt 1932: 2, 10) – he makes clear that he draws upon the *Tuhfat Al Nafis* and the *Hikayat Negeri Johor* as well as the *Malay Annals*.

Time and again, therefore, Winstedt writes in dialogue with court historians – and such a focus on monarchy was in tune with other aspects of the British official approach to the Peninsular states (Amoroso 2014; Gullick 1992; Milner 2002). Even in the 1920s, Governor Sir Hugh Clifford viewed the evolving 'British Malaya' as a collection of 'Muhammadan Monarchies', noting that the British had 'no mandate' to alter this (Milner 2011b: 106). The British Residents were formally 'advisors' not governors – and Winstedt himself was to hold such a senior advisory role in Johore, where he needed to be closely familiar with royal perspectives. The sultanate histories which he and other officials wrote would be useful to British administrators – and writing them could not only require a study of relevant *hikayat* literature, but also cooperation with the royal courts. In the case of the Perak history, Winstedt thanks Sultan Iskandar for 'graciously provid[ing] several illustrations' (Winstedt 1934: preface). In his 1932 Johor history, he (Winstedt 1932: preface) says Sultan Ibrahim read some of the chapters and contributed valuable 'criticism and information'. He also thanks other members of the royal elite who had 'hunt[ed] up much manuscript material'.

Winstedt's collaboration with the royal courts – and especially his relationship to long-departed *hikayat* authors – is one dimension of royal influence in building the emerging multi-monarchy Peninsular state. His historical writing might be described as modern, 'scientific work' – as his contemporaries insisted – but its perspective and themes are influenced by monarchical traditions with pre-modern roots.

Advancing the Winstedt strategy

Winstedt's Melaka-based, state-building strategy was developed over the following years – including by Winstedt himself. His 1923 text, *Malaya: the Straits Settlements and the Federated and Unfederated Malay States,* has been described as the first book to sketch

'Malaya' explicitly as a British-based political entity (Daniel 1941: 1–125). An early review predicted it would be the 'standard book on Malaya in the educational institutions in this country – and probably other countries too' (*Malaya Tribune* 1923: 6). In this work, Winstedt (1923: vii–viii) makes clear that although 'Malaya' had a broad meaning, he used the term 'politically' to refer to 'that part of the Malay Peninsula under British rule or protection'.

Given its audience, 'Malaya' contains topics that are not found in the 1918 text – such as geography and economics. Despite such additional material, however, the 1923 book is in significant ways consistent with his 1918 text. It too highlights the arrival of the Melaka ruling family from Palembang – doing so with reference to the Malay Annals (Winstedt 1923: 85) – and then gives the establishing of the Melaka Sultanate a founding role in the 'Malaya' history (ibid.: 129–140). When the book turns from pre-history to history, nearly half of the contents deal with Melaka. There is some coverage of all the states within the British sphere, but they tend to be depicted as having a historical connection to either the Sultanate of Melaka or its successor, the Sultanate of Johor. In discussing Terengganu, for instance, Winstedt (1923: 260) emphasises that 'the present royal house, like those of Pahang and Johore, is descended from Bendahara Abdul-Hamid, the father of the non-royal Bendahara Abdul-Jalil, who became Sultan Abdul-Jalil Shah of Johore in 1701'. Melaka even finds its way into the historical narrative of the distant state of Kelantan (Winstedt 1923: 257).

Melaka-Johor is also stressed in the analysis of the Malay language. Although recognising the existence of various forms of spoken Malay in Malaya – such as those in Perak, Kelantan, Kedah, and Penang – Winstedt (1923: 96) endorses Johor Malay as 'the model of correct pronunciation', because of its connection to 'the old Melaka dynasty'. It is striking that Kelantan, a state containing, as Winstedt (ibid.) himself points out, 'the largest Malay population of any state in British Malaya', is not accorded the same historic and linguistic importance as Melaka and Johor. Kedah might also have been an option. John Crawfurd (1967: 58), writing in the early 19th century – and not then focusing on Melaka-based state-building – considered that the Malay spoken and written in Kedah was, in fact, 'the best Malay'.

As to Winstedt's influence on others, the 1918 Malay-language history was used as a textbook in the modern education system under development in the inter-War period.[11] About 2,000 copies of the first edition of *Kitab tawarikh Melayu* were printed every year and the book was revised in 1921 and 1925 (Cheah 1996: 44). Apart from the reiteration of the Melaka argument in Winstedt's own later writings, it was also advanced in a range of other historical writings. With respect to well known texts by foreigners, examples are C.M. Turnbull's *A short history of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei* (1980), John Gullick's *Malaysia: economic expansion and national unity* (1981), and Barbara and Leonard Andaya's *A history of Malaysia* (1982). Gullick (1981: 17) observed that the 'legacy of Malacca and Johor' is to be 'found in the traditions which still permeate Malay society'.

Perhaps more important than the Melaka strategy's influence on outsider histories is its impact on local authors – including those writing for the Malayan/Malaysian education system. As Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail and Badriyah Haji Salleh have explained,

[11]Naoki Soda (2001: 200). According to Cheah (1996: 44), it was also used in Malay primary schools, 'which went up to the sixth standard'; Winstedt (1921: 6).

in the early post-Independence years, when the Ministry of Education invited 'professional historians' to work on the syllabus, the 'Melaka sultanate, considered to be the basis of Malay culture and system of government, became an important component … ' (Abdul Rahman and Badriyah 2003: 186). The history of Malaya was presented as beginning 'chronologically from the Melaka sultanate and continued up to independence, in 1957' (ibid.: 185). With respect to individual post-Independence authors, Abdul Rahman and Badriyah mention the writings of Abdul Samad Ahmad, Ahmad Bakhtiar, Darus Ahmad, and Harun Aminurrashid as drawing on the Melaka narrative as they have sought to strengthen 'the morale of the Malays before, and in the first few decades after, Malaya's independence … ' (ibid.: 174). An example of Melaka being deployed in a nation-state history is the history of Malaya, *Sejarah Tanah Melayu,* by Hussein Ahmad (1964: 46). After a few observations on pre-Melaka history, this book commences with a lengthy section on the *Zaman kesultanan Melayu* (Malay sultanate period), ending with a discussion of 'Governmental Arrangements in the Kingdom of Melaka' (*Peratoran Pemerentahan Kerajaan Melaka*) (ibid: 46). Apart from highlighting Melaka as the starting point for a history of Malaya, however, Hussein Ahmad does not suggest the sultanate had a significant impact on the modern state. Another 1964 history of Malaya, by Wan Shamsuddin and Arena Wati (1964: 296–298), goes further – with an opening chapter on Melaka and then a stress on the role of the 'Melayu-Melaka kingdom' heritage in the later history of the Malay race (*bangsa Melayu*). Joginder Singh Jessy's *History of Malaya, 1400–1959*, also published in 1964, describes the 'period of the Malacca Sultan' as being 'often regarded as the golden age of Malayan history' (ibid.: 3) – and notes too that this sultanate 'made a lasting impression on the development of Malaya' (ibid.: 18). This textbook, used widely until the 1980s (Blackburn and Wu 2019: 144), often cites Winstedt's work.

Looking beyond the early years of Malaya/Malaysia, in his recent *Museums, history and culture in Malaysia*, Abu Talib Ahmad (2018: 115), points out that after 1988, the 'Melaka heritage was given renewed emphasis in the history curriculum and history textbooks for secondary school'. It must be remembered, he adds, that after 1989 History as a subject was compulsory for all secondary students (ibid.: 115). To take some curriculum examples, the Winstedt Melaka strategy is especially prominent in the textbook designed for Form 1 – issued by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in 2002 (and reprinted many times in later years) (Ahmad Fawzi et al. 2010). Following a few notes on pre-history and the pre-Melaka kingdoms – including Champa, Srivijaya and 'Old Kedah' – the curriculum book turns to the 'Malay Sultanate of Melaka'. After relating the arrival of the monarch from Palembang, the next chapter – with the title 'The splendour of Melaka' (*Kegemilangan Melaka*) – describes the sultanate's hierarchy of administration and status, the trading operations, the taxation arrangements, the role of the Malay language, the international relations of Melaka, and the role played by Melaka in the study and spread of Islam. The book then deals with 'The decline of Melaka', noting its fall to the Portuguese – and declares, in a way that fuses royal and national (ethnic) narratives, that the 'efforts of the [last Melaka sultans and their subjects] to defend the sovereignty of the race (*bangsa*) deserve praise' (ibid.: 98). Even dealing with later periods, the focus on Melaka is maintained. After quite brief discussion of a range of later sultanates, the final chapter on Peninsular Malaysia returns to the 'heritage' (*warisan*) of the Malay sultanate of Melaka (*Kesultanan Melayu Melaka*). Here the authors outline the

governmental hierarchy and legal arrangements that they say were inherited from Melaka – noting too the specific characteristics of Negri Sembilan. The chapter concludes with the observation that 'the people of Malaysia can be proud of the heritage of the Sultanate of Malay Melaka, which is still influential today' (ibid.: 175).

In this textbook for younger students, the Melaka strategy could not be spelt out more clearly. The strategy is influential again, however, in a different framework in a textbook for more advanced students – including undergraduates.[12] *Pengajian Malaysia – Kenegaraan dan Kewarganegaraan* (Malaysian studies: nationhood and citizenship) (Nazaruddin 2006) presents Malayan/Malaysian history in a wider Archipelago setting – a framework to which we will return. It mentions such states as 'Kedah, Langkasuka, Srivijaya, Majapahit and Malacca' – and notes that in the past 'the inhabitants … were free to move from one place to another as there were no boundaries or limits' (ibid.: 4). With the 'arrival of the Western colonialists', however, the 'islands of the Malay Archipelago were fragmented' (ibid.: 1) – which, by implication, explains the geographic dimensions of Malaysia. With respect to the Peninsula, Melaka is portrayed as critical in tracing the 'early history' of Malaysia, with its 'system of government, Islam as the official religion and Malay as the national language' (ibid.: 4).

The fall of Melaka to the Portuguese is viewed as a warning against managing success badly, being over-confident and greedy, and indulging in 'cheating and the struggle for power' (ibid.: 8). Melaka's influence, however, continues. The textbook mentions 'Malay Kingdoms' other than Melaka – but insists 'they were not as great as the Malay Kingdom of Malacca' (ibid.: 8). Also, their 'ruling system was similar to that of the Malay Kingdom of Malacca … ' (ibid.: 8). Moving forward to the creation of the new Malaya/Malaysia, the text proclaims that the 'Malay Kingdom of Malacca greatly influenced [the new nation's] social, cultural and political system' (ibid.: 21).

Abu Talib Ahmad (2018: 119) has written recently about how the influence of the Melaka sultanate narrative has reached well beyond school education – kept alive through the naming of buildings, roads and 'naval boats'. He points to the prominence of 'displays connected with the Melaka Sultanate' in the National Museum (ibid.: 84) – and notes that various museums in the city of Melaka place emphasis on the rajas and royal courts rather than the wider city that encompasses 'other ethnic groups and other aspects of society' (ibid.: 90). In these museums the argument is put that although Islam may have been adopted in other kingdoms before Melaka, 'the entrenchment of the faith started with the Melaka Sultanate' (ibid.: 89–90, 101). Also, the 'recreation of history' which the museums present 'follows closely' such texts as the Malay Annals and the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (ibid.: 108). We have pointed out, however, that although these texts project a monarchy-centred narrative, it is Winstedt not the Malay authors who did most to raise the Melaka sultanate's prestige above other regional kingdoms and insisted on making Melaka so pivotal in Peninsular history. It is Winstedt who did most to provide an argument for the view – expressed clearly in more recent years in a popular English-language history text, *The land of the sultans: an illustrated history of Malaysia* (Spruit 1995: 13) – that 'the story of Malaysia really begins …

[12]We are grateful to Amalina Mohd Sokri for confirming that Pengajian Malaysia is a textbook for a compulsory Malaysian Studies course at Malaysian universities. We are also grateful to Dr Uzair Rusli at University Malaysia, Terengganu, for his insight on the curriculum used at mainstream Islamic secondary schools in Malaysia.

[with] the Sultanate of Malacca', which was 'the most powerful state of its time in Southeast Asia' (ibid.: 13).

Challenging the Winstedt strategy

Where the museums differ from Winstedt is in their explicit anchoring of 'Malay dominance' – of ethnic or national dominance –in 'the Melaka Sultanate', stressing its significance to 'the Malays' as well as 'Malaysian history' (Abu Talib 2018: 114). At times, as we have noted, Winstedt puts his historical narrative in a Malay ethnic setting – including giving the 1918 book the title 'Book on Malay history'. His writing, however, supports most of all a sultanate rather than a Malay racial or nationalistic vision.

Some Malay historians, as well as Malaysian museums, have made a Malay ethnic narrative their priority. As noted already, the national history of Wan Shamsuddin and Arena Wati positioned the Melaka sultanate in a specifically 'Malay' narrative. A Form 5 school textbook links Melaka to Malay nationalism with some skill (Ramlah et al. 2010). A subsection in the book, entitled 'The Malay Sultanate of Melaka – the basis for the formation of State and Race' (*Kesultanan Melayu Melaka – asas pembentukan negara dan bangsa*), is placed in a chapter with the title 'The realization of State and Race formation' ('Kesedaran Pembinaan Negara dan Bangsa'). After discussing the government structure and laws of Melaka, the text explains that Johor, Perak and Pahang were all based on the system of government – and the heritage of customs, religion and language – of the Malay sultanate of Melaka (ibid.: 80). Following some examination of the situation in Kelantan, Terengganu, and Negeri Sembilan, the text turns to the Malay struggle against Malayan Union – the 1946 British plan that entailed 'the destruction of the state and race that had been built up since the period of the Malay Sultanate of Melaka' (ibid.: 95). The text relates that this struggle succeeded – with the 'Malay Rajas' being recognised as 'the heads of their Malay states' (ibid.: 105, 108) – and then describes the Federal Constitution of 1948 (which replaced Malayan Union) as acknowledging *ketuanan Melayu* or 'Malay supremacy', while securing the institution of the *Raja Melayu*, or Malay monarchy (ibid.: 108). The claims of monarchy and race, so this presentation conveys, were both united and successful. Highlighting a Malay ethnic/nationalist perspective, this textbook modifies the Winstedt monarchy-focused approach – but the Melaka sultanate is still fundamental. Other historians – often in a subtle rather than confrontational manner – have sought to oppose the Melaka emphasis.

Some retain monarchy preoccupations while resisting the Melaka claim. We have discussed the strategic reasons for highlighting Melaka – but noted that Kedah and Patani also have claims. With respect to the East Peninsula, the famed and ancient kingdom of Langkasuka was said by Mubin Sheppard (1972: 5) to be 'in the neighbourhood of what was later to be called Patani – and its importance has been discussed more recently by Farish A. Noor and Eddin Khoo (2003: 153–160). The historical records for this polity continue to be scanty, but it was described in Paul Wheatley's (1966: 160) classic study on early Peninsular history as 'a kingdom of considerable consequence during the first fifteen hundred years of the Christian era'. Sheppard (1972: 15) suggested that a 'cultural survey' carried out in the mid 19th century would have shown that 'the full range of traditional Malay decorative arts, inherited from Ligor and Langkasuka, was then only to be seen in Kelantan'. In Sheppard's view, the 'cradle of the Malay race' lies 'somewhere

between Yunnan and Cambodia' – and 'waves of immigrants' would have passed down the Peninsula, 'some settling on its hospitable riverbanks and coast' (1949: 1).

Other East Peninsular claims to historical attention include Terengganu – which a Chinese report of the early 14th century describes as a centre of trade, with a ruler who is 'capable, forbids greed and encourages diligence and frugality' (Wheatley 1966: 80). An inscription from the same century describes the ruler as the 'the expounder on earth' of laws – and provides part of a law code containing both Islamic and non-Islamic elements (Abu Talib 2018: 67–68; Ahmat Adam 2017). To take one final candidate, a 14th-century Javanese text appears to refer to the whole Peninsula as 'Pahang', which immediately raises questions about the influence of that polity (Milner 2011b: 93). However, neither Pahang nor Terengganu – nor Langkasuka – offers the same source material as Melaka to provide a pre-modern narrative foundation for a developing, modern Peninsular state.

A Kedah heritage also still has advocates. Former University of Malaya history professor, Kobkua Suvannathat-Pian (2003), has pointed out that the Kedah text, the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* relates that the 'founder-rulers' of Perak, Patani, and other kingdoms had been 'sent out' by the Kedah ruler 'to found new states of their own'. Archaeological work in the Bujang Valley, according to Abu Talib (2018: 55), has drawn attention to the early, pre-Muslim history of Kedah and indicates that 'the Malays already possessed the skills in architecture, carving, sculpture and writing besides skills in commerce and trade'. Here we have an 'ancient state' – a non-Islamic state – from the 'pre-Melaka period' (ibid.: 61).

Apart from such arguments for other sultanates, the Melaka strategy has been not just modified but directly resisted in certain nationalist writings. Siti Azizah Hasyim (1988) positions Malaya in a comparative context, with little emphasis on the Melaka heritage. The narrative moves from the kingdom of Kedah – noting the influence of Indian religions – to Langkasuka, with its connection to Patani in Thailand. It then comments on other polities, including Srivijaya, Majapahit (based in Java) and various states in mainland Southeast Asia. The next chapter focuses on the development of 'traditional Malay society' – noting that the Arabic-based Jawi script was used very early in Terengganu. The Malay language, so it is emphasised, became the '"lingua franca" of Island Southeast Asia'. The Melaka 'system of politics' is discussed, as are the states of Perak and Negri Sembilan – but in developing its main theme, the history of 'nationalism in Malaysia' (ibid.: 79), the book highlights the influence of Japan's victory over Russia in 1905. This victory inspired Asian peoples to oppose colonialism with energy (*semangat*) and confidence (*keyakinan*). In the case of Malaya, Islamic reformism was also important – as was the role of 'radicals' such as the Pahang inter-War writer, Ibrahim Yaacob – who had called for a Malay unity reaching well beyond the Peninsula, a 'Malay world' (*alam Melayu*) vision (ibid.: 81; Milner 2002: chapter 10). Azizah's account, therefore, is not Melaka-centred, nor does it place great stress on sultanates.

A further counter-royal narrative expresses a radical, or subaltern point of view (Guha 1982). In its royal court focus, Winstedt's 1918 history ignores local Malay challenges to the British and/or their 'protected' sultans – for instance, the Naning War of 1831–1832, the murder of Resident Birch in Perak in 1875 and the Pahang rebellion of the late 1880s. The 1987 'history of modern Malaysia' written by Maswari Rosdi and Suhara Salim stresses these anti-colonial struggles, reminding us that the colonial period was far from

peaceful and that the Malay commoner had agency. In this book, the resistance action is positioned centrally in the narrative of Malay nationalism, particularly that stream of nationalism represented by such radicals as Ibrahim Yaacob. There is certainly a brief overview of early kingdoms – but it is dominated by Melaka (see Milner 2005: 141–144). The Maswari and Suhara (1987) text also disagrees with Winstedt in not being preoccupied with building a Peninsular state. The British are portrayed as obstructing a pan-Archipelago aspiration. The book argues that 'we Malays in *Tanah Melayu*, with a loyal spirit, fully support the idea of one homeland, with *Tanah Melayu* being a part of Indonesia-Raya' (Maswari and Suhara 1987: 180).

Such an Archipelago project, directly contradicting Winstedt's Peninsular objectives, taps into an earlier stream of historical commentary. Ibrahim Yaacob (1957: 145) had been writing about an 'Indonesia-Raya' in which all peoples of the region would be considered members of one race (*bangsa*). He used the term 'Malaysia' in 1948 in a way that implied an Archipelago polity which might include the Philippines as well as Indonesia (Soda 2020: 140). He was also dismissive of individual sultanates as foci of loyalty – suggesting it was provincial and fragmenting to speak of being 'Perak-minded' or 'Terengganu-minded'. The idea of being 'Java-minded', he said, should also be put aside to achieve a 'Malay national spirit' (*semangat kebangsaan Melayu*) (Soda 2020: 112). In the inter-War period, another attempt to foster a pan-Archipelago vision was made by Abdul Hadi, an influential teacher at the Sultan Idris Training College in Perak. His *Sejarah Alam Melayu* (History of the Malay World) (1925-1929), which was used in the official education system (Soda 2001: 196), certainly dealt with the Peninsular states, including Melaka – but presented them as part of the far larger 'Malay world' that encompassed even Java. The Archipelago ambition, of course, lost out to narrower Peninsular Malayness in the early years of Malayan Independence – but the establishing of an International Malay Secretariat by the Malaysian Government in 1996 was a reminder that in certain quarters something of the 'Malay world' sentiment remained potent (Milner 2005: 150).

Another type of national narrative – one which might evolve more strongly in coming years – places emphasis on Islam, more than on monarchy or nationalism. In 1966 the Mufti of Terengganu, Yusof bin Ali Al-Zawawi – in a foreword to a history of Terengganu (Misbaha 1966) – praised this work for studying a 'portion of the history of Islam in the state of Terengganu' – and added that there had never been a general history reflecting the life of the '*Umat Islam*' (the community of Muslims) on 'the Peninsula'. More recently, the Kelantan religious leader, Nik Aziz, complained that history writing in Malaysia has tended to follow a Western style and has paid too little attention to spiritual factors (Azhar 2002: 376). An important recent study is Khairudin Aljunied, *Islam in Malaysia* (2019), and there are various other works on different aspects of Muslim life on the Peninsula; but it is another matter to develop a state-building Islamic narrative – transcending sultanate, racial or national identities.

The school text, *Tamadun Islam dan tamadun Asia* (Islamic civilisation and Asian ivilisation (Azhar 2002) does situate Malaysia in a global, religious context – taking account of numerous institutional and social aspects of the international Muslim community, while concentrating on the impact of Islamic civilisation on the 'Malay world'. Melaka is acknowledged to have been central in the spread of Islam (ibid.: 276) – but there is also stress on various Sumatran centres, as well as of Patani and Champa. It is

the creative influence of Islamic civilisation that is stressed in this text – and it is noted that the role of the ulama or religious leaders in the development of states has been 'very large' (ibid.: 376). This said, the reference point for the analysis still tends to be 'the Malays', and Malaysia, rather than the *umat Islam* – which Mufti Jusof bin Ali suggested should be the real focus of study (ibid.: 374 ff).

The extent to which non-Malays feature in the national narrative is also an area where we see resistance to the Winstedt strategy. Chinese and Indians receive more attention in his 1923 English-language text than in the 1918 history, but the Malay narrative is clearly dominant. In 1918, he does suggest that fighting among the Chinese in Perak led to British intervention (Winstedt 1921: 88) – and, in a later book, stressed that 'as the Pax Britannica increased the tide of immigration, so the plight of the Malays grew worse' (Winstedt 1948: 106). Maswari and Suhara (1987: 184) are more explicit in their anti-Chinese perspective. Not only were Malays 'worried about foreigners especially Chinese who controlled the economy'; it was also the case that both Chinese and Indians tended to be 'still loyal to their original residence' (ibid.: 227) – and found it difficult to 'assimilate with Malay society' (ibid.: 228).

An account of Malaysian nation-building which takes a different view on the non-Malay role is Cheah Boon Kheng's *Malaysia* (2002). It portrays the plural society – the combination of the 'Malay' ethnic community with large 'Chinese' and 'Indian' minorities – as the foundational element in Malayan/Malaysian state-building. The Alliance party that first won government in Malaysia was based on an 'historic bargain' between these communities (Cheah 2002: 235).[13] The agreed framework gave a special position to the Malay community while offering citizenship to large numbers of non-Malays. In Malaysia, Cheah argues, nation-building was 'based on the theme of the making and sharing of the Malaysian nation among its ethnic groups' (ibid.: 235). Although this history is written in a reassuring, non-combative manner – appealing to a sense of political and social balance – it rejects Winstedt's Melaka/monarchical/Malay perspective. It offers little in fact to those who wish to see a national narrative that highlights Malay aspirations – whether these are grounded in nationalistic, Islamic or royal imperatives.

Conclusion

Moving back and forth between these nation-building narratives we seldom see direct debate, or explicit borrowing of ideas. Yet the writing of 'Malaya' has clearly been a dialogic process involving cross-cutting influences as well as sharp – if politely formulated – differences in viewpoint. The Winstedt Melaka strategy was designed at the time the new colonial state of Malaya was being forged – a relatively small Peninsular entity situated almost in the middle of the extensive Dutch East Indies. This said, his writing needs to be understood as a response not just to this political imperative but also to Malay *hikayat* writers of old, especially in the prominence given to monarchy. Winstedt's work has also had an impact on later national narratives – providing an instance of the irony, in which proponents of colonialism and nationalism can operate within a common discourse, sharing a single ideological thematic (Chatterjee 1986: 38; Milner 2002: 53–54).

[13]Note, also, the way Shamsul Baharin developed a 'bargain' narrative in 1962. See discussion in Milner (2005: 131–136).

The concluding part of this article has noted not just borrowing from Winstedt on the part of post-independence historians, but also certain innovative ways in which such historians have resisted his narrative – offering alternative accounts of the making of the nation. Some worked against the Melaka-Johor emphasis, stressing other sultanates; others have countered the Peninsular focus, urging an Archipelago-wide, broadly ethnic, national project. Perspectives rejecting the sultanate, top-down bias also emerged – some written in the cause of a Malay nationalist or anti-elite subaltern ambition; others seeking to accommodate a specifically Islamic vision, or a troubled non-Malay aspiration. Malaysia is faced today with a complexity of visions of the past – a complexity not surprising, given the way Malaya/Malaysia's social community has itself been splintering.

Winstedt's writing provides a reference point in the study of Malayan/Malaysian history contests. It highlights the colonial role in writing the post-colonial Malaysian nation state, but also provides an opportunity to identify important instances of local agency – local perspectives on the past – going back even to pre-modern times. The crafting of Malaysia's national narrative, of course, will continue – possibly in ways that Winstedt could hardly have imagined.

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