

# Contesting Malaysia's Integration into the World Economy

“Through celebrating the work of Shahril Talib Robert, the authors in this volume remind us of a deeper economic and political heritage that is often lost in the rubble of confusing national politics. All who care for Malaysia will find the studies here an uplifting affirmation of the value of open-minded and dedicated scholarship. I congratulate the editors and their colleagues for bringing so much more of the country's varied foundations to our attention.”

—Prof. Wang Gungwu, *National University of Singapore, Singapore*

Rajah Rasiah · Azirah Hashim ·  
Jatswan S. Sidhu  
Editors

Contesting Malaysia's  
Integration  
into the World  
Economy

palgrave  
macmillan

*Editors*

Rajah Rasiah  
Asia-Europe Institute  
University of Malaya  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Azirah Hashim  
Faculty of Languages and Linguistics  
University of Malaya  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Jatswan S. Sidhu  
Asia-Europe Institute  
University of Malaya  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

ISBN 978-981-16-0649-6      ISBN 978-981-16-0650-2 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-0650-2>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. 2021

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover credit: MAEKFOTO/Alamy Stock Photo

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd.  
The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

## FOREWORD



### **ISTANA ISKANDARIAH KUALA KANGSAR**

This publication provides a most fitting tribute to the life and work of the late Professor Shaharil Talib Robert, in the depth and richness of the scholarship that it brings together, as well as in its range and scope. It embodies Shaharil's concept of history as being something that is actively constructed, through the critical interrogation of existing perspectives, and robust use of evidence. This approach is what we see on display here in all the individual contributions, while the broader question the book addresses—of the intersection of the national, regional, and global scales—also, of course, lay right at the heart of his work.

Among Shaharil's fundamental concerns was the way in which narratives are shaped, and how the presentation and interpretation of the facts determine what becomes the accepted version of historical or current

events. As he saw it, the role of historians is to ensure that a ‘better’ truth can be told, or a more accurate and comprehensive version of events. To achieve this, historians must critically engage with the manipulation of information by those who seek to gain from so doing. They must employ rigorous scientific methods. And they must bring to the foreground the view from below, by highlighting the stories and actors more often excluded from the dominant narrative.

These concerns appear ever more pertinent today, in our post-truth world of social media, conspiracy theories, and the systematic distortion of facts to serve the interests of particular groups. Shaharil’s approach of meeting this challenge through well-crafted historiography, focused on previously marginalized perspectives, was inspired in part by the work of historian and French resistance hero, Marc Bloch. Bloch’s pioneering insights evolved during a period when fascism was in the ascendent. The total control and manipulation of the public discourse is an essential element of fascism, and in such conditions, the need to question constructed discourses, and to work tirelessly against the distortion of the facts by special interests, becomes even more urgent.

Shaharil was committed to this search for historical accuracy and truth, to trying to make sense of the ‘bewildering’ and ‘tangled’ relationships and dynamics of the complex world we are navigating through. I am often reminded of his metaphor of history as being like a ship charting a course through the dangerous waters of ideology and interests, ‘in order to arrive at some unified and holistic understanding of our past and present,’ as he put it. He thus conceptualized history as something we must actively engage with and shape ourselves, as historians and actors, in order to challenge and correct its biases and omissions.

Shaharil’s intellectual legacy, with all its various facets, is honored in this volume most ably by his former colleagues, peers, and students. All of the chapters question accepted truths, and apply carefully considered new evidence to existing orthodoxies, or unexplored aspects of our past and present. In this vein, there is even a questioning and extension of his own work on the Malay aristocracy, which I’m sure he would have welcomed and enjoyed. The depth and breadth of the contributions, all under the rubric of Malaysia’s integration with the world economy, and the multi-scalar ramifications of this process, attest to the deep impact Shaharil’s work has had. The book underscores its immense influence on the practice and study of history in this country and beyond.

Shaharil and his work have had a profound influence on my own academic research, particularly in relation to my choice of methodology and use of archival source material. The pursuit of this research has proved both fulfilling and, I hope, useful, and I thus owe him an immense debt for his guidance and inspiration. I know there are many others who feel similarly, including many of those who have contributed chapters to this volume.

I want to congratulate the editors for this most fitting celebration of the life and work of Shaharil Talib. As a whole, the book fulfills admirably the historian's ultimate goal of helping us to better understand from where we have come, so that we can navigate more effectively the choppy waters of our current times, in keeping with the late professor's vision. And it serves to reassure us that his intellectual legacy will continue to resonate strongly, despite his passing. This legacy will help to ensure that our historical narrative will continue to be informed from below, and that those who seek a more accurate and holistic version of events will prevail over those who deliberately seek to manipulate and distort the facts.

Kuala Kangsar, Malaysia  
November 2020

HRH Sultan Nazrin Shah

## PREFACE

This book seeks to celebrate the contribution of the late Professor Dato' Shaharil Talib Robert to scholarship in general, and history and foreign policy in particular. He was a rare academic who was a bundle of intellectual energy that synergized others in his company. Always bubbling with his charming smile, Shaharil Talib never stopped motivating the young on the responsibility of a scholar to seek truth and novelty in furthering their fields. He wasted little time with academics with closed minds, even shying away from shallow critics to spend his precious time on worthy discourse. Groomed in the spirit of Marc Bloch and Fernand Braudel, Shaharil Talib sought to and encouraged others to recraft history by using cutting-edge methodologies and innovative analytical techniques to generate new insights for establishing greater rigor. In doing so, he called for scholarship to be sterilized from ideology and self-interest. Shaharil Talib campaigned for historical interrogation to be sensitive to the multi-scalar nature and plurality of social relations. While he was damning in his condemnation of the repression the masses faced under colonialism, he also pressed for such accounts to be told truthfully with concrete evidence. Shaharil encouraged research on undocumented developments unrelated to colonial intervention that were important to understanding Malaysian history. While Shaharil's historical research stretched beyond Malaysia to include Southeast Asia, he took great pride in serving his nation, Malaysia. Among contributions he made to the country include his key advisory role on tracing the historical maps of the Islands of Pedra Branca, Middle

Rocks, and South Ledge to assist the Malaysian team contesting their national location in a dispute between Malaysia and Singapore that was heard at the International Court of Judgement, The Hague.

In the scholarly spirit of Shaharil Talib, this book brings together a collection of chapters that either document developments that are new to the universe, or contest existing documentations in a wide range of topics that constitute pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial relations in Malaya. Indeed, I would argue that each of the chapters provides a refreshingly new perspective to Malaysian history.

Shaharil was born in 1946 and passed away in 2018 leaving behind his dancer wife, Datuk Azanin Ahmad and daughter Shein Shanin Shaharil. He was a family man who was fond of them both. Shaharil was educated at the Victoria Institution before undertaking his degree at Universiti Malaya and his doctorate at Monash University. He was made Professor and Head of the Southeast Asian Studies Department at University of Malaya before being appointed as the founding Executive Director of the Asia-Europe Institute at University of Malaya. He shared the same doctoral supervisor at Monash University, Michael Swift, with Shamsul Amri Baharuddin and Zawawi Ibrahim. Shaharil showed utmost respect for the monarchy, and even used to wear black clothes to work all the time. He would proudly tell me that we Malaysians are the subjects of our monarchy, and black attire simply denotes our acceptance of the royal norm. He was particularly close to His Royal Highness Sultan Nazrin Shah of Perak. Nevertheless, Shaharil criticized the elitist nature of typical historical accounts, and so encouraged others to document the histories of the poor, including the working class. He often told me of how happy he was in having supervised Maznah Mohamad to produce a seminal piece of scholarship documenting the disappearance of Malay handloom weavers in Malaysia. Unlike those with old ways of doing things, Shaharil was open to new ideas so long as it opened novel pathways to pursuing scholarship. In my mind, Shaharil Talib was a wonderful example of a scholar who carried enormous experience and tacitness with him, yet always kept his humility. Although he is no longer with us, his legacy, which includes the several graduate students he supervised, and the many friends he connected with, will carry the torch he lit. I for one have missed hearing his soft voice, engaging smile, and the many intellectual discussions. He was like an elder brother who cared not just for the research I did, but also for me personally.



I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of several individuals who were either directly or indirectly involved in the development of the Asia-Europe Institute when I served as Shaharil's Deputy Director between 2004 and 2005: His Royal Highness Sultan Nazrin Shah, Datuk Prof. Dr. Hashim Yaacob, Prof. Dr. Roziyah Omar, Dr. Shamsulbahriah Ku Ahmad, Dr. Giovanni Capanelli, Omar Farouk, Professor Dato'D. Hassan Said, Tan Sri Ghani Patail, Tan Sri Visu Sinnadurai, Datuk Sothi Rachagan, Tan Sri Ajit Singh, Dr. Mokhtar Thamin, Gareth Api Richards, Prof. Amitav Acharya, Rajarethnam M., Dr. Azmi Sharom, Professor Ajit Singh, Professor Sanjaya Lall, Dr. Gabriel Palma, Prof. Carlo Pietrobelli, Prof. Tan Eu Chye, HE Thierry Rommel, Prof. Antony Bryant, Prof Fernando Rodrigo, Syed Farid Alatas, Dato Dr. Thillainathan Ramasamy, Gnasegarah Kandaiya, Harbans Singh Sohan Singh, Dr. Ichiro Sugimoto, Patricia Martinez, Tin Htoo Naing, Dang Minh Quang and Amer Hamzah Jantan. Finally, I would like to thank the three anonymous referees for their constructive comments on the chapters. The usual disclaimer applies.

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Rajah Rasiah

# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction: Problematizing Historicization</b>	<b>1</b>
	Rajah Rasiah, Azirah Hashim, and Jatswan S. Sidhu	
<b>2</b>	<b>Revisiting Colonial Industrialization in Malaya</b>	<b>15</b>
	Rajah Rasiah	
<b>3</b>	<b>The Anthropology of the Malay Peasantry: Reflecting on Colonial and Indigenous Scholarship</b>	<b>41</b>
	Zawawi Ibrahim	
<b>4</b>	<b>Colonial Knowledge and the Construction of Malay and Malayness: Exploring the Literary Component</b>	<b>77</b>
	Shamsul Amri Baharuddin	
<b>5</b>	<b>Analysing Pre-modern Malay Political Systems: From Raffles to Shaharil Talib</b>	<b>95</b>
	Anthony Milner	
<b>6</b>	<b>Homage to Shaharil Talib and His Question of Divide in Malay Society: Merchants, Weavers and Specialists as the ‘Middle-Class’ of an Old Malay World</b>	<b>125</b>
	Maznah Mohamad	
<b>7</b>	<b>Malay Aristocrats’ Participation in Business in Colonial Malaya</b>	<b>145</b>
	Sivachandralingam Sundara Raja	

<b>8</b>	<b>Malaysia's South Indian 'Coolies': Legacies of Imperialism, Colonial Capitalism and Racism</b>	<b>169</b>
	Viswanathan Selvaratnam	
<b>9</b>	<b>Sustaining the Hakka Chinese Identity in Sabah: The Role of the Basel Church</b>	<b>201</b>
	Danny Tze Ken Wong	
<b>10</b>	<b>Hegemonic Instability in the Evolving Geopolitics of Southeast Asia</b>	<b>219</b>
	Johan Saravanamuttu	
<b>11</b>	<b>The Legacy of Colonialism: Malaysia's Foreign Policy Under Tunku Abdul Rahman</b>	<b>243</b>
	Rahul Mishra and Peter Brian M. Wang	
	<b>Index</b>	<b>265</b>

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Shamsul Amri Baharuddin** is a social anthropologist and the Founding Director, Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA), The National University of Malaysia (UKM) since 2007. To date, he is one of the only five Distinguished Professors appointed by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia; recipient of the Academic Prize, Fukuoka Award, Japan in 2008; inducted as a Fellow, Academy of Science Malaysia in 2018; in January 2019 appointed as Chair, National Council of Professors (MPN), Malaysia and in September 2019 was awarded the UNESCO CHAIR (Communications and Social Cohesion) at UKM. He is known as the architect of Malaysia's *Blueprint for National Unity 2015* and its first-ever *National Unity Index 2018* (IPNas 2018) and *The National Unity Action Plan* (2021–2025). In July 2020 he was appointed as the Advisor on Unity, Ministry of National Unity, Malaysia.

**Azirah Hashim** is a Senior Professor in the English Language Department, Faculty of Languages and Linguistics. Her previous positions include Executive Director of the Asia-Europe Institute, Director of the Centre for ASEAN Regionalism, Dean of the Humanities Research Cluster and Dean of the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics. She is also a Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Germany.

**Zawawi Ibrahim** retired as a Professor of Anthropology at University of Brunei Darussalam and is currently a visiting Professor at Taylor's University. He was previously a Professor of Anthropology at University Malaysia

Sarawak and University of Malaya. He is also an acclaimed song composer, musician and singer.

**Anthony Milner** is an Emeritus Professor, Australian National University; Professorial Fellow, University of Melbourne and Visiting Professor, University of Malaya. He has published widely on Malay history and political culture—and on Southeast Asian regional relations.

**Rahul Mishra** is a Senior Lecturer at the Asia-Europe Institute. Before this, he was a Consultant at the Foreign Service Institute of India's Ministry of External Affairs. He has also worked with the Indian Council of World Affairs and Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses for four years each. Recipient of the Asia Fellowship of the East-West Center in Washington, DC, Korean and the Australian Government Fellowships, he was also previously affiliated with Nanyang Technical University and the National University of Singapore.

**Maznah Mohamad** is an Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore. Her areas of research and publications are Gender and Islam, Bureaucratic Islam, Malaysian Politics and the Historical Deconstruction of the Malay World.

**Sivachandralingam Sundara Raja** is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya. He formerly headed the Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya. His main area of specialization is in the field of Malaysian economic history and also works on British imperial history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and contemporary Indians in Malaysia.

**Rajah Rasiah** is a Distinguished National Professor of Economics at the Asia Europe Institute, University of Malaya. He is also holds visiting positions at Sunway University, Institute of Energy Policy and Research, UNITEN, Institute of Capital markets Research, Cambridge University, Oxford University and UNU-MERIT. He is the 2015 recipient of the Celso Furtado prize from the World Academy of Sciences for advancing the frontiers of social science (Economics) thought. He was made Distinguished Professor of Economics in 2017 by Malaysia's Ministry of Higher Education, and awarded the Merdeka Prize for scholastic excellence in 2018.

**Johan Saravanamuttu** is a Professor Emeritus at Universiti Sains Malaysia and Adjunct Senior Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University. He also held positions previously as Professor of Political Science at Universiti Sains Malaysia and Senior Visiting Fellow at the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore.

**Viswanathan Selvaratnam** is a third-generation Malaysian and a World Bank retiree. He had previously taught at the University of Malaya and at the National University of Singapore.

**Jatswan S. Sidhu** is an Associate Professor in the Department of International and Strategic Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. He is also Executive Director of the Asia-Europe Institute (AEI), University of Malaya and Director, Centre for ASEAN Regionalism, University of Malaya (CARUM).

**Peter Brian M. Wang** has served in the Malaysian Government for more than 17 years holding various portfolios, the majority of which was spent at the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) of Malaysia. He is currently attached with the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN) where he lectures and undertakes research on economic and international relations-related policy. He is currently working on his Ph.D. on the architecture of regional orders at the Asia-Europe Institute.

**Danny Tze Ken Wong** is a Professor of History and Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya. He is a former Director of the Institute of China Studies at University of Malaya. His research focuses on the Chinese in Malaysia, Sino-Malaysia relations and history of Sabah.

## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 2.1	Contribution of export taxes from tin and rubber in colonial revenue, Malaya, 1906–1957 ( <i>Source</i> Plotted from Federation of Malaya [1957])	20
Fig. 2.2	Manufacturing employment, Malaya, 1947 and 1957 ( <i>Source</i> Federation of Malaya [1957])	25
Fig. 2.3	Manufacturing firms using power machinery, Malaya, 1955 ( <i>Source</i> Adapted from Federation of Malaya [1957])	28