

**NEGOTIATING COLONIAL IDENTITIES:
MALAYA IN THE BRITISH EMPIRE EXHIBITION,
1924-1925**

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information which have been used in the thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.



Wong Lee Min
13 August 2013

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Summary

This thesis studies Malaya's participation in the British Empire Exhibition held at Wembley from 1924 to 1925, and seeks to understand how Malaya's residents situated themselves within the empire, by analysing their representations of the country, as well as their visits and receptions to the exhibition. I contend that the Malaya Pavilion's organisers and audience negotiated a vision of a pan-peninsular, predominantly Malay country where Malay rulers commanded substantial political leverage, at a time of debate over Malaya's structure and hence, its identity. Staged within the interwar context of empire reconstruction, and the decentralisation of the Federated Malay States partly aimed at administratively unifying the Malay Peninsula, the exhibition operated as a tool of cultural technology for the pavilion's organisers to express their differing imaginings of how diverse states and political systems across the peninsula constituted Malaya. Commentators in the Malayan anglophone press joined the organisers in stressing the country's distinction among British territories through writings and spatial arrangements, while remaining patriotic to the metropole.

Malaya, as showcased at Wembley, was prominently Malay in nature, for most attention was paid to the Malays as the country's most civilised and dominant 'natives', in the pavilion's Islamic Indo-Saracenic architecture, exhibits and publications. By comparing representations at Wembley with those featured in other significant imperial and Malayan exhibitions in 1886, 1922 and 1938, I identify the British Empire

Exhibition as a point of transition in colonial discourse on the Malays, from them being colonists to indigenes of Malaya. Not only did colonial rhetoric shift with time, it was not uniform at any given moment to begin with, but was open to dispute by both colonisers and colonial subjects. In examining how racial stereotypes of Malaya's non-European communities were constructed and challenged, I focus on the widespread essentialisation of Malay laziness and its displacement by another image of Malays as cheerful workers, which was disseminated in the pavilion's pamphlet and photographs, and accounts on the Malay contingent stationed in the pavilion as ethnographic exhibits.

This thesis also illustrates how Malay rulers made the visits to London to view the exhibition work to their benefit, as they bypassed the colonial government in Malaya and consulted metropolitan authorities on issues with which they had long been dissatisfied. On their return, the rulers took opportunity of welcoming ceremonies to enhance their political influence over their states, by styling themselves in ways relevant to local developments.

By delving into the medium of exhibitions largely neglected in historiography on Malaya, this thesis contributes to the study of the colonial construction of a Malay Malaya by first interpreting the British Empire Exhibition as a cultural counterpart to political attempts at integrating the peninsula. Next, this work takes on the claim of Malay indigeneity to the peninsula and the stereotype of Malay idleness, both of which still hold currency today, and details British involvement in the

shaping of these ideas through exhibition representations, highlighting the presence of lesser-known alternative discourses. Finally, this thesis offers a revision to the common understanding of pomp merely as a cover-up for the Malay kings' lack of real power, by underscoring the rulers' agency in utilising welcoming ceremonies to boost their political influence at home.

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Introduction

This thesis examines Malaya's involvement in the British Empire Exhibition of 1924 and 1925 at Wembley (northwest London, England), paying attention to how organisers and participants imagined the country, its relationship with the metropole and their positions within the imperial order. The thesis analyses the Malaya Pavilion's organisation, representations and reception by its audience, tracks the participation of Malay rulers and humans displayed as exhibits, and situates the exhibition in the interwar context of empire reconstitution and decentralisation in Malaya. I argue that both organisers and participants seized upon the British Empire Exhibition, hosted during a period of negotiation over Malaya's structure, mainly to forge, but also to contest, a pan-peninsular, dominantly Malay country within the empire, in which Malay rulers held a significant political role. The exhibition's goal of enhancing imperial unity was largely accomplished in Malaya's case: tensions within and rejections of certain representations of the country and its people did not lead to a spurn of empire, and any resistance to imperial authority was subtle. The study of Malaya's participation in the British Empire Exhibition reveals how the country and its people functioned within the empire when that enterprise still appeared very viable.

The British Empire Exhibition spanned 216 acres of land on Wembley and remains the largest imperial exhibition held in England to

date.¹ It was first mooted by the British Empire League in 1902 to celebrate King Edward VII's coronation, but enthusiasm for the suggestion whittled away when the Liberals took over from the Conservative government in 1906.² Four years later, the exhibition was again proposed to take place in 1915, on the occasion of the Prince of Wales' (later Edward VIII) twenty-first birthday. These plans, however, were interrupted by the outbreak of World War I and it was not until after armistice that the idea was revived in 1919, and finally realised in 1924. All British territories participated in the six-month-long exhibition (23 April to 1 November), with the exception of Ireland, Gibraltar and British North Borneo (Sabah).³ The number of visitors—some 17 million—fell far short of the organisers' target of 25 million and the poor turnout was mostly blamed on bad weather. To make up for the resulting financial losses of £600,000, the show was extended for another season in the following year (9 May to 31 October 1925). This decision proved to be unwise, for the exhibition only drew another 10 million visitors and incurred a larger final loss of £1,581,905.⁴ Despite these failures, the British Empire Exhibition, being one of the first exhibitions in the

¹ See John Allwood, *The Great Exhibitions* (London: Studio Vista, 1977), pp. 180-5.

² Daniel Mark Stephen, " 'Yoking West Africa to the Chariot of Progress': The Gold Coast, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone at the British Empire Exhibition, 1924-1925" (PhD Thesis, University of Colorado, 2005), pp. 26-7; John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester and Dover: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 107-8.

³ Alexander C.T. Geppert, "Wembley 1924-1925", in *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions*, ed. John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co, Inc, 2008), p. 231. Sabah did not participate in the British Empire Exhibition because the costs involved were too steep for the North Borneo Chartered Company. *SFP (The Singapore Free Press and Merchantile Advertiser)*, 2 June 1924, p. 4.

⁴ The exhibition attracted a total of 27,102,498 visitors in both years. Geppert, "Wembley 1924-1925", p. 233-4; *SFP*, 16 July 1924, p. 8; For a comprehensive description of the British Empire Exhibition, see the commemorative account by Donald R. Knight and Alan D. Sabey, *The Lion Roars at Wembley: British Empire Exhibition 60th Anniversary 1924-1925* (London, England: Barnard & Westwood Limited, 1984).

interwar period, was significant in bringing back the pre-war fashion of hosting international exhibitions among European countries and the United States of America. On both coasts of the Atlantic, the organisation of international expositions was resumed with such frequency that it characterised the interwar period as 'a world of fairs', in Robert Rydell's words.⁵

For both its state and private organisers, the British Empire Exhibition had important roles to play in the reconstruction of post-World War I Britain. It aimed to promote imperial trade by stocktaking natural resources and markets available in the empire. Many organisers insisted on the sole use of empire supplies, but foreign materials and products still found their ways into the show. In addition, the exhibition was an attempt at enhancing imperial unity by educating its audience on different British territories and their people.⁶ With its showcase of humans from 'many stages of civilisation', their crafts and ways of living, the exhibition was advertised as 'a Family Party of the British Empire', while the empire was described as a 'Commonwealth of Nations'.⁷ The show's key goals reflect changes in perceptions of the empire within the

⁵ Robert W. Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 3, 5 and 67. From the staging of the first international exhibition in London in 1851 till 2001, some 300 international exhibitions were hosted across the world, two-thirds of which were held between the 1880s and World War II. Half of these pre-war exhibitions were organised in Europe. Alexander C.T. Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 7-8.

⁶ ANM, Plan and Perspective Drawing of the Proposed Malaya Pavilion. BEE., A.L. Birse, The British Empire Exhibition, 1 Feb. 1923, p. 1; On the use of empire supplies, see *ST* (*The Straits Times*), 31 Jan. 1923, p. 10; *The Times*, 23 April 1924, pp. 16 and xii. The Agent-General for British Columbia complained against the use of American and Baltic timber in the exhibition. CO 323/932/6, pp. 184-200.

⁷ Marjorie Grant Cook and Frank Fox, *The British Empire Exhibition 1924 Official Guide* (London: Fleetway Press Ltd., 1924), pp. 9-10.

post-war metropolitan government, which was saddled with financial shortages and escalating nationalistic dissent in its territories.⁸ Previously trumpeted claims of European racial superiority were muted; instead, imperialism was increasingly defended in terms of British trusteeship and indirect rule, thereby countering criticisms that empire only benefitted the metropole at the expense of its dependencies.⁹ Spearheading this new imperialist discourse was Lord Alfred Milner, the Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1919 to 1921. He underscored the empire's importance in offering resources and markets for Britain's post-war recovery, and identified Britain's responsibility in providing capital and technology for the development of its dependencies, as well as preserving 'good' aspects of their cultures and maintaining their indigenous rulers. The concepts of imperial trusteeship and indirect rule held currency throughout the 1920s, popularised by Frederick Lugard (the Governor-General of Nigeria) as the British 'dual mandate' in Africa, and put into practice by Milner's disciple, Leopold Charles Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies from late 1924 to 1929.¹⁰ In this context of imperial transformation, the exhibition re-cast the empire in familial terms and emphasised its development under colonial rule, paving the way for post-

⁸ In 1919, Britain waged wars in Ireland and Afghanistan, and wrestled with civil unrest in Egypt, Turkey, Iraq and India. Britain also faced problems in its dominions, for South Africa and Canada continually demanded greater decision-making powers, and Britain eventually acquiesced. On the other hand, Australia and especially New Zealand identified strongly with the metropole in the 1920s, even as they developed distinctive identities. Robert Johnson, *British Imperialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 151, 153, 157, 159 and 164.

⁹ Nicholas Owen, "Critics of Empire in Britain", in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. IV The Twentieth Century* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), ed. Judith M. Brown and Wm. Roger Louis, p. 193.

¹⁰ Yeo Kim Wah, *The Politics of Decentralization: Colonial Controversy in Malaya, 1920-1929* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 36-8.

World War II discourses on racial equality in Britain and present-day notions of third-world economic development.¹¹

The exhibition situated visitors geographically and historically in an imperial imaginary via the organisation of buildings, choice of toponyms, maps and pageantry, encouraging visitors to identify themselves as part of the ‘imagined community’ of empire.¹² Most buildings within the exhibition, a microcosm of the empire, were constructed with the latest piece of engineering technology—reinforced concrete—which also implied the empire’s permanence.¹³ Pavilions were arranged according to the types and origins of their exhibits, as well as the geographical location and political status of the countries that they represented. Some coherence was added to the exhibition grounds by Rudyard Kipling, who named twenty-four kilometres of roads. He coined toponyms such as ‘Craftsmen’s Way’, ‘Engineer’s Way’, ‘Pacific Slope’, ‘Atlantic Slope’, ‘Commonwealth Way’ and ‘Dominion Way’. These road names, boasted the author of a guidebook, contained ‘the true Imperial note’.¹⁴ The constructed imperial landscape at the exhibition was bolstered by hard facts presented in the form of a large-scale relief world

¹¹ Stephen, “The Gold Coast, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone at the British Empire Exhibition”, pp. 12-3 and 21-2. The British Empire Exhibition has been studied as one of many forms of pro-Empire propaganda that proliferated in Britain during the interwar years. See John M. MacKenzie, “The Popular Culture of Empire in Britain”, in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. IV*, pp. 212-231; John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, pp. 107-112; and Thomas G. August, *The Selling of Empire: British and French Imperialist Propaganda, 1890-1940* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984), pp. 125-153.

¹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (London and New York: Verso, 2006), see pp. 170-8 on how maps were central to the Southeast Asian colonial states’ imaginings of their boundaries.

¹³ Rydell, *World of Fairs*, p. 64.

¹⁴ Geppert, *Fleeting Cities*, p. 150; Cook and Fox, *Official Guide*, p. 19 (quotes).

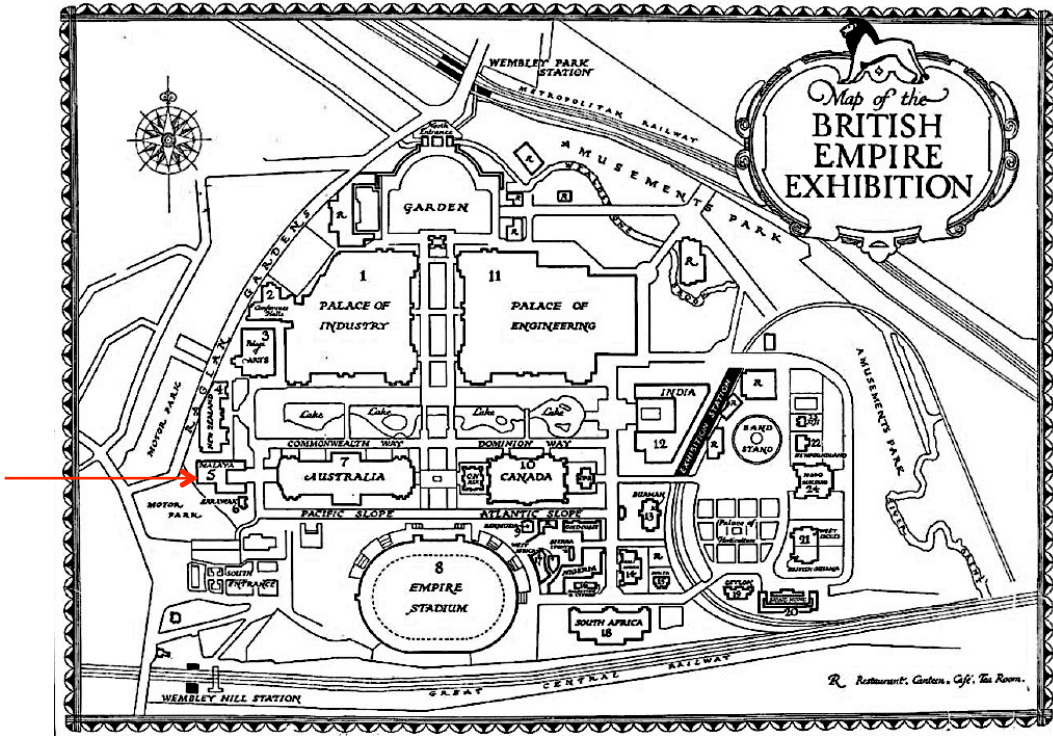


Figure 1: Map of the British Empire Exhibition (Malaya Pavilion Marked)
 Source: Cook and Fox, *Official Guide*, p. 7.

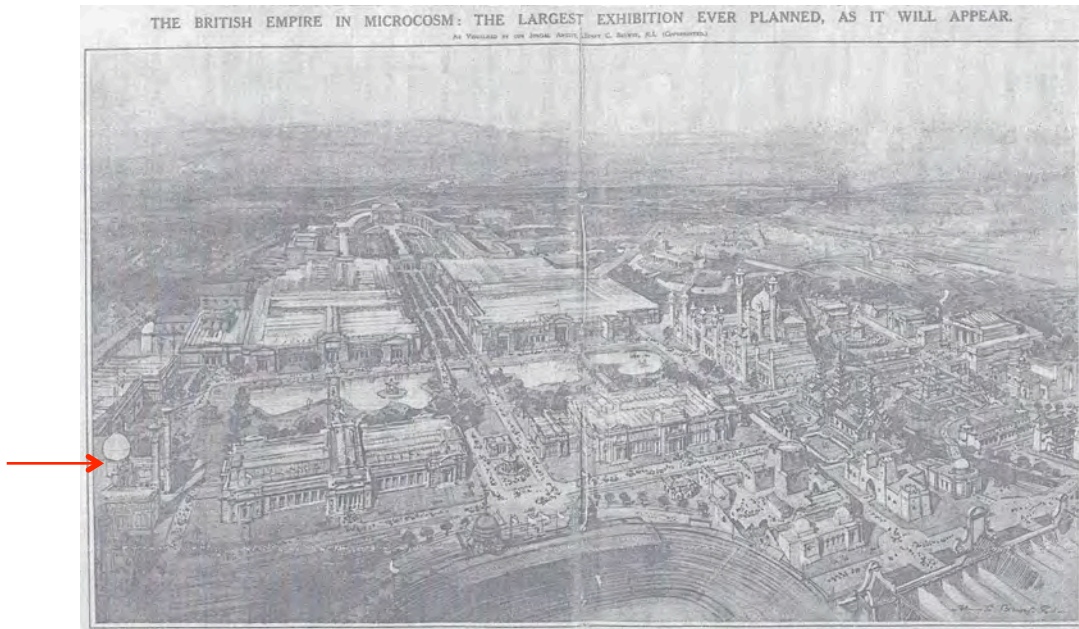


Figure 2: Bird's Eye View of the Exhibition Grounds (Malaya Pavilion Marked)
 Source: *The Illustrated London News*, 19 Jan. 1924, p. 104-5

map set in water, located in the centre of His Majesty's Government Pavilion. British territories were illuminated in red on the map, and information on their populations and resources was listed. Little ship models plied along the major trade routes connecting the metropole with ports of the empire, thereby highlighting imperial links.¹⁵ In addition to geography, imperial history was stressed in three-day-long Pageant of Empire performances in 1924, which involved a cast of 15,000 people and thousands of animals. A dramatisation of selected events in an almost inexorable march from 606 B.C.E to the creation of the modern British Empire, the Pageant suggested the Empire's 'historical inevitability'¹⁶ and sought to imbue in visitors a shared imperial historical identity.

Situated close to the south entrance, the Malaya Pavilion was reportedly on 'the best site of the whole Exhibition area'. The 97,500 square-foot pavilion 'invited the first attention of visitors' who travelled via omnibus from London or trains from the North, and remained more popular than other pavilions in the east of the exhibition grounds even when the number of visitors dipped. It featured exhibits from the Unfederated Malay States (UMS): Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Johor; the Federated Malay States (FMS): Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang; the Straits Settlements (SS): Singapore, Penang, Melaka, Labuan, Dinding, Christmas Island and Cocos Keeling Islands; and Brunei. Indo-Saracenic in style, the structure was modelled after public buildings in the Federated Malay States and designed by the exhibition architects,

¹⁵ Geppert, *Fleeting Cities*, p. 158; Allwood, *The Great Exhibitions*, p. 129.

¹⁶ Burton Benedict, "International Exhibitions and National Identity", *Anthropology Today* 7, 3 (Jun., 1991), p. 7.

Sir John W. Simpson and Maxwell Ayrton, with the assistance of Colonel A.B. Hubback.¹⁷

Malaya's participation in exhibitions has attracted little academic attention, though exhibitions were highly popular and frequently organised in Malaya, at least during the mid-1920s. Small-scale agri-horticultural and trade shows were hosted in bigger towns such as Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Seremban and Malacca, sometimes on an annual basis.¹⁸ In April 1922, the Malaya-Borneo Exhibition was held in Singapore on the occasion of the Prince of Wales' visit. Impressed by the displays, Prince Edward strongly encouraged the Malayan government to take part in the British Empire Exhibition.¹⁹ His words fell on willing ears, for the anglophone community was enthusiastic over the exhibition's aims of promoting imperial trade and unity, and saw it as a golden opportunity to publicise the relatively unknown country.²⁰ On the other hand, the Mandarin and Malay (*rumi*) reading public hardly seemed interested in the metropolitan show. Reporting on it was sparse and short, and the newspaper articles mostly comprised translated news rather than reviews,²¹ thereby necessitating a focus on the anglophone community's

¹⁷ Andrew Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion, British Empire Exhibition* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1926), pp. 1 and 5. In 1924, Sarawak occupied a pavilion of its own, south of the Malaya Pavilion.

¹⁸ The first Malayan Agri-Horticultural Exhibition held in Kuala Lumpur in 1923 attracted 25 000 visitors. *MWM* (*Malay Weekly Mail*), 8 May 1924, p. 435; *MWM*, 15 Feb. 1923, p. 392; *TOMW* (*The Times of Malaya and Planters' and Miners' Gazette, Weekly Mail Edition*), 16 June 1926, p. 619.

¹⁹ *ST*, 13 June 1922, p. 9.

²⁰ *SFP*, 12 Nov. 1924, p. 6; *MST* (*The Malayan Saturday Post*), 31 May 1924, p. 11; *MM* (*The Malay Mail*), 16 Mar. 1925, p. 9.

²¹ I base these observations on a survey of newspapers published some time around the opening of the exhibition in April 1924 (the surveyed period is indicated in brackets): *Nanyang Siang Pau* [南洋商报] from Singapore (Apr. and May 1924), *Lat Pau* [叻报] from

reception of the exhibition in this thesis. The Wembley show was not the only imperial exhibition that Malaya entered: four decades earlier, the Straits Settlements and Malay States under British influence had participated in the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 in South Kensington, and subsequently, Malaya put up the largest colonial section at the British Empire Exhibition of 1938 in Glasgow.²² Despite the exhibition vogue in Malaya and historical significance of the Wembley exhibition, only a few studies have touched on the country's participation in that show, by way of examining other questions on the colonial state's involvement in race construction, ethnology and museology.²³ This thesis contributes to existing literature an in-depth study of Malaya's participation in the empire exhibition, which explores the exhibition in itself as an arena for organisers and participants to express and debate their imaginings of the country, its people and their relationships with the metropole.

Singapore (Mar. and Apr. 1924), *Yik Khuan Poh* [益群报] from Kuala Lumpur (Jan. to July 1924) and *Kabar Slalu* from Singapore (Jan. to May 1924). These newspapers paid more attention to local shows—the Agri-Horticultural Exhibition in Kuala Lumpur, for instance, attracted more reviews than the empire exhibition in the *Yik Khuan Poh*. I did not consult any *jawi* and Tamil newspapers, but it is likely that their reporting on the exhibition was similarly scarce.

²² Perak, Selangor and Sungei Ujong were the only Malay states presented at the 1886 exhibition. *Notes on the Straits Settlements and Malay States* (London: William Clowes & Sons, 1886). *ST*, 3 Apr. 1938, p. 14.

²³ Sandra Khor Manickam, "Taming Race: The Construction of Aborigines in Colonial Malaya, 1783-1937" (PhD Thesis, Australian National University, 2010), pp. 292-303; Daniel P.S. Goh, "Ethnographic Empire: Imperial Culture and Colonial State Formation in Malaya and the Philippines, 1880-1940" (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2005), pp. 194-201; Shabbir Hussain Mustafa, "Camping and Tramping through the Colonial Archive: The Museum in Malaya", in *Camping and Tramping through the Colonial Archive: The Museum in Malaya*, ed. Tan Li-Jen and Shabbir Hussain Mustafa (Singapore: NUS Museum, 2011), pp. 14-39. For a discussion focused on the Malaya Pavilion's architecture, see Lai Chee-Kien, "Concrete/Concentric Nationalism: The Architecture of Independence in Malaysia, 1945-1969" (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2005), pp. 129-149. There are, to my knowledge, no other academic works on exhibitions in Malaya or Malaya's participation in international exhibitions.

International exhibitions are recognised as representational venues for participating countries to culturally define themselves in relation to one another. Carol Breckenridge explains that international exhibitions ‘created an imagined ecumene’, a ‘discursive space that was global, while nurturing nation-states that were culturally highly specific’ with regard to an ‘imperialised or imperialising other’.²⁴ National identities on display, however, were not ready-made notions that simply required rendering into representations, but carefully-wrought and contested formulations. Peter Hoffenburg points out that exhibitions involved organisers and participants in a ‘self-conscious reworking of fluid national and imperial identities’ in response to strains within society, and laid the economic, cultural and social groundwork for subsequent political developments, such as the formation of the British Commonwealth. Representational authority could be challenged at these shows: idealised images presented by organisers, aimed at persuading audiences of a certain societal order, sometimes ended up being disputed by them. Meanwhile, the participation of individuals from colonies denied the metropole’s monopoly over the production of imperial knowledge.²⁵ In a similar vein as these works, Chapter One of this thesis argues for the role of the British Empire Exhibition in cultivating Malaya as a discrete unit within the empire, thereby complementing other contemporaneous cultural and political measures. The Malaya Pavilion’s main organisers

²⁴ Carol A. Breckenridge, “The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting: India at World Fairs”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, 2 (April 1989), p. 196.

²⁵ Peter H. Hoffenburg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2001), pp. xiv (quote), xv, 15, 47 and 60.

attempted to forge a pan-peninsular Malaya out of different states and administrative constituents, and insisted, together with commentators in the country's press, on its distinctiveness and competitiveness vis-à-vis other British territories. Such assertion of Malaya's distinction often proved at odds with the metropolitan organisers' vision of the empire.

The pan-peninsular Malaya presented at Wembley was a predominantly Malay landscape created through an emphasis on Malays as the most important, almost-indigenous population in the country, as well as sympathetic representations affirming the need for pro-Malay policies. In Chapters Two and Three, representations of Malaya at Wembley are analysed in line with those put forth in other major British and local exhibitions: the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, the 1922 Malaya-Borneo Exhibition and the 1938 British Empire Exhibition. These comparisons reveal that the claims of Malay indigeneity to the Peninsula, first peopled by the Orang Asli ('aborigines'²⁶), had strengthened over time as the Malays faced greater competition from Chinese and Indian immigrants, who dominated the economy, threatened Malay numerical superiority, and increasingly agitated for political rights. British recognition of Malays as the Peninsula's indigenes had important and long-lasting implications because it justified colonial protectionist policies towards the Malays, and set the precedent for 'special rights' of the *bumiputera* ('sons of the soil', who include non-Malay indigenes) to be enshrined in the Malaysian Constitution and protected through present-

²⁶ The term 'aborigines', used during the colonial period, is now deemed pejorative. I keep this term in my discussion on colonial representations, however, with no intent of being derogatory.

day affirmative action in education, civil service employment and businesses.²⁷ Studies on the colonial construction of Malay indigeneity have therefore concentrated on political developments and dwelled mostly with the post-World War II period, when independent Malay(si)a was taking form under much debate.²⁸ This thesis adds to the literature by focusing on exhibition representations and discussing how the Malays were gradually established as indigenes, in relation to the Orang Asli, Chinese and Indians, in the colonial period prior to World War II.

By providing opportunities for organisers to present and naturalise a desired order of things and people, an exhibition functioned as a cultural technology of colonial rule. As Timothy Mitchell has argued, the colonising process went beyond the consolidation of rule to include the taming of seemingly chaotic reality into meaningful representations. The exhibition serves not only as a site for the display of these depictions, but also as a metaphor for the European conception of the world ('world-as-exhibition'), founded on the modern ontological separation between representations and their corresponding reality.²⁹ Renderings of reality put on show were 'colonial forms of knowledge' which facilitated

²⁷ Ariffin Omar, "Origins and Development of the Affirmative Policy in Malaya and Malaysia: A Historical Overview", *Kajian Malaysia* XXI, 1 & 2 (2003), pp. 13-29.

²⁸ Ibid; Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail, "Bumiputera, Malays and Islam: A Historical Overview", *Kajian Malaysia* XXI, 1 & 2 (2003), pp. 105-121; Richard Mason and Ariffin Omar, "The 'Bumiputera Policy': Dynamics and Dilemmas", *Kajian Malaysia* XXI, 1 & 2 (2003), pp. 1-12; Rusalina Idrus, "Malays and Orang Asli: Contesting Indigeneity", in *Melayu: The Politics, Poetics and Paradoxes of Malayness*, ed. Maznah Mohamad and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011), pp. 101-123; Sandra Manickam's dissertation, "Taming Race", departs from these works by studying the changing meanings and boundaries of 'indigeneity' in anthropological and official writing from 1783 to 1937.

²⁹ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1991 [1988]), pp. xiii-ix and 13 (quote).

governmental control over the colonised. Bernard Cohn has identified several investigative modalities within this body of knowledge, based on the type of information and how it was amassed, organised and produced.³⁰ Among them, the historiographic and survey modalities were prominently employed in the Malaya Pavilion to stress British authority over the country, as will be elaborated in Chapters Two and Three. Historical accounts justified British influence over Malaya by noting its legal basis and describing the progress that it had generated. Results of surveys included maps and exhibits of Malaya's infrastructure, products and natural resources, which testified to the country's development and potential for further growth, as well as ethnographic displays and descriptions that underscored British role in managing peaceful relations among different ethnic groups.

Tony Bennett offers a compelling elucidation of the power mechanism behind an exhibition—an 'exhibitionary complex' of 'disciplinary and power relations', involved in coordinating a 'voluntarily self-regulating citizenry'.³¹ He contends that political and cultural elites arranged objects and people in exhibition narratives and space in ways that legitimised their authority, such as forming a metanarrative of progress. The elites gained hegemonic power over their audiences by persuading them of their parts, not least as beneficiaries, in the order presented. Visitors internalised these messages and codes of conduct,

³⁰ Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 5-11.

³¹ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 59 and 63.

conforming to them through self-discipline and mutual surveillance.³² Bennett's formulation of exhibitions, however, leaves no room for contradictions within and contestations to the displayed order. Chapter Three broaches these problems of representation by examining the construction of race at the Malaya Pavilion. It is well-established that the stereotype of Malay laziness had developed in the late nineteenth century, upon the onset of British influence over the Malay Peninsula.³³ Yet, a little-known alternative discourse to this stereotype can be traced at the British Empire Exhibition. Textual and pictorial portrayals of the Malays vindicated them from charges of indolence, while the Malay contingent stationed at Wembley furthered the impression of Malays as cheerful workers among the exhibition's audiences. Meanwhile, the focus on Malays in the pavilion's publications attracted slight criticisms from commentators who expected greater recognition of Chinese and Indian contributions to the country. Nonetheless, these flaws in the representations of Malaya did not constitute a challenge to British rule.

Recent scholarship on international exhibitions has expanded its purview beyond individual 'exhibitionary complexes' and the metropolitan-colonial interactions they facilitated, to explore how they were shaped by other intra-imperial and inter-metropolitan connections. Deborah Hughes, for instance, proposes study of the 'imperial

³² Ibid., pp. 62-3 and 67.

³³ Charles Hirschman, "The Making of Race in Colonial Malaya: Political Economy and Racial Ideology", *Sociological Forum* 1, 2 (Spring, 1986), pp. 330-61; Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the image of the Malays, Filipinos and the Javanese from the 16th to the 20th century and its function in the ideology of colonial capitalism* (London: Frank Cass, 1977).

exhibitionary complex' that not only tracks bilateral ties between metropole and colony, but also accounts for how events and exchanges within 'peripheral' parts of the empire played out at exhibitions.³⁴ Alexander Geppert focuses on the metropolitan venues of exhibitions instead, calling attention to the 'exhibitionary networks' of institutions and highly mobile organisers across these sites that spawned exhibitions highly similar in terms of displays and rhetoric.³⁵ This thesis discusses the cultivation of Malaya's identity in relation to other British territories (Chapter One) and Indian influence on the Malaya Pavilion's architectural style (Chapter Two), but it mainly concentrates on metropolitan and Malayan contexts and interactions. Nevertheless, Chapter Four attempts to go beyond the 'exhibitionary complex' paradigm by analysing welcome ceremonies organised for Malay rulers returning from London, positioning these events as an extension of the metropolitan exhibition into the colonial 'periphery'. At these ceremonies, Malay rulers cast imperial relations to their advantage and styled themselves in ways which enhanced their authority over their states. These carefully-crafted claims suggest that pomp was not merely a disguise for the rulers' lack of real power, as it is commonly described in historiography,³⁶ but a means through which they strove to project their remaining political influence.

³⁴ Deborah L. Hughes, "Contesting Whiteness: Race, Nationalism and British Empire Exhibitions between the Wars" (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2008), pp. 11-2.

³⁵ Geppert, *Fleeting Cities*, pp. 14-5 and 240.

³⁶ Simon C. Smith, *British Relations with the Malay Rulers from Decentralization to Malayan Independence, 1930-1957* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 15; Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Palace, Political Party and Power: A Story of the Socio-Political Development of Malay Kingship* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011), pp. 71-2.

In closing this introduction, a further note on the thesis' structure is due. Chapters are arranged thematically. Chapter One discusses the Malaya Pavilion's organising process and general comments on the country's participation in the exhibition, in the context of British efforts to construct a pan-peninsular Malaya, particularly through the policy of decentralisation in the 1920s. Chapter Two features a tour through the pavilion, accompanied by analyses on the probable meanings of its architectural style and exhibits. The chapter compares representations of Malaya at Wembley with those shown at other exhibitions and identifies an increasing emphasis on the Malay landscape of the country. Chapter Three delves further into the making of a Malay Malaya by studying racial stereotypes expressed in exhibition publications, photographs and visitors' impressions of the Malay contingent stationed in the pavilion. In addition, this chapter pieces together the experiences of Malay human exhibits at Wembley. Chapter Four looks at the Malay rulers' attempts at making political gains via participation in the exhibition. It examines how rulers utilised their stay in London for political negotiations and made use of welcome ceremonies in Malaya to boost their domestic political influence. Finally, the conclusion considers how themes that emerged during the British Empire Exhibition—the moulding of a peninsula-wide Malay-centric country, exoneration of Malays from stereotypical accusations of laziness and the Malay rulers' exploitation of exhibitions—developed after its finale.

Chapter One:
Constituting Malaya within the British Empire

The British Empire Exhibition took place against a backdrop of constitutional reorganisation in interwar Malaya, carried out by the colonial government through the policy of decentralisation of the FMS. Aimed at quelling long-standing dissatisfaction within the overly-centralised FMS and widening the federation to encompass the UMS, decentralisation involved numerous sensitive issues which dictated its slow and non-forceful mode of implementation. Exhibitions were employed as a tool of cultural technology by their organisers, both the British and colonial subjects, to showcase and negotiate their contrasting ideas on how disparate states and political systems fitted into the administratively uniform, pan-peninsular Malaya that decentralisation sought to create. Commentators on the Malaya Pavilion also participated in the shaping of this Malayan identity, which developed in relation not only to the country's component states, but also other British territories and the metropole. The Malayan anglophone community's imaginings of the country, as expressed through spatial arrangements of the pavilion and newspaper reports on the exhibition, was that of a unit with strong ties to the metropole, occupying a place of pride in the empire. Their emphasis on Malaya's individuality, however, did not always concur with the metropolitan organisers' vision of the British Empire.

1.1. Organising Committees

By being tasked with the selective collection, interpretation and presentation of objects, exhibition organisers become 'brokers of culture' who define taste and assess how the displayed items are associated with larger group, national and imperial identities.¹ Both the British and colonial subjects were involved as tastemakers in the Malaya Pavilion, though the latter's efforts were primarily focused on amassing objects while the former had more control over the final presentation of exhibits. Mainly responsible for organising the Malaya Pavilion was a wholly European executive committee, in consultation with an advisory general committee and various state committees which collected exhibits. Headed first by the experienced Major J.C. Moulton, organising secretary for the 1922 Malaya-Borneo Exhibition in Singapore, the executive committee was later handed over, upon Moulton's departure for Sarawak in September 1923, to A.F. Richards, the Secretary to the High Commissioner. The executive committee consisted of ten to thirteen members, mainly government officials and two members from the Chamber of Commerce, who met monthly in Kuala Lumpur. Its decisions were implemented by Andrew Caldecott, the London Secretary, who chaired another committee after the disbanding of the Malaya-based executive committee in January 1924.² Some members from the two

¹ Breckenridge, "The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting", p. 213; Hoffenburg, *An Empire on Display*, p. 33.

² Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, pp. 18-9; ANM, Plan and Perspective Drawing of the Proposed Malaya Pavilion. BEE., A.L. Birse, *The British Empire Exhibition*, 1 February 1923, p. 2; ANM, *British Empire Exhibition, 1924 - Minutes of Central Committee, Malaya (BEE Minutes)*. Executive committee members who saw through the entire process of organising the Malaya Pavilion were G.E.S. Cubitt, V.A. Lowringer, A.S.

committees—namely, A.S. Haynes, R.O. Winstedt and A. Caldecott—were known for their pro-Malay tendencies. Haynes was the most partial among them, such that ‘the very intensity and extremism of [his] view [drew] attention to the moderation of the majority’.³ As soon as the executive committee was created, Haynes brought up the idea of including some ‘influential Malays’ in the body but his recommendation was rejected for fear that the inclusion of Malays from a particular state would incur displeasure among other states and the Chinese. In order to keep the executive committee as small and effective as possible, the members resolved to appoint prominent Malay officials to the general committee instead.⁴ Besides allowing for administrative ease, this move also limited the appointed officials’ influence as tastemakers, since the final arrangements for the Malaya Pavilion essentially remained within the purview of the executive committee.

The general committee was a large body that comprised Malay rulers and British Residents/Advisors from all participating states, under the joint-chairmanship of the Colonial Secretary, SS and Chief Secretary, FMS. Its members could offer suggestions on their states’ representations and the Malaya Pavilion’s general organisation directly to the chairman of the executive committee. No meetings were held by the general

Haynes, J.B. Scrivenor, H.C. Robinson, A.L. Birse and G.E. Greig. Other members were part of the executive committee for a shorter period: M.E. Sherwood, R.O. Winstedt, J.H. Keer, D. Hampshire, W.P.W. Ker, F.W. Foxworthy and E.C. Morrison. The ten-member London committee in 1925 comprised H.C. Robinson, G.E.S. Cubitt (later replaced by V.G. Bell), M.A.V. Allen, G.H. Corbett, G.E. Nathan, Oliver Marks, H. Robinson, W.L. Conlay, R.B. Osborne and Andrew Caldecott.

³ Yeo, *The Politics of Decentralization*, p. 16; Robert Heussler, *British Rule in Malaya: The Malayan Civil Service and Its Predecessor, 1867-1942* (Oxford: Clio Press, 1981), pp. 247 and 298 (quote).

⁴ ANM, BEE Minutes, Meeting 3 on 3 Dec. 1922, p. 6.

committee, which was instead updated on the pavilion's progress through the executive committee's monthly meeting minutes.⁵ Being part of the general committee probably granted one titular honour more than any effective control over the pavilion's organisation, such that Caldecott did not even mention the general committee in his detailed *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*.⁶

Non-Europeans ultimately contributed to the project of defining taste and culture in the Malaya Pavilion in their capacities as state committee members, collectors and makers of exhibits. State committees, usually chaired by British Residents/Advisors, planned the states' subsections in the arts and crafts section. Their proposals were studied by the executive committee, which also requested for exhibits directly from the British Residents/Advisors and Malay rulers.⁷ Scant extant state committee minutes and correspondences document that the Kelantan committee was dominated by eleven Malay members, while the five-member Kedah committee had two Malay members and was headed by one of them.⁸ The Kedah government organised a three-day exhibition of Malay arts and crafts and agricultural products in 1923, so as to pick out

⁵ ANM, British Empire Exhibition. Formation of a General Committee representing the various countries in Malaya and minutes the British Adviser Kelantan to serve on this committee, Letter from Guillemard to British Adviser, Kelantan, 19 Feb. 1923.

⁶ ANM, British Empire Exhibition. Formation of a General Committee representing the various countries in Malaya and minutes the British Adviser Kelantan to serve on this committee, Transliteration of a letter from His Excellency the High Commissioner for the Malay States to the His Highness the Sultan of Kelantan dated 1st March, 1923.

⁷ ANM, British Empire Exhibition to be held in London in 1921, Letter from Lornie to Sherwood, 11 July 1922; ANM, British Empire Exhibition Arts and Crafts Section, Selangor Exhibits, Letter from H.C. Robinson to B.R. Selangor, 6 July 1923.

⁸ ANM, Proposes to pay a visit to Kelantan to discuss on matters regarding the British Empire Exhibition & asks what date will suit, Note dated 11 Mar. 1923; ANM, British Empire Exhibition to be held in London in 1921, Minute paper No. 589-38, Sheet 3, 5 Mar. 1923; ANM, British Empire Exhibition, 1924 – Kedah Committee, Meeting Minutes on 14th July 1923.

suitable exhibits for the Wembley show.⁹ In Negri Sembilan, the Chinese Protectorate Office played a part in coordinating the collection of exhibits.¹⁰ Besides Malay artisans who plied their handicrafts in the arts and crafts section, Chinese and Tamil craftsmen were involved in the construction of exhibits, such as a teak train sleeping berth model.¹¹ Despite the contribution of these non-European figures in producing the exhibition, the executive committee appears to have had an upper-hand in determining the exhibitionary narratives, as indicated by the glowing justificatory account of British influence over Malaya conveyed in the pavilion, to be discussed in Chapter Two.

1.2. Forging a Pan-Peninsular Malaya

The Malaya Pavilion's organisers grappled with the question of how three administrative units (SS, FMS and UMS) and multiple states could be represented as a pan-peninsular Malaya, a largely-British formulation, without losing the states' individuality and the country's coherence. This issue of integrating Malaya's constituents was also crucial in the colonial government's policy of decentralisation, which aimed at devolving power from the Federal Council and departments to state authorities in the 1920s. Decentralisation was important not only to mollify critics within the FMS, but also to entice the UMS into joining a

⁹ ANM, Kedah Exhibition, September 1923: Forwards programme:-, *Kedah Exhibition of arts & crafts and agricultural products to be held at anak bukit, Kedah, on 10th to 12th inclusive safar, 1342 (September 22nd-24th, 1923) Judging will commence at 9 a.m. on the 9th safar, 1342. The exhibition will be open to the public at 10am on Saturday 10th safar, 1342. At which hour H.H. the Regent of Kedah will declare the exhibition open.* (Penang: C.A. Ribeiro & Co., Ltd., 1923), p. 1.

¹⁰ ANM, British Empire Exhibition at Wembley Park in 1924. Representation of Negeri Sembilan in the Arts and Crafts Section, Letter from Assistant Protector of Chinese to Secretary to Resident, Negri Sembilan, 25 July 1923.

¹¹ *MM*, 18 Jan. 1924, p. 16.

loosely-bound federation that spanned across the peninsula. As Malaya's components underwent review and change, the exhibition served as a platform for colonial officials to project their desired image of the country, within limits acceptable to the non-European organisers in the general and state committees. The pavilion's representations added substance to the concept of a pan-peninsular Malaya, which was adopted as a geographical frame by Malay ideologues who promoted loyalty to the Malay *bangsa* (race) in the early twentieth century.

The problem of Malaya's integrity is essentially an old one, which stems from the nature of the term 'Malaya' as a colonial construct, a 'homogenising and essentialising device' that downplayed differences within it and served as a convenient demarcation of imperial authority.¹² Anthony Reid traces the first usage of the term 'Malaya' to the Scottish sea captain Alexander Hamilton, who referred to the ports of Kedah and Perak as being on the 'coast of Malaya' in the early eighteenth century. European maps, however, continued to label the Malay Peninsula as 'Melaka', and it was not till the beginning of British political influence in the region during the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, that the landmass became more often recognised as the 'Malay' or 'Malayan' Peninsula.¹³ At around the same time, the Malays infrequently referred to the Peninsula as *tanah Melayu* (the land of the Malays), a term that was

¹² Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between metropole and colony: Rethinking a research agenda", in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 11.

¹³ Anthony Reid, "Understanding *Melayu* (Malay) as a Source of Diverse Modern Identities", in *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identity Across Boundaries*, ed. Timothy P. Barnard (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004), p. 11.

later adopted as the Malay translation of 'Malaya'.¹⁴ This translation was a misnomer, as Reid points out, for residents of various ethnic groups from English-medium schools reckoned that the term 'Malaya', increasingly used in the 1920s, reflected the peninsula's multi-ethnic composition.¹⁵

Publications, especially textbooks, popularised the notion of 'Malaya'. In 1834, Captain P.J. Begbie produced the very first book on the 'Malayan peninsula', while in 1855, a geography textbook titled *Hikayat Dunia* (Account of the World), mainly used in the SS, encouraged students to understand and identify with the Malay peninsula as a unit by using it as a distinct reference point in descriptions of different races and lands. R.O. Winstedt co-wrote a Malay history textbook, *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu* (History of the Malays), published in 1918, which underscored to students their identity as Malays in Malaya, a peninsular territory clearly defined through political treaties.¹⁶ In addition to Winstedt's work, other history and geography textbooks penned by British and Malay authors between 1917 and 1940, for use in Malay vernacular schools and teacher training colleges, were similarly focused on Malaya, with some analysis on the Malay states and the Malay world.¹⁷ Furthermore, the impression of a singular Malaya was fostered in schools through the teaching of the Johor-

¹⁴ Anthony Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002 [1995]), p. 107.

¹⁵ Anthony Reid, *Imperial Alchemy: Nationalism and Political Identity in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 94-5.

¹⁶ Milner, *The Invention of Politics*, p. 71; Reid, "Understanding *Melayu*", pp. 11, 15 and 16.

¹⁷ Soda Naoki, "The Malay World in Textbooks: The Transmission of Colonial Knowledge in British Malaya", *Southeast Asian Studies* 39, 2 (September 2001), p. 214.

Melakan sultanate's history, its court literature and the use of Johor Malay, in neglect of the heritage of other states.¹⁸

Besides operating in the realm of culture, colonial officials in the 1920s contributed to the reification of Malaya through political means, namely, the policy of decentralisation of the FMS. Impetus for decentralisation and a related 'pro-Malay' policy of involving Malays to a greater extent in state administration came earliest from within the federation at the turn of the twentieth century. The federation consisted of the four protected states of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang, and was formed in 1895 with the aims of facilitating economic growth and efficiency, by creating administrative, legislative and judicial consistency across these states. Subsequent improvements in transport and telecommunications, and growth of the tin and rubber industries further encouraged centralisation, leaving state authorities with little power compared to federal departments and the Federal Council. Created in 1909, the Federal Council allocated financial budgets of the federation and its component states, and had authority over all legislation except those pertaining to Islam and the Malay chiefs' political pensions.¹⁹ The High Commissioner headed the Federal Council, whereas Malay rulers, the only Malays in the council, were members with no veto power. Meanwhile, the Malay rulers continued to serve in the less significant state councils as chairmen whose formal approval was necessary before

¹⁸ Anthony Milner, *The Malays* (Malden, MA; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), pp. 123-4.

¹⁹ Yeo, *The Politics of Decentralization*, pp. 15-6; Kalyan Kumar Ghosh, *Twentieth-Century Malaysia: Politics of Decentralization of Power, 1920 - 1929* (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1977), p. 54.

decisions could be made, even though they were bound by treaty to follow the Residents' advice.²⁰ Unhappy with these developments, Sultan Idris of Perak in 1903 pushed for the control of state authorities over state matters, reminded the Resident-General to follow the Pangkor Treaty which stipulated that Residents were advisors of their sultans, and advocated the employment of Malays in higher ranks of the civil service.²¹ In successive years, the Sultan stepped up his criticisms of the federation's over-centralisation and was echoed by the state's Resident E.W. Birch, who led other pro-Malay officials, including A.S. Haynes and R.O. Winstedt (later members of the Malayan executive committee for the British Empire Exhibition), to champion for a return of power to state authorities and the protection of Malay rights.²² These concerns were again brought to the forefront after World War I, when a commission appointed in 1918 to advise on the salary of European government officials counselled the devolution of power from the Federal Secretariat to state and district establishments, and the employment of more non-Europeans in the government service.²³

The implementation of both proposed measures grew increasingly urgent in the early 1920s, when the FMS' financial situation worsened against the backdrop of a post-war economic recession and rubber slump from 1920 to 1921. In 1922, a Retrenchment Commission set up to

²⁰ William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 18 and 93.

²¹ CO 882/10/16, W.G. Maxwell, Notes on a Policy in Respect of the Unfederated Malay States, 15 Oct. 1920, p. 7; Yeo, *The Politics of Decentralization*, p. 161.

²² Ghosh, *Politics of Decentralization of Power*, pp. 51-2; Yeo, *The Politics of Decentralization*, p. 16.

²³ Ghosh, *Politics of Decentralization of Power*, pp. 75-7.

investigate ways of cutting cost in the over-centralised and expensive federation recommended the preferential employment of non-Europeans, especially Malays, in the civil service and better arrangements for their training. Such measures would also help to neutralise the unbalanced racial proportions in the government service: the Chinese and Indians occupied most clerical and specialist positions such that in 1920, the Malays made up only 10.5% of 1001 clerks in the FMS. The FMS government eventually took up the Commission's proposals, stipulating in 1923 that priority must go to the Malays for subordinate positions that only required knowledge of the Malay language. In addition, the government strongly encouraged the employment of Malays in the civil service and set up or improved training facilities for them.²⁴ Meanwhile, a 1922 issue of the Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence reported widespread dissatisfaction among local intellectuals of various ethnicities over the extent of centralisation in the FMS and warned that 'the Malay [could] hardly be expected to accept with equanimity the continuous diminution of the powers of the Sultans and the Feudal Chiefs which [had] been a feature of the past few years'. The Bulletin fully supported decentralisation, noting unequivocally that 'some steps in that direction would certainly be heartily welcomed by the Malays and many others, and would go far to prevent what is now only a feeling of indifference [among Malays towards the British from] developing into actual hostility'.²⁵

²⁴ Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, pp. 113-8.

²⁵ CO 273/518/62331, p. 84.

Decentralisation, however, was more than an address of long-time criticisms that emanated from the FMS. It was also directed at warming up the UMS to the idea of joining the federation, by assuring them that state authorities in the FMS held as much power as theirs. The UMS, in particular Kedah and Johor, were unwilling to join the federation despite the potential economic development it offered, because it would result in their state councils losing too much authority over local affairs to the federal bureaucracy. Initially, the British had no pressing incentive to force the northern Malay states, especially Kelantan and Trengganu, into the federation since they were far away and difficult to get to from the established centres on the west coast, and did not possess any urgently-needed economic resources.²⁶ The northern Malay states were thus not federated immediately after they came under British suzerainty in 1909; neither were there efforts taken to bring Johor and Trengganu into the federation when they accepted an Advisor in 1914 and 1919, respectively. The British policy of incorporating the UMS into the federation was only pursued in earnest, K.K. Ghosh argues, from 1920 onwards in order to promote economy in development works and more uniform development across all states, gain access to resources desired by British and international capital, and ensure the compliance of UMS British Advisors with federal policies. In the hope of making entry into the federation more acceptable to the UMS, the Colonial Office endorsed the devolution of power from the federal bureaucracy back to the Residents, Malay rulers and state councils. The brain behind these proposals for decentralisation,

²⁶ Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, p. 92.

George Maxwell, the Resident of Perak, was appointed as the Chief Secretary of the FMS in November 1920 to execute the measures.²⁷

There was yet another complication in the attempts at combining administrative units to form a larger Malayan federation, which arose from the different political status of the SS and the Malay states, as colonies and protectorates, respectively. The Malay rulers of the FMS feared that their states would lose their independence if they joined the SS in a federation. To add on to the fray, business interests in the FMS and SS were divergent and mutually suspicious. Businesses in the FMS were wary of the High Commissioner's strong hand, while businesses in the SS were anxious that their free-port status would be removed upon their entry into the federation. Eventually the British settled for a federation of the Malay states without the colonies, though both types of entities would be placed under the charge of the Governor/High Commissioner in Singapore and administered with the same policies.²⁸

Owing to the above considerations, decentralisation had to proceed slowly and was couched in non-coercive and vague terms. In his memorandum to the Colonial Office, which set the directions for decentralisation in Malaya, Maxwell admitted that 'all that seem[ed] to be possible, therefore, [was] some policy of combination, cooperation and coordination, with the creation of a friendly spirit which [might] ripen into a federal spirit'.²⁹ He hoped that in time, this 'federal spirit' would

²⁷ Ghosh, *Politics of Decentralization of Power*, pp. 87-96, 107-111.

²⁸ Yeo, *The Politics of Decentralization*, pp. 78 and 329.

²⁹ CO 882/10/16, Maxwell, Policy in Respect of the Unfederated Malay States, pp. 9-10.

'link all the Malay states into a loose-knit federation, wherein each state [could] preserve its separate entity, its dignity and self-respect, whilst combining with all the other States in matters of common interest'.³⁰ To this effect, Maxwell made a number of recommendations. First, he suggested that a public announcement be made on the government's policy: it did not seek to federate all states but to pave way for 'a friendly combination and co-operation [among them...] on the understanding that each party [was] free to act as it [thought] best in matters of local interest'. Second, he counselled that 'in any scheme for friendly combination and co-operation, particular care should be taken to give full representation to the Unfederated States, and to avoid carefully anything that might be interpreted as undue pressure'. Third, power should be returned to the Residents, rulers and state councils of the FMS.³¹

In view of the misgivings that each state and administrative unit had towards decentralisation and the widening of the federation, as well as the government's decision to implement these measures with as little pressure as possible, exhibitions became important platforms where the 'federal spirit' could be cultivated. This goal, in fact, was explicitly stated for the 1922 Malaya-Borneo Exhibition in Singapore, a show which formed the basis for Malaya's participation in the British Empire

³⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

³¹ Ibid., p. 10. Guillemard took up Maxwell's first suggestion and made the announcement at a Federal Council meeting in December 1921, with the additional statement that any state which wanted to enter the federation was also welcomed. CO 882/10/16, Despatch from High Commissioner to Secretary of State, 31 Jan. 1923, p. 17. Besides that, Guillemard issued confidential instructions to follow up on the second and third recommendations. CO 882/10/16, Despatch from High Commissioner to Secretary of State, 5 July 1921, p. 11.

Exhibition two years later.³² The Malaya-Borneo Exhibition aspired to showcase the territories' people and natural resources to the Prince of Wales, and to be the first gathering and foundation for further meetings of people of different classes from Malaya and Borneo, 'so that by personal meeting, by interchange of ideas and discussion of matters of interest to each, considerable mutual benefit [might] be derived by all'.³³ While recognising the unique characteristics and challenges of each state, the organising secretary stressed that 'the interest and lines of future prosperity of all these Malayan countries under British influence [were] so closely allied that any means calculated to dispel mutual ignorance and to encourage a closer co-operation towards common ideals would appear to be well justified'.³⁴

The executive committee of the Malaya Pavilion did not profess any goal of promoting a 'federal spirit' through participation in the British Empire Exhibition, but this thought could not have been far from their minds. This is evident in the ways that the committee dealt with proposals and concerns raised by various states on the representation of their states vis-à-vis others in the pavilion. Worried that they might not amass enough exhibits to fill up a separate state section, the Kedah state council suggested to the Secretary to the High Commissioner, M.E.

³² The exhibition spanned 68 acres of land on Robinson Road and was opened from 31 March to 15 April 1922. *SFP*, 6 Jan. 1922, p. 12; *ST*, 1 Apr. 1922, p. 9. I thank Fiona Tan for sharing her unpublished paper on the Malaya-Borneo Exhibition. Fiona Tan Lu Pin, "East Meets West in the Malaya-Borneo Exhibition" (Academic Exercise, National University of Singapore, 2011).

³³ ANM, Malaya-Borneo Exhibition, 1922 – (i) Memorandum by [Organising] Secretary (ii) Arrangement made for Exhibition, J.C. Moulton, Malaya-Borneo Exhibition, 4 Nov. 1921, p. 1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Sherwood, that all UMS be put together in a section.³⁵ Sherwood brusquely replied that 'there [was] no question of each of the states acting separately but that Malaya [would] act as one unit'.³⁶ More difficulties, however, came in the way of the executive committee as it tried to represent Malaya as a whole, and revealed the Malay states' wariness towards each another. Given that the loyalties of many Malays during the interwar period continued to lie with their sultans, instead of being channelled towards the larger Malay race, Muslim community or Malaya,³⁷ it is not surprising that the Malay states perceived themselves to be in a competition of display with other states. Sherwood soon wrote to the committee's chairman, J.C. Moulton, that the UMS were worried that they would not gain as much publicity as the FMS through the exhibition. He noted in particular that:

Johore has very little indeed in the way of arts and crafts. So they are frightened that say their timber exhibits would be swallowed and over-shadowed by the FMS and that relatively nobody visiting the pavilion would hear very much about Johore. To remedy this they think that the only chance of getting advertisement would be to have a special Johore stand [in the forest, and arts and crafts sections]³⁸

Moulton found these concerns 'very reasonable' and proposed, in recognition of the independence of the UMS, that they each have a 'national' section, next to the 'regional' sections of the SS and FMS. His suggestion falls in line with Maxwell's recommendation of granting 'full

³⁵ ANM, British Empire Exhibition to be held in London in 1921, Letter from ag. B.A. Kedah to Secretary to High Commissioner, 29 Aug. 1922.

³⁶ ANM, British Empire Exhibition to be held in London in 1921, Letter from Sherwood to the B.A. Kedah, 4 Sep. 1922.

³⁷ Milner, *The Invention of Politics*, p. 269.

³⁸ ANM, Memorandum addressed by His Excellency the High Commissioner to the Chief Secretary, F.M.S. regarding the British Empire Exhibition, Letter from Sherwood to Moulton, 14 Dec. 1922.

representation' to the UMS while carrying out decentralisation, so as to prevent any perception among these states of 'undue pressure' to join the federation. Each 'national'/'regional' section, according to Moulton's plan, would feature the state/administrative unit's scenery, map, jungle produce and timber furniture, publish an illustrated pamphlet on its history, natural resources and economic potentials, and dedicate most of its space to arts and crafts. In addition to these sections, there would be departmental exhibits of forestry, mines and agriculture, and another section on arts and crafts, all of which would showcase Malaya as a whole. Although these arrangements would cause recurring exhibits, Moulton opined that they would 'demonstrate best the size and diversity of Malaya' and show that all sections were 'really part and parcel of but one larger entity'.³⁹

Eventually, the exhibits were not divided as per Moulton's suggestion, but arranged according to the broad categories of forestry, fisheries, mines, scenery, arts and crafts, rubber and agriculture, with each category further divided based on the types of exhibits, rather than their place of origin. The only exception to this rule was the arts and crafts section, where exhibits were organised according to their origins and accompanied with labels embossed with the corresponding state emblems.⁴⁰ No explanation was given for these changes, though it could be suggested that the new arrangements not only did away with repeated

³⁹ ANM, Memorandum addressed by His Excellency the High Commissioner to the Chief Secretary, F.M.S. regarding the British Empire Exhibition, Letter from Moulton to Sherwood, 16 Dec. 1922.

⁴⁰ Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 6.

exhibits, but also provided a stronger semblance of unity, far too difficult to achieve in reality, in the presented images of Malaya. In this way, the representation of Malaya at the exhibition anticipated desired transformations in the political realm. The exhibition then, was not a 'festival of hegemony' but an arena where competing ideas of Malaya was expressed through the organisation of space; not a 'mere mirror of political and social order but [an] agent of change' which operated by inviting organisers and visitors to participate in the spatial (and in effect, social) order it presented.⁴¹

The British cultivation of Malaya to encompass different states on the peninsula served as an important foundation for a group of Malay ideologues who championed the cause of the *bangsa* at the turn of the twentieth century. These writers coupled the terms *bangsa* and *tanah Melayu*, thus defining 'a specific and broad territorial scope for Malay political sentiment', which stood against the pan-archipelagic scope proposed by another group of *bangsa* proponents. Additionally, this formulation of community was opposed to others put forth by the 'kerajaan-minded', who focused their loyalties on their sultans, and the 'umat-minded', who called for solidarity with all Muslims without any heed of state boundaries. Proponents of various communal sentiments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries aired their views and disagreements in the new and widening public sphere, mainly through newspapers and other publications. Anthony Milner thus contends that

⁴¹ Hoffenburg, *An Empire on Display*, pp. 15 (first quote) and 27 (second quote).

this period witnessed the ‘invention of politics’, prior to the development of nationalism in the late 1930s.⁴² The British Empire Exhibition was another medium in the rapidly expanding public sphere of Malaya. Negotiations went on between organisers who placed state interests first (as one would expect of the *kerajaan*-minded) and others, mainly colonial officials, who saw and tried to present the country as a whole (a stance that would have been shared by the *bangsa-tanah Melayu* ideologues). In part, the latter vision was further encouraged through the country’s interactions with other British territories during the exhibition.

1.3. Malaya’s Place in the Empire

Studies on the British Empire Exhibition have mostly argued that it failed in its aim of enhancing imperial unity, and instead became a breeding ground for nationalist sentiments and a stage for their expression. The London-based Union of Students of African Descent, for example, was politicised by highly-sensational metropolitan press reports on a purported Ashanti princess stationed in the West African Pavilion in 1924, and protested against these inaccurate representations. Artisans joined in the fray by ousting photographers from the pavilion, and eventually the artisans’ living quarters had to be closed to the public. Subsequently, the student union engaged West African exhibition visitors in discussions on the region’s future, which groomed a number of anti-colonial nationalists and groups connected with the international

⁴² Milner, *The Invention of Politics*, p. 107.

movements of Pan-Africanism and Garveyism.⁴³ In India's case, nationalists decried participation in the exhibition for fear that imperial trade would cause greater exploitation of the country's resources. Upon the release of the 1923 Devonshire White Paper that denied the large Indian population in Kenya of similar rights as white settlers, an organiser of the India Pavilion resigned and called for a boycott of the exhibition. While India put up a show in the end, its government withdrew funding in 1925 because the exhibition's rhetoric of development and 'imperial brotherhood' had proven flimsy to many Indians.⁴⁴

In contrast to West Africa and India, Canada affirmed its ties with the metropole by exhibiting butter sculptures of Prince Edward, even as it projected a singular national identity. This identity was founded on the 'core myth' that Canada offered opportunities for hardworking individuals to fulfil their ambitions and was manifested in a distinctive artistic style. Receptions to the pavilion's displays also indicate that Canadians were 'loyal to their British heritage' and 'proud to be Canadian', and were especially determined to uphold their economic and

⁴³ Daniel Mark Stephen, " 'The White Man's Grave': British West Africa and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924-1925", *The Journal of British Studies* 48, 1 (Jan., 2009), pp. 102-128; Stephen, "The Gold Coast, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone at the British Empire Exhibition"; Alexander C. T. Geppert, "True Copies: Time and Space Travels at British Imperial Exhibitions, 1880-1930", in *The making of modern tourism: the cultural history of the British experience, 1600-2000* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), ed. Hartmut Berghoff, Barbara Korte, Ralf Schneider and Christopher Harvie, p. 237.

⁴⁴ Daniel Mark Stephen, " 'Brothers of the Empire': India and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924-1925", *Twentieth Century British History* 22, 2 (2011), p. 13; Deborah L. Hughes, "Kenya, India and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924", *Race & Class* 47, 4 (2006), pp. 66-85; Hughes, "Contesting Whiteness: Race, Nationalism and British Empire Exhibitions".

diplomatic independence.⁴⁵ Similar to Canada, the Malaya Pavilion's organisers, participants and commentators underscored the country's unique position *within* the empire. Even the pavilion's re-opening in 1925 was justified 'on Imperial grounds solely', rather than the expectation of making large profits.⁴⁶ Disagreements between the Malayan anglophone community and metropolitan exhibition organisers, however, suggest differences in their visions of how Malaya fitted into the empire.

The Malayan executive committee asserted the country's distinction by insisting on a separate pavilion, instead of combining with other British territories, so as to create a more effective advertisement for the country. There were no plans made in the metropole for a standalone Malaya Pavilion initially. Due to spatial constraints and in a bid to reduce the colonies' expenditure on the exhibition, the central executive committee in London had recommended that colonies be housed in shared pavilions according to geographical groups of the Mediterranean, Eastern, Far Eastern (which included Malaya), West African, East African, and West Indian and Atlantic. In the eyes of the metropolitan organisers, these geographical categories possessed natural coherence and 'would make it possible to embody in the style of architecture and the laying-out of the surrounding grounds characteristic features of the Colonies of the group'.⁴⁷ The Malayan executive committee, however, was opposed to the idea of being combined with 'other distant and less important Colonies

⁴⁵ Anne Clendinning, "Exhibiting a Nation", *Histoire sociale/ Social History* 39, 77 (2006), pp. 79-107. Quote from p. 82.

⁴⁶ *MM*, 15 Sep. 1925, p. 7.

⁴⁷ CO 323/888/43, Winston S. Churchill, Enclosure in Circular despatch of 15 March 1922, p. 338.

total dissimilar in character', including the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Mauritius and Seychelles,⁴⁸ and complained that 'the individuality of Malaya would not be given due prominence and the advertisement to the country would be proportionately less'. Subsequently the committee requested for a separate pavilion, but was turned down by a Malayan old hand, Sir Frank Swettenham, the Far Eastern group committee's chairman, who was previously the Resident-General of the FMS (1896-1901) and the Governor of the Straits Settlements (1901-1904). Swettenham's actions were the object of Sherwood's bitter complaints to the British advisors of Kedah, Trengganu and Kelantan:

The Executive Committee here [has] been beset with numerous difficulties mainly from the Authorities at Home. Swettenham is naturally trying to boss the show and he wishes to appear at the Exhibition as Lord and Master of all the Eastern Colonies, and knowing that Malaya will put up more money than the others he proposed a grandiose programme grouping all the Eastern colonies together with Malaya.⁴⁹

Furious at the Far Eastern group committee's expectation that Malaya should make the largest financial contribution to the shared pavilion, the Malayan government threatened to reduce its projected expenditure on the exhibition from £50,000 to £10,000, if it was not granted a separate pavilion.⁵⁰ Finally in December 1922, the metropolitan organisers relented and granted Malaya a pavilion of its own.⁵¹ This quarrel reveals

⁴⁸ ANM, BEE Minutes, Meeting 3 on 3 Dec. 1922, p. 3.

⁴⁹ ANM, Memorandum addressed by His Excellency the High Commissioner to the Chief Secretary, F.M.S. regarding the British Empire Exhibition, Letter from Sherwood to Peel, Humphreys and Worthington, 21 Dec. 1922.

⁵⁰ *ST*, 6 Dec. 1922, p. 9.

⁵¹ ANM, Plan and Perspective Drawing of the Proposed Malaya Pavilion. BEE., A.L. Birse, The British Empire Exhibition, 1 February 1923, p. 3.

that the metropolitan and colonial officials accorded differing degrees of emphasis on Malaya's individuality.

In addition to having a separate pavilion, Malaya's distinction within the empire was nurtured during the exhibition through competition with other participating polities. Friendly rivalry was common among British territories in exhibitions and could be perceived from the turn of the twentieth century onwards, particularly among Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. These dominions contested to acquire the best sites on exhibition grounds and to build the largest pavilions in hope of attracting trade and immigrants. At the same time, they attempted to show cultural and stylistic independence from England through their pavilion designs.⁵² While preparing for the British Empire Exhibition, Malaya and other British territories remained secretive about their pavilions, reportedly competing to create an exceptional display that would attest to their ability to organise for the empire's cause.⁵³ Boasting of the Malaya Pavilion's completion before the India Pavilion, 'the proudest pavilion of all', *The Straits Times* special correspondent at Wembley complimented the 'indefatigable energy, tact, and resolution on the part of the executive staff which other territories of the Empire [could] only envy'.⁵⁴ Comparisons between Malaya and other British dependencies, made with respect to their performance at the exhibition, sometimes spilled over to other areas such as their economic

⁵² Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 63.

⁵³ *ST*, 23 Apr. 1923, p. 8.

⁵⁴ *ST*, 19 May 1924, p. 9.

potentials. A reviewer, for instance, declared that 'Africa [had] often claimed to be the future larder of the world, but she [would] assuredly find Malaya a close runner-up'.⁵⁵

Besides honing Malaya's individuality, commentators lent their pens to build closer ties between the country and the metropole. In a letter to *The Straits Times*, 'Malayan' noted a fall in British repute in the country and criticised the 'hopelessly unprogressive' education system for failing to inculcate a sense of pride among students in being part of 'one of the greatest Empires in the history of the world'. Recognising the exhibition's potential in nurturing imperial pride and identity, 'Malayan' proposed that the government fully sponsored fifty students to visit Wembley, accompanied by teachers who had not travelled to Europe before.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, a reporter pointed out that it was the fiftieth anniversary of British political influence over Malaya and reproved the pavilion's organisers for their lack of 'patriotic imagination', as they did not plan a commemoration of the anniversary at the exhibition.⁵⁷

Though loyal to the metropole, the Malayan anglophone community did not readily accept the familial imagery of empire projected by metropolitan authorities through the exhibition. The editors of *The Malay Mail* castigated the metropolitan organisers for producing publicity materials so amateurish in nature that they could hardly

⁵⁵ *ST*, 24 May 1924, p. 11.

⁵⁶ *ST*, 7 Feb. 1924, p. 11. 'Malayan' suggested that the fifty students comprise forty boys and ten girls, including Malays, Chinese, Eurasians and Indians from all parts of Malaya. All students must be British subjects born in the country.

⁵⁷ *ST*, 9 June 1924, p. 9.

advertise the exhibition in their editorials. One paragraph from a booklet published in London irritated the editors so badly that they cited it in full:

Where the Pacific Ocean rolls its long swell there are still laughing nations of happy children “who have never grown up,” and lands where the curse of Adam, which is that with the sweat of the brow must bread be won, has not fallen. Civilisation intrudes now, more urgent each year, to impose conformity with its life: and the Paradises of the South Seas yield to its advance—here with the sullen and passionate resentment of the angry child, there with the pathetic listlessness of the child too afraid to be angry.

‘This sort of thing’, the editors caustically rebuked, ‘affects the average latter-day editor much as the sight of an urchin sucking lemons does [the] itinerant cornet soloist, and the W.P.B. [waste paper basket] becomes its instant home’.⁵⁸ The editors’ condemnation of this paragraph, more than a criticism of its rhetorical style, is a rejection of the imperial relationship that it portrayed, in which the metropole was a paternalistic agent of civilisation, whereas British territories were passive receivers of progress who were unable to adapt well to the rapid changes. Malaya, it was believed, could give back to the metropole. One of its contributions, pinpointed the *Malaya Tribune’s* editor, was the implementation of restrictions on rubber production, which worsened the country’s economic recession. Despite feeling anxious and indignant that Malaya’s sacrifices were mostly belittled or forgotten by the metropole, the editor remained patriotic and reminded his readers that it was the country’s ‘imperial duty to strain every effort’ to protect the rubber industry.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *MWM*, 22 Nov. 1923, p. 531; The booklet in question is *The British Empire Exhibition, Wembley April to October 1924* (London: The Arden Press, n.d.), p. 13.

⁵⁹ *MT*, 25 Apr. 1924, p. 6.

Alongside other cultural and political measures, the British Empire Exhibition facilitated the expression and fostering of a distinct Malayan colonial identity among organisers and participants from the Malay Peninsula. The following chapter delves further into the nature of Malaya, constructed through the pavilion's displays and guides, as a predominantly Malay country of great economic importance to the empire.

Chapter Two: **The Malay Land of Abundance and Progress**

‘More than spectacles featuring prominent people, or occasions to display goods from all nations,’ Carol Breckenridge asserts that ‘world fairs were venues that (through selective representation) reduced cultures to their objects’.¹ Taking this statement as a starting point for discussion, this chapter examines the Malaya Pavilion’s architecture, exhibits and their accompanying texts, which produced specifically for the metropole’s consumption an image of a dominantly Malay Malaya that had benefitted much from British influence and was of immense economic value to Britain. Behind these seemingly confident and coherent portrayals, however, were disagreements over the pavilion’s architecture between British and Malay organisers that revealed how they shared authority over the representation of Malaya. The exhibition’s stress on Malay primacy, when contextualised and compared with the portrayals of Malays at other major imperial and Malayan exhibitions, can be understood as part of a larger shift in the British acknowledgement of Malay indigeneity to the peninsula, which tended to cover up uncertainties in the position of Malays with regard to other communities.

2.1. Representing Malaya through Architecture

The Indo-Saracenic Malaya Pavilion, lauded as a ‘poem in steel and plaster’ by its London Secretary, Andrew Caldecott, was painted in cream with bands of royal yellow, and topped off by a central dome fronted by

¹ Breckenridge, “The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting”, p. 202.

two small corner minarets (Figure 3). It was one of the tallest structures within the exhibition grounds, made prominent by two seventy-five-foot high minarets that marked the entrance to its courtyard.² Standing guard at this entrance was an imposing bronze statue of Sir Stamford Raffles, introduced as the founder of Singapore. With a penetrating and thoughtful gaze, folded arms and his right foot forward, the statue cast Raffles, in the apt words of a reviewer, as a ‘monarch of all he surveys’.³ Passing by a water tank in the centre of the courtyard, flanked by two rows of colonnaded verandahs, visitors arrived at the building’s doorway, which was framed by a horseshoe arch painted with the words ‘Negri-negri Melayu’ (Eng: Malay states) in *Jawi* characters. The fact that Malaya was made up of distinct states was emphasised in the decoration of the pavilion. Not only were the names of the Malay states painted on the panels above the colonnades, state flags were also hung outside and within the pavilion (Figure 4).

Given that the pavilion was meant to be representative of Malaya, the choice of the Indo-Saracenic style that was invented in India and exported to Malaya by the British, instead of an indigenous wooden structure, was a demonstration of British knowledge and power in determining suitable architecture for its territories. The Indo- Saracenic style was developed in the latter-half of the nineteenth century, as part of the British Raj’s bid to make itself look more ‘Indian’ and thus, more

² *MT*, 11 Mar. 1924, p. 9 (quote); Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 1; *MT*, 26 May 1924, p. 6.

³ *MT*, 28 May 1924, p. 8; NAS (National Archives of Singapore), Statue of Sir Stamford Raffles in Malaya Pavilion (Photograph), Accession No.: 1196.



Figure 3: Illustration of the Malaya Pavilion

Source: Donald Maxwell, *Wembley in Colour: Being both an impression and a memento of the British Empire Exhibition of 1924 as seen by Donald Maxwell, with over one hundred sketches in colour and monochrome* (London: Green and Co., 1924), p. 77.



Figure 4: The Malaya Pavilion in the British Empire Exhibition
Source: ANM, Accession No.: 2001/0063053.

legitimate to rule the jewel in the crown. Comprising a wide-ranging mix of Hindu, Saracenic and European architectural idioms, the style was realised in form via modern, scientific European engineering techniques and materials.⁴ With the onset of British influence in Malaya, the Indo-Saracenic style was employed for colonial civic buildings, such as the Selangor Secretariat and Kuala Lumpur Railway Station, because the British saw it as a fitting representation of Islamic identity, based on their experience in ruling over India. Since being Muslim was taken as a defining trait of Malays, the British perceived that the Indo-Saracenic style blended well into the Malayan landscape.⁵ Within three decades or so of its introduction, the style gained sufficient recognition as being representative of Malaya, for it appears to have been a unanimous decision within the wholly-European executive committee to request General Hubback, architect of a number of civic buildings in the FMS, to design a Indo-Saracenic pavilion.⁶ Indeed, there were practical considerations behind this stylistic choice. As Caldecott explained, the pavilion had to fit its surroundings of 'solid cyclopean masses' such as the Palaces of Engineering and Industry, and should heavy concrete structures not dominate future exhibition grounds, the Malaya Pavilion could be made up of two or three *balais* (halls) on piers arranged around a courtyard.⁷ Moreover, initial plans were not for the pavilion to

⁴ Thomas R. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj* (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989), pp. 55-104.

⁵ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 57 and 60.

⁶ ANM, B.E.E. X9/1924, British Empire Exhibition 1924, 12 in C.F. 445/22, Letter from Cubbitt to Moulton, 25 Oct. 1922.

⁷ Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 2.

represent Malaya on its own, but for it to be accompanied by a few Malay houses on stilts, erected on a small manmade lake. The executive committee finally decided against this costly proposal and vacated the land for the Sarawak Pavilion instead,⁸ leaving only the Indo-Saracenic building that served as a visual allusion to British authority in architecturally representing Malaya.

Yet, certain objections to the pavilion's features brought forth by the UMS hint that there was no singular authority on what constituted suitable Islamic architecture to be presented to the metropolitan public. By the end of the nineteenth century, the British in Malaya grew so confident of their ability to represent Malay-Muslim identity with Indo-Saracenic structures that they began to design and construct mosques, though they had never attempted to take over this role from the indigenous rulers in India. As expected, there was resistance to this architectural imposition amongst sultans, the most famous example being Sultan Abu Bakar of Johor (reign: 1862-1895), who fashioned himself as a modern ruler and had a palace and mosque constructed in the European neoclassical style.⁹ What is striking about the debate over the Malaya Pavilion's design, very likely derived from Kuala Kangsar's Ubudiah Mosque,¹⁰ is that the state committees did not reject the Indo-Saracenic style at all, but expressed their disagreements from the position of

⁸ ANM, BEE Minutes, Meeting 6 on 4th Mar. 1923, p. 3; ANM, Plan and Perspective Drawing of the Proposed Malaya Pavilion. BEE., A.L. Birse, No. 4. The British Empire Exhibition (1924), 22 May 1923, p. 1.

⁹ Metcalf, *Imperial Connections*, pp. 62 and 65-6.

¹⁰ Ubudiah Mosque is General Hubback's last architectural project in Malaya. Lai, "Concrete/Concentric Nationalism", p. 141.

familiarity with the style for mosque construction. Kedah and Kelantan, preceded by Sir Frank Swettenham, called for the removal of the courtyard's central tank, on the account that it made the pavilion far too similar to a mosque for comfort, thereby 'offend[ing] the susceptibilities of the Malays'.¹¹ Nonetheless, the Exhibition Architect did not back down and was 'very anxious to retain' the tank.¹² For Johor, the pavilion's minarets were the problematic features that made it resemble a mosque. This complaint was 'carefully considered' in consultation with other states before the executive committee agreed that the feature could be kept 'without giving offence to Malays or in any way lowering the dignity of Malaya in Mohamedan eyes'.¹³ Eventually, the executive committee convinced the state committees to accept the central tank and minarets by referring to the Indian Pavilion, which possessed both features and was 'even more Mosque-like' than the Malaya Pavilion.¹⁴ The state committees' authority in determining what was a 'mosque-like' structure appears, then, to be very much arbitrary and contingent on how the British had first interpreted Islamic architecture in its territories, particularly India, the sub-imperial centre of the empire. On the flipside, the British in Malaya could not assert an undebatable interpretation of Malayan Muslim architecture and had to turn elsewhere to justify their choice.

¹¹ ANM, BEE Minutes, Meeting 6 on 4 Mar. 1923, p. 3 and Meeting 7 on 5 Apr. 1923, p. 2 (quote).

¹² ANM, BEE Minutes, Meeting 10 on 1 July 1923, p. 2.

¹³ ANM, BEE Minutes, Meeting 8 on 10 May 1923, p. 3.

¹⁴ ANM, BEE Minutes, Meeting 10 on 1 July 1923, p. 2.

2.2. A Tour of the Pavilion

Deliberate efforts were spared on the pavilion's interior decor to create an artificial Malayan landscape—dominantly Malay, with some Chinese and European elements. False columns adorned the pavilion's walls and four stanchions at the entrance hall were dressed up as coconut trees. Chinese lanterns from Singapore, Malay state flags and banners were hung from the ceiling at regular intervals (Figure 5). These banners were coloured yellow, red and black, representing 'royal power, the executive and the commonalty' respectively, and the same colour scheme was used in the painting of furniture. Kris, spears and a round motif resembling a Malay dish cover were used to ornament furniture and balustrades in the pavilion, while attap roofs lined the tops of tall wall display cases and booths, giving to them 'a definitely Malayan character'.¹⁵ The absence of interior decor representing the Indians, the



Figure 5: Postcard Stall and Forestry Section Photographed from the Entrance Hall
Source: NAS, Accession No.: 1198.

¹⁵ *MT*, 12 Mar. 1924, p. 8 (1st quote); Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, pp. 3 (2nd quote) – 4.

third largest community in Malaya after the Malays and Chinese, was perhaps compensated by the pavilion's façade, which resembled the Indian Pavilion.

The one-storey building was divided into eight sections: an entrance hall with an information bureau staffed by the London-based Malay States Information Agency (3750 square feet), mines (8500 square feet), arts and crafts, forestry, agriculture (5000 square feet each), rubber (2500 square feet), fisheries and scenic (1250 square feet each). Miscellaneous exhibits that did not fit into any section were scattered throughout the pavilion. Exhibits in each section were grouped together based on types and systematically 'arranged so as to show the consecutive processes of production, preparation, export and final manufacture', accompanied with photographs and maps that showed the geographical distribution of raw materials in Malaya. The only exception to this scheme of classification was the arts and crafts section, where exhibits were arranged according to their state of origin.¹⁶ While there were some changes made to the exhibits in 1925, the pavilion's layout and classification methods were mainly retained. A series of nineteen pamphlets complemented these sections; the largest number of pamphlets was produced for the agriculture section. These booklets provided potential investors with useful information on Malaya's infrastructure (land surveys, railway and road systems, and shipping facilities), multi-ethnic population and governmental policies affecting

¹⁶ Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, pp. 5 – 6 (quote) and 14.

them (labour, education, native life, hygiene and sanitation).¹⁷ In addition, publications titled *Malaya in Monochrome* and the *Illustrated Guide to British Malaya*, which contained descriptions of Malayan history, geography, wildlife, industries, commerce, arts and crafts, were issued.¹⁸

There was no designated route through the pavilion—the executive committee in Malaya was careful to include ‘more entrances, exits and through passage-ways, to allow visitors more freedom in choosing their own way’.¹⁹ Nonetheless, Caldecott recommended visitors to begin with the forestry section, located on their left upon entrance into the pavilion, pass through the fisheries section to the main hall, where there were scale models, exhibits on mining and commercial exports, before heading to the right wing, where the arts and crafts, rubber and agriculture sections were situated.²⁰ The following discussion on the pavilion’s exhibits and their significance adopts Caldecott’s suggested itinerary.

Entering the forestry section from the entrance hall, visitors saw timber, rattans and canes, dammars and resins. Half-polished wooden planks were attached to walls, while finished wooden products in the form of furniture, receptacles, parquetry and walking sticks were placed

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17. 1,500 copies of each pamphlet were printed. The two pamphlets on Malay arts and crafts and native life were the most well-received and were nearly sold out.

¹⁸ *Malaya in Monochrome* (Singapore: Houghton-Butcher (Eastern), 1924); *Illustrated Guide to British Malaya* (The Malayan Governments, 1924). Both books did not sell well: 10 910 of the 20 000 copies of the *Illustrated Guide* and 179 of 570 copies of *Malaya in Monochrome* were sold. The remaining copies were distributed to governmental and educational institutions, and other individuals. Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, pp. 16-7.

¹⁹ ANM, BEE Minutes, Meeting 7 on 5 Apr. 1923, p. 3.

²⁰ *MT*, 12 Mar. 1924, p. 8.

nearby.²¹ In what was publicised as ‘the first comprehensive display of rattans ever made in [Britain]’, fourteen species of whole rattan plants were featured with a variety of rattan chairs, baskets and walking canes.²² Remaining exhibits included gutta percha (latex), jelutong (gum), tans, dyes and cutch, and miscellaneous items such as animal trophies, stuffed animals and birds.²³ Caldecott boasted that this section was praised by experts as the ‘best display of forestry at Wembley’, but admitted that it was ‘a trifle dull and bare’ for the layman.²⁴

Should the forestry section not convince visitors of Malaya’s rich natural resources and economic potential, the fisheries section conveyed this message even more directly and emphatically, calling for British enterprise to utilise the country’s natural bounty. Three maps of the eastern and western hemispheres and Malayan seas painted in contrasting colours of black, white and ultramarine revealed that Malaya had the largest fishing ground in the world. Nets and bamboo floats were hung from the rafters, surrounded by stuffed fish, models of traps, tackle and boats, and photographs of the trade.²⁵ This section ‘proclaim[ed] the Malay fisherman to be possessed of infinite resource’,²⁶ but at the same time, it suggested that the fishing industry’s potential had not been reached. A reviewer explained that the fishing methods displayed were

²¹ Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, pp. 6-7; *ST*, 27 Oct. 1923, p. 11.

²² *MT*, 12 Mar. 1924, p. 8 (quote); Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 7.

²³ G. C. Lawrence, ed., *British Empire Exhibition 1925 Official Catalogue*, 2nd ed. (London: Fleetway Press, 1925), p. 84.

²⁴ Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 7.

²⁵ *MT*, 12 Mar. 1924, p. 8; Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 8; NAS, Exhibits of Fishes and Fishing Methods in Malaya Pavilion (Photograph), Accession No.: 1194.

²⁶ *MT*, 12 Mar. 1924, p. 8.

'more or less primitive', for Malay and Chinese fishermen had kept to techniques and tools inherited from their forbears, and urged for investments in modern machinery to expand the fishing industry.²⁷

Leaving the pavilion's left wing to enter the main hall, visitors would have been impressed with the story of Malaya's development and technological advancement under British influence. On display were recent large-scale maps created by the Malayan Survey Department, which detailed the country's terrain, crops and industries, and delineated railway tracks and roads that were meticulously coloured according to their construction materials (Figure 6).²⁸ The depicted transport systems attested to the overall effectiveness of British governance, achieved through sacrifices by colonial officials. One pamphlet declared that the



Figure 6: F.M.S. Railways Exhibit
Source: ANM, Accession No.: 2001/0022176

²⁷ *SFP*, 15 May 1924, p. 2.

²⁸ *MT*, 12 Mar. 1924, p. 8.

FMS railway service was ‘not surpassed in any Colony or Protectorate’,²⁹ and cited an American citizen’s testimony on how Malayan roads were the ‘finest laid and maintained Roads of their class in the world’. The same commentator paid tribute to the ‘Silent Empire Builders to whom no glory [was] usually awarded’—engineers who had cut through swamps and jungles to build roads—whose difficulties were evidenced by several photographs of roads and railway tracks snaking through uneven terrains.³⁰ Other scale models that filled this space reminded visitors of Malaya’s technological comparability, if not superiority, to the rest of the world: the Singapore Harbour, whose shipping tonnage handled in 1922 was just below that of Liverpool’s; the causeway between Singapore and Johore, with ‘a rolling lift bridge, the only one of its type in this part of the world’;³¹ and the latest sleeping train saloon, ‘claimed to afford the acme of comfort yet achieved’.³²

The same narrative of British-led development was reiterated through the mining exhibits, which constituted the largest section and occupied a central position in the main hall, facing the pavilion’s doorway. Such pride of place was justified in recognition of Malaya’s role as the world’s leading producer of tin, having contributed 42.1% of all tin produced in the world from 1897 to 1922.³³ These figures were visually emphasised with two pyramids of polished tin ingots, one larger than the

²⁹ *Railway, Road and Shipping Facilities in the Malay Peninsula* (Singapore: Fraser and Neave, Ltd., 1923), p. 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 18 and 3 (quote).

³² *MT*, 12 Mar. 1924, p. 8.

³³ Between 1897 and 1922, Malaya produced 12 million of the 28.5 million metric tons of tin produced in the world. *SFP*, 24 June 1924, p. 3.

other, indicating the ratio of Malaya's tin output to that of the world's.³⁴ In the section's pamphlet, much credit for these achievements were given to the 'extremely industrious' Chinese, who '[had] done and [was] doing most of the work', supplemented by the limited involvement of Malays and Indians. Yet, Europeans were crucial in raising the country's tin output despite there being few of them in the industry, for they introduced machinery that allowed for the mining of previously unobtainable deposits.³⁵ The purpose of this section then, seems to be the juxtaposition of scale models labelled as 'Primitive Chinese Methods' with improved mining methods, so as to publicise the latter and attract British investments. In stark contrast with the moving models of the modern hydraulic and bucket dredge mines were the Chinese mine models: one of which illustrated manual bucket dredging by coolies, while another featured a treadle pump and a rotating water wheel (Figure 7). A Chinese mine, accompanied by life-size workers, tools and a 'kongsi-house' (company) was excavated within the pavilion grounds in 1924, and transferred indoors in 1925.³⁶ Exhibits of the various stages in tin smelting, metal products, China Clay and minerals completed this section.³⁷

³⁴ Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 9.

³⁵ G.E. Greig, *Mining in Malaya* (London: Malay States Information Agency, 1924), pp. 35 (quote) and 40-2. Only 327 Europeans were involved in Malaya's mining industry in 1921.

³⁶ NAS, Exhibits Of The Primitive Chinese Methods Of Tin-Mining In Malaya Pavilion (Photograph), Accession No.: 1188; *MM*, 16 Mar. 1925, p. 9; *ST*, 28 Dec. 1923, p. 9; Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 9.

³⁷ *ST*, 25 Sep. 1923, p. 2; Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 9.

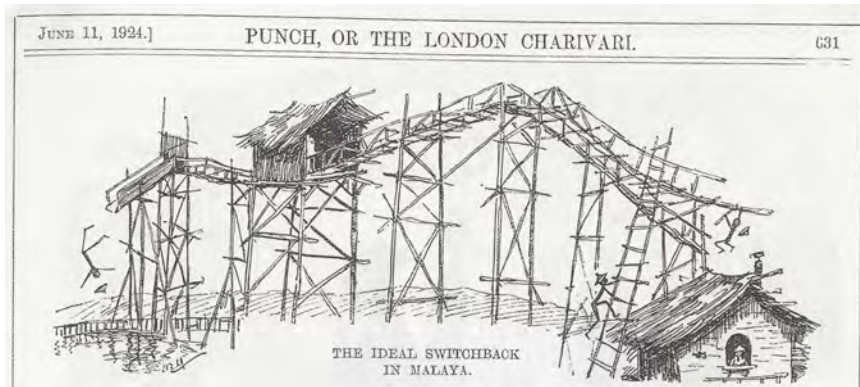


Figure 7: Mr Punch's Rendition of Chinese Mine Models in the Malaya Pavilion
 Source: *Punch*, 11 June 1924, p. 631.

Photographs and dioramas abounded in the Scenic section next to the mining exhibits, a reminder of Malaya's beauty after expounding on its economic potential. Scenes of Malaya's nature, plantations, kampongs and buildings earned the compliments of a critic for being of the right size—'little gems; each with its own little story to tell', and for 'leav[ing] something to the imagination'.³⁸ Adding colour to this section were oil paintings of Malays, Chinese and Javanese, a portrait of the Sultan of Perak and several watercolours. At the end of the main hall laid the commerce section, where Malayan exports such as tin, rubber and foodstuff were displayed in the manner that they were exported. This section was scrapped in 1925, for it repeated exhibits from other sections.³⁹

Next in the itinerary was the arts and crafts section, the most popular section among visitors, located in the right wing of the building. An array of handicrafts were found here: textiles and embroidery; silver, gold and other metal receptacles; weapons including the kris, spears,

³⁸ Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 8 and 15; *MT*, 12 Mar. 1924, p. 8.

sakai blowpipes; woodwork in the form of *sireh* boxes, models of boats and agricultural tools, walking sticks and carved furniture; pottery; matwork and basketry. Some of these exhibits were contributed by Malay royalty: the Sultan of Selangor carved a set of wooden dies displayed with *kain telepok* (cloth stamped with gilt) while his son, the Raja Muda (Heir Apparent) loaned an embossed costume; a few pieces of silver and gold wares were from the late Sultan of Brunei's regalia; the Raja of Perlis lent a set of carved, silver-gilt wooden furniture; and the Regent of Kedah provided some walking sticks.⁴⁰ Besides suggesting a generally congenial relationship between Malay aristocrats and the colonial government, these loans were likely to have raised the visibility of their owners on the world stage, as holders of political power, wealth and taste. In addition to the inanimate exhibits, a group of artisans (eight in 1924 and eleven in 1925) demonstrated weaving, carpentry, silverwork and basketry.⁴¹

Malay art and crafts were severely denigrated in this section, leaving room for the British to uplift the colonised, a message oft repeated in the pavilion. Ivor H.N. Evans, the ethnographical assistant at the FMS Museums, painted a gloomy picture of how several types of Malay art had deteriorated or disappeared: work produced by the few jewellers and goldsmiths left in villages were 'generally of a very debased type'; lacework was 'very degenerate' compared to the past; and wood carving

⁴⁰ Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, pp. 10-1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

was 'a dying industry'.⁴² Even basketry, in which the Malays were 'fairly expert', was not spared the decline — what Evans deemed as better work had become 'almost a lost art'.⁴³ Such a negative account, born of Evans' nostalgia,⁴⁴ allowed for the depiction of British political influence as having a singularly positive effect on Malay handicrafts. Caldecott pointed out the key role of Europeans in sustaining Malay arts against the influx of cheap and tasteless imports,⁴⁵ while a metropolitan reviewer opined that the arts and crafts section was the best section in the Malaya Pavilion, for it 'furnishe[d] remarkable testimony to the beneficence of British rule and guidance'.⁴⁶ This narrative of a golden past of the arts, its subsequent demise and revitalisation under colonial rule is not unique to the British in Malaya, but was commonly employed by other imperialists, such as the French in Cambodia.⁴⁷

The pessimistic evaluation of Malay arts and crafts in the British Empire Exhibition contrasts with representations from the 1922 Malaya-Borneo Exhibition held in Singapore, and hints at the Malaya Pavilion organisers' careful choice of authors whose works would suit the metropolitan audience. In a write-up on the pavilion, Caldecott introduced sophisticated Malay handicrafts as nothing more than imitations. 'In art the Malay genius is not original;' he wrote, 'weapons,

⁴² Ivor H. N. Evans, *Malay Arts and Crafts, Malayan Series No. XIII, British Empire Exhibition, London. 1924* (Singapore: Fraser and Neave, 1923), pp. 11 (first quote) and 18.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴⁴ Manickam, "Taming Race", pp. 283-8.

⁴⁵ Evans, *Malay Arts and Crafts*, p. 14; *MT*, 12 Mar. 1924, p. 8.

⁴⁶ *The Times*, 5 May 1924, p. 12.

⁴⁷ See Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860-1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007).

textiles and silver work display Indian and Javanese characteristics, while lace and embroidery are derived from the Portuguese and Chinese. Only in more primitive industries, such as matwork, can a purely indigenous element be detected.⁴⁸ Evans clarified that Malay crafts had suffered not because of any inherent inabilities of Malay craftsmen, but because they worked first as rice planters, lacked capital and ‘dislike[d] continuous and monotonous work’.⁴⁹ On the contrary, in the official guide to the Malaya-Borneo Exhibition, R.O. Winstedt penned an affirmative appraisal of Malay handicrafts. While admitting that all Malay metalwork show Indian influence, Winstedt stressed that the ‘Malay craftsman ha[d] developed a style of his own, avoiding the excessive adornment which mars so much Indian and Sinhalese work’. In explaining the dying craft of niello, Winstedt attributed the cause not to any lack on the part of Malays, as Evans did, but to the passing away of the ‘feudal’ way of life when chiefs supported the livelihoods of craftsmen.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, this sympathetic account of Malay arts and crafts was missing at Wembley and was replaced instead with one that underscored to metropolitan audiences the importance of British intervention in nurturing Malay material culture.

⁴⁸ *MT*, 12 Mar. 1924, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Evans, *Malay Arts and Crafts*, pp. 1 (quote) – 2.

⁵⁰ *Guide to the Malaya Borneo Exhibition 1922 and Souvenir of Malaya* (Singapore: Rickard Limited, 1922), pp. 126 (quote) – 7. Winstedt was not asked to expand his chapter into a pamphlet for the British Empire Exhibition. Instead, he contributed a pamphlet on Education in Malaya, in his capacity as the Director of Education, FMS. R.O. Winstedt, *Education in Malaya, Malayan Series No. XIV, British Empire Exhibition, London. 1924* (Singapore: Fraser and Neave, 1923).

The subsequent section on rubber returned to the point on Malaya's economic possibilities, emphasising the country's ability to contribute to the metropole. Industrial, commercial and domestic rubber products which demonstrated the material's multiple potentials were showcased on a long tiered stand in 1924 and in four cross-sections of rooms (a bathroom, kitchen, hall and nursery) complete with wax figures in 1925 (Figure 8).⁵¹ A pyramid composed of square rubber blocks showed the rubber output of Malaya compared with the rest of the world—the top five tiers representing the former and the sixth tier the latter—and was cited as 'a particularly interesting statistical exhibit' in a book on good exhibitionary practices authored by the exhibition's Director of United Kingdom Exhibits.⁵² For a commentator from London, the rubber pyramid was not only a statement about the profitable industry, but a symbol of the British imperialists' initiative and daring.



Figure 8: Cross-section of a Kitchen in the Rubber Section, 1925
 Source: *Supplement to the Straits Budget*, 17 July 1925, p. 12.

⁵¹ Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 13; *MT*, 9 July 1925, p. 5.

⁵² Lawrence Weaver, *Exhibitions and the Arts of Display* (London: Country Life Ltd., 1925), p. 91.

Praising 'the enterprise of a few British pioneers' for the introduction of rubber into the East Indies, the commentator suggested that the 'resilient' rubber pyramid also '[stood] for that same spirit of romance which sent the great Stamford Raffles on his high adventures a century ago'.⁵³ Yet, Malaya was more than a provider of natural resources to the metropole; it could also contribute creations and new ideas, as was made clear by a rubber road exhibit in the pavilion. Invented by a Malayan rubber planter, Mr. J. Sheridan Cowper, the long-lasting road, which comprised patented rubber blocks arranged in an interlocking system to prevent water seepage, proved so promising that a London Borough Council agreed to test the blocks on a road section.⁵⁴

The final section on agriculture attempted to illustrate, in a highly scientific manner, the types of produce in Malaya, their cultivation methods and results, and to encourage the development of existing and potential agricultural industries.⁵⁵ This section featured a rubber 'tree' for visitors to tap, together with machinery and tools involved in rubber processing.⁵⁶ Displayed in the form of models were other agricultural tools, accompanied by crops such as tapioca, rice, coconut and oil palm. A number of different infected tree parts demonstrated the common

⁵³ *SFP*, 19 July 1924, p. 14, extracted from the *Morning Post*.

⁵⁴ *MM*, 21 June 1924, p. 10; *SFP*, 28 June 1924, p. 11; *SFP*, 15 July 1924, p. 11; Eventually, the Ministry of Transport decided against testing Cowper's blocks after an expensive experiment with blocks invented by another individual came to naught. ANM, Rubber Paving Block Invented by Mr. J. Sheridan Cowper. Experiments with: – Proposal to Appoint an Independent Committee for Rubber Roadway Experiments, Letter from Brockman to Chief Secretary, FMS, 3 Mar. 1924.

⁵⁵ *SFP*, 3 Aug. 1923, p. 9; *MT*, 12 Mar. 1924, p. 8 (2nd quote).

⁵⁶ Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 12; *MT*, 9 July 1925, p. 5.

diseases and pests of Malayan crops and how they could be treated.⁵⁷ Similar to the sections on forestry and fisheries then, the agriculture section tried to convince visitors of Malaya's economic prospects and call for capital investments.

All in all, the exhibits and the narratives in which they were emplotted can be likened to the colonial government's report card to the metropolitan public. The 'performance report' stressed Malaya's progress under British influence, such that it was technologically comparable to the rest of the world and was able to give back to the metropole. The assertion of Malaya's limitless economic possibilities was aligned with the British Empire Exhibition's goals to build imperial trading ties and thus enhance imperial unity. Above all, these claims of Malaya's superiority can be read, in line with the Malayan anglophone communities' fear of being forgotten by the metropole, as ways to catch the metropole's attention by underscoring the country's importance. Judging from reviews of the pavilion, the key messages of Malaya's economic potential and development under British influence were quite successfully conveyed to visitors. A columnist from *Punch* took home the point that 'Malaya chiefly mean[t] tin and fish, and not head-hunters, *sarongs* or *kris*'.⁵⁸ Another correspondent wrote of how 'order and real government ha[d] been established' in Malaya with the coming of the British and

⁵⁷ *MT*, 12 Mar. 1924, p. 8; Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 13.

⁵⁸ *Punch*, 11 June 1924, p. 631.

urged all interested in 'learn[ing] of the progress of the [Malay] Peninsula' to visit the pavilion.⁵⁹

Former residents of Malaya, however, were disappointed in the pavilion's representation of the country's scenery, and found the place overly commercialised and inauthentic. Mr. H.M. Tomlinson, a journalist who had travelled around Malaya a few months prior to the exhibition, decried that he 'could see no jungle at Wembley. No beaches of golden sand. No high summits of forests just coming out of the morning mist.'⁶⁰ For a child named Rosemary, the pavilion '[was not] like Malaya—it [was] more like a 6.5d bazaar-opening day'. Another problem was the striking lack of Malays in the pavilion, so few that they were 'noticeable'. 'Why', she exclaimed, 'they don't even seem like the Malays we knew out there'.⁶¹

2.3. Constructing a Malay Malaya

Contradictory to Rosemary's complaints, Malays were prominently represented in the pavilion, be it through the 'Islamic' Indo-Saracenic architecture, interior decor, human ethnographic exhibits (only Malays) or exhibition pamphlets. The exhibition articulated Malay dominance in Malaya, a construct that was heavily shaped by the British and attuned to changing colonial ideologies and circumstances in the country. This section tracks the development of Malay primacy in exhibition representations by comparing the portrayals of Malays in relation to

⁵⁹ *SFP*, 31 July 1924, p. 4.

⁶⁰ *MT*, 16 May 1924, p. 6.

⁶¹ *SFP*, 29 Oct. 1924, pp. 1-2.

other communities at the British Empire Exhibition and other significant imperial and Malayan shows, namely, the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886, Malaya-Borneo Exhibition of 1922 and the next British Empire Exhibition of 1938.

At the Colonial and India Exhibition of 1886 held in South Kensington,⁶² the Sakais and Semangs were classed as aborigines in a pamphlet on Perak, while Malays were identified as recent colonists. Playing up the status of Malays as foreign colonists, according to Sandra Manickam, granted the British who had just established political control over Perak, Selangor and Sungei Ujong with a historical precedent and hence, legitimation. By the turn of the twentieth century, the position of the British in Malaya had grown stronger with time and their political influence had extended across the whole peninsula, making it superfluous to justify their presence through Malay precedent. The Malays were then labelled in the British Empire Exhibition as 'natives', an acknowledgement that had formed the basis for the government's attention to them in contemporary colonial discourse, which cast the British as essential protectors and tutors of the Malays.⁶³

Such was the importance of the protection of Malays in colonial ideology, that British recognition of Malay indigeneity strengthened as Malay position vis-à-vis Chinese and Indians in Malaya weakened. In 1921, the Malays made up 49.2% of Malaya's 3.4-million population,

⁶² The Straits Settlement Court spanned 8,700 square feet. *SFP*, 12 June 1886, p. 5.

⁶³ Manickam, "Taming Race", pp. 27-8 and 294-7.

followed by the Chinese and Indians which constituted 35.0% and 14.0% of the population respectively. Although most Chinese and Indians were sojourners, a sizeable number were permanent settlers, and 22.0% of the Chinese population and 12.4% of the Indian population were born in Malaya.⁶⁴ These domiciled communities were increasingly vociferous in demanding for their political rights, such as the removal of the 'colour bar' in the civil service that limited them to subordinate clerical and technical positions which they already dominated, allowing only Europeans and Malays to fill up administrative positions. Faced with political and economic pressures from the expanding Chinese and Indian population, Malay writers frequently fretted that their race was at risk of being outcompeted by other races, and urged for preferential treatment of Malays as 'sons of the soil'.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, British colonial officials, particularly those who had advanced their careers through the protection of Malays, emphasised the Malay nature of the country.⁶⁶ In a pamphlet for the British Empire Exhibition, Evans wrote of the Malays as 'more recent invaders of the country', but quickly asserted that they were 'old established ones now', in contrast to the 'recent foreign invaders of the soil'—immigrants from India and China.⁶⁷ The primary position of Malays in Malaya was also underscored on the cover of the *Illustrated Guide to*

⁶⁴ J. E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya, 1921* (London: Dunstable and Watford, 1922), pp. 95, 97 and 149.

⁶⁵ Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 2nd ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), pp. 244-5; *MWM*, 1 Feb. 1923, p. 110, 'Correspondence. Claiming Rights. Preference for Malays'; *MWM*, 6 Dec. 1923, p. 583-4, 'The 'Poverty of Malays'.

⁶⁶ T.N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 19-20.

⁶⁷ Ivor H. N. Evans, *Native Life in the Malay Peninsula, Malayan Series No. XV, British Empire Exhibition, London. 1924* (Singapore: Fraser and Neave, 1923), pp. 1 and 13.

British Malaya, which depicts a well-dressed Malay couple strolling in a kampong well shaded by coconut trees and omits Chinese and Indian figures (Figure 9).

Presented with a small disclaimer in 1924 and 1925, the claim of Malay indigeneity to Malaya was reiterated more firmly at the next British Empire Exhibition of 1938 in Glasgow, when the position of Malays as the majority in Malaya became even less certain. Figures from the 1931 census show that the percentage of Malays in Malaya's 4.4-million population had slipped to 44.7%, while the Chinese and Indians made up 39.0% and 14.2% of the population respectively. If the aborigines and Malay immigrants were excluded, the percentage of Malays would only be 37.5%, lower than that of the Chinese. In addition, more Chinese and Indians were likely to view Malaya as their homeland, since 31.3% of

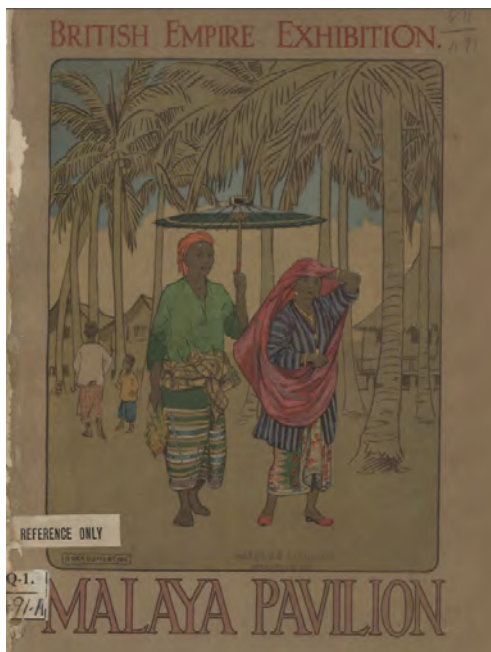


Figure 9: Front Cover of the *Illustrated Guide to British Malaya*

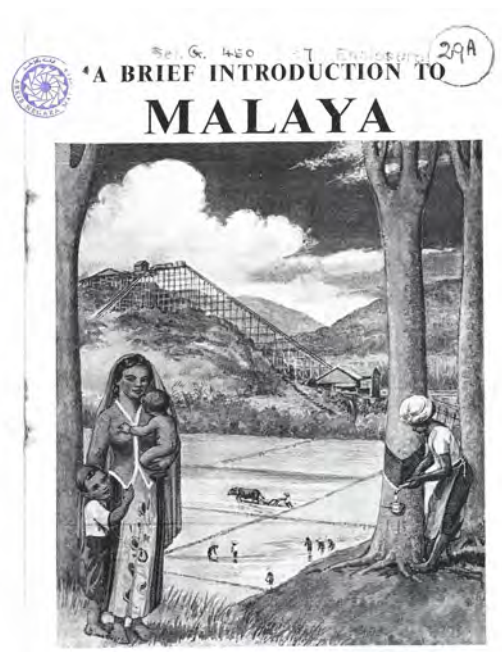


Figure 10: Front Cover of *A Brief Introduction to Malaya*

Chinese and 21.1% of Indians were born there.⁶⁸ One result of these demographic, political and economic pressures, exacerbated by the Great Depression, was that more Malays of different socio-economic classes read, listened or contributed to Malay newspapers, in which sentiments on the Malay race being in crisis were aired.⁶⁹ Despite or perhaps because of these circumstances, *A Brief Introduction to Malaya* distributed for free in the Malaya Court in 1938, stated with no qualifications that 'the Malays, Negritos, Sakais and Jakuns are the indigenous races of the Peninsula', and provided no further discussion on the origins of Malays and elaboration on the Chinese and Indians.⁷⁰ The booklet's cover illustration affirmed the dominance of Malays as indigenes and the majority population in Malaya, and downplayed the presence of Indians and Chinese, featuring them as economic tools.⁷¹ A protective Malay mother with two children is foregrounded in the illustration, whereas a lone Indian rubber tapper is depicted in the middle ground. Surprisingly, there are no Chinese figures, though their presence is arguably implied with the sluice gate of a mine relegated to the background of the illustration, since a majority of Chinese were miners (Figure 10). With this representation,

⁶⁸ C. A. Vlieland, *British Malaya (the Colony of the Straits Settlements and the Malay States under British protection, namely the federated states of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang and the states of Johore, Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu, Perlis and Brunei: A report on the 1931 census and on certain problems of vital statistics* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1932), pp. 36, 126, 222 and 225.

⁶⁹ Mark Emmanuel, "Viewspapers: The Malay press of the 1930s", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 41, 1 (Feb. 2010), pp. 1-20.

⁷⁰ ANM, Empire Exhibition Glasgow, 1938, *A Brief Introduction to Malaya* (London: W. & S. Ltd., 1938?), p. 7. The Malaya Court took up 5,616 square feet within the Colonial Pavilion. ANM, Empire Exhibition Glasgow, 1938, Report on the Administration of the Malayan Information Agency for the Year 1938, p. 22.

⁷¹ The artist of the cover illustration is unknown.

the economically dominant, second-largest community in Malaya was reduced to its economic function.

Emphasis on the exhibition of Malay dominance was not only influenced by colonial ideologies and conditions back in Malaya, but also by the intended audience. Although the metropolitan exhibition from 1924 to 1925 focused on the Malays, the aborigines took the limelight two years earlier at Singapore's Malaya-Borneo Exhibition, perhaps because they were more exotic and attention grabbing than the Malays in a Malayan setting. The *Guide to the Malaya Borneo Exhibition* features a short paragraph on the origins of the Malays, before it embarks on a longer discussion on the Semangs, introduced as the Peninsula's 'earliest inhabitants', the Sakais and Jakuns.⁷² On the guide's cover, an aborigine is portrayed with his arm extended, as he welcomed visitors to the exhibition (Figure 11). Dayak and Malay houses were erected in the western part of the exhibition grounds, surrounded by various 'native sideshows'.⁷³ Organisers of the Malaya Pavilion in the British Empire Exhibition, however, 'agreed on no account to send natives as exhibits, e.g. Sakais, merely for the display of themselves and their costume'.⁷⁴ This unexplained decision could be a protective gesture informed by the exhibition visitors' negative reviews of aborigines as curiosities and wild savages in 1922.⁷⁵ Moreover, impressions of this nature would not gel

⁷² *Guide to the Malaya Borneo Exhibition*, pp. 73 (quote) – 75.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-43; *ST*, 18 Mar 1922, p. 10.

⁷⁴ ANM, BEE Minutes, Meeting 6 on 4 Mar. 1923, pp. 4-5.

⁷⁵ One reviewer recounted, 'When the visitor steps into the British North Borneo section [...] he feels transported into another world — full of ancient arts and crafts, into the presence of wild men, with wild and gruesome customs, and so well portrayed by the



Figure 11: Front Cover of *Guide to the Malaya Borneo Exhibition*

with the image of Malaya's progress that the pavilion's organisers sought to project.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, the Sakais were still exhibited in the form of photographs, to be discussed in the following chapter.

In general, the Malaya Pavilion's exhibits and narratives underlined the country's development under colonial rule, the need for its resources to be better utilised with British capital and the key role of the British in safeguarding the Malays and their culture. Aligned with the contemporary imperial ideology of trusteeship, these messages catered to the metropolitan audience and were also sensitive to the Malayan context of intensifying competition among different races, in playing up Malay dominance to justify continued British protection of these 'indigenes'. The

exhibits on view. [...] to make Borneo jungle life more realistic Mr. Grant pointed out a live young Murut, a head hunter, who sat on a stool grinning at the skull out of whose nose protruded a large wild boar's tooth!' *ST*, 5 Apr. 1922, p. 9.

⁷⁶ I thank A/P Timothy Barnard for pointing out this to me.

next chapter elaborates on the predominantly Malay landscape displayed at Wembley, by examining stereotypes of Malaya's communities circulated at the exhibition and how they were supported or disputed by the organisers and participants.

Chapter Three: **Racial Constructions, Contradictions and Contestations**

Racial stereotypes constituted a form of colonial ethnographical knowledge that validated imperial control, for they ordered society into a civilisational hierarchy in which inferior races were dependent on white men for guidance to progress, or even to survive. Underlying this form of knowledge was a claim to certainty that was necessary for its operation because, as Homi Bhabha explains, the stereotype presented the colonial subject as a 'fixated Other' who was nonetheless 'entirely knowable and visible'. Yet, under the veneer of conviction, the stereotype is 'a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive'.¹ This argument holds much validity for the construction of race at the Malaya Pavilion, broached in this chapter through texts and photographs issued for the exhibition and accounts on the Malay human exhibits. In accordance with the colonial government's pro-Malay stance, the Malays were dominantly represented as the most civilised indigenes, in juxtaposition with the primitive aborigines and industrious, supposedly temporary Chinese and Indian settlers. Portrayals of the Malays, however, were not uniform and most strikingly, the conventional idea of Malay indolence was at times disputed and to some degree displaced by the essentialisation on their alleged cheeriness. The attention awarded to Malays as 'sons of the soil' in the pavilion's representations also met mild challenges from sympathisers and members of the 'immigrant' communities, whereas the aborigines

¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 70-1 and 78.

remained voiceless in the face of being presented merely as ethnographic curiosities. Constructions of different races put forth at the exhibition thus contained contradictions and were contested by colonial subjects, though these dissensions hardly amounted to an undermining of British influence over Malaya.

3.1. Textual Representations

British stereotypes of races in Malaya changed with time, illustrating how stereotypes performed their ideological functions by staying attuned to the colonialists' shifting political and economic imperatives. Early European writings dating to the sixteenth century cast Malays as dangerous and deceitful pirates—a result, Charles Hirschman suggests, of the Malays' continual resistance to the relatively weak Portuguese and Dutch colonial authorities. However, the Malays were 'literally and figuratively disarmed' with the extension of British influence over the Peninsula after 1874, an intervention first justified by the need to protect British investments by ending wars between Malays and Chinese in the mining industry, and later, by the rhetoric of helping incompetent Malays administer their country.² A central component of this paternalistic discourse was the stereotype of the idle Malay in opposition to that of the industrious Chinese (and to a lesser extent, Indian), which had developed from the low level of Malay participation in the Chinese and Indian-dominated colonial capitalist economy.³ The reliance on immigrant (especially Chinese) labour to develop the country

² Hirschman, "The Making of Race in Colonial Malaya", pp. 336 and 342-4, quote on p. 343.

³ Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, pp. 70, 75 and 80-1.

was often rendered problematic by British convictions that Malays and Chinese could not tolerate one another and that without their protection, the indigenous Malays would be outnumbered and outcompeted by Chinese sojourners. Consequently, the British fashioned themselves as stewards of the Malays, responsible for ensuring Malay primacy while advancing Malaya's economy.⁴

These changes in colonial stereotypes were reflected in publications issued for the Malaya Pavilion at Wembley. Malays were 'a much maligned people', Evans asserted with reference to the 'popular idea' in England of a Malay as 'a cruel and treacherous pirate armed with a poisoned dagger'.⁵ According to Caldecott, the Malays were 'a content[ed] landed peasantry' and 'the backbone of [the] country', who 'maintain[ed] with dignity and charm their relation of hosts towards the more pushful foreign element in the population'. Nevertheless, he credited the Chinese for the 'genesis' of Malaya's tin mining industry and the Indians for providing plantation labour, admitting that Britain held 'no monopoly of the enterprise, adventure and perseverance on which Malaya's commercial importance and prosperity ha[d] been built'.⁶ *Malaya in Monochrome* likewise recorded the importance of Chinese and Indian immigrants as traders, white-collar workers and labourers in mines and plantations.⁷ These sojourners, Evans pointed out, had an

⁴ Sandra Khor Manickam, "Common Ground: Race and the Colonial Universe in British Malaya", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40, 3 (October 2009), p. 600.

⁵ Evans, *Native Life in the Malay Peninsula*, p. 16.

⁶ *MT*, 11 Mar. 1924, p. 9.

⁷ *Malaya in Monochrome*, unnumbered page; These stereotypes of the 'cheerful but indolent' Malays were popularised among students in England through the examinable

undue advantage whenever they handed out loans to the thriftless and insolvent Malays, such that British interventionist policies were necessary to safeguard the Malays. For instance, the Chinese trader provided credit to Malay fishermen, 'much to their detriment', while the Chettiars who offered loans at high interest rates of around 36 percent per annum had a 'firm hold on many Malays', because these debtors were often forced to mortgage their lands when they were unable to repay their loans. To prevent the permanent Malay population from being displaced by the immigrant Chettiars, the British established Malay Reservations in 1913, which were parcels of land that could not be transferred to non-Malays.⁸

Evans' work, however, departed from the rest of the exhibition's publications in its attempt to demolish the stereotype of the lazy Malay, though it still fell in line with the government's pro-Malay stance in the 1920s. Defending the Malays against accusations that they were 'lazy and cumber[ed] the earth', he stressed that Europeans and Malays could learn from each other at times, though he did not elaborate on these occasions.⁹ Evans contended that the Malays were not intrinsically indolent, but the climate sapped their energy and they never felt compelled to toil for their survival because of the low population density. Moreover, the Malays

subject of Empire Study. They were reproduced in the *Weekly Bulletin of Empire Study*, a series of teachers' notes initiated by the Board of Education to disseminate information on the British Empire Exhibition and British territories, which targeted two million children between the ages of eleven and sixteen. By the end of the exhibition, 130,000 copies of the bulletin were circulated, reaching out to an estimated 1.5 million students. *The Weekly Bulletin of Empire Study* (London: The Inter-Departmental Educational Subcommittee, 1924), pp. 86, 173 (quote) and 345; National Archives, United Kingdom (NAUK), BT 60/14/2, British Empire Exhibition 1924 and 1925, Report of HM Government's Participation at Exhibition, Section I: Bulletin of Empire Study.

⁸ Evans, *Native Life in the Malay Peninsula*, pp. 2 (quote)–3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

refrained from working hard to improve their living conditions for fear of incurring the jealousy of their sultans, who would then confiscate their property. For Evans, claims of Malay idleness were dubious for they were mainly allegations made by Europeans who were unable to obtain consistent Malay labour. He retorted that the Malays simply had no need to be employed as labourers, especially if they owned land.¹⁰ Not laziness, but other traits characterised the Malays: a good sense of humour, the ability to 'both think and act for [themselves] in a greater degree than most easterners' and skilfulness in handicrafts. On a negative note, Malay adults tended to be gullible, spendthrift, expert at securing loans but very bad at repaying their debts.¹¹ In general, the Malay in Evans' depiction possesses several strengths but remains in need of British protection and guidance in order to progress. According to Daniel Goh, Evans' defence of the Malays balanced out negative implications on Malay character that arose from the stereotype of the diligent Chinese and dependence on Chinese labour frequently reiterated in other exhibition publications. The analysis by Evans, a government-employed anthropologist, therefore suited the tastes of the conservative Guillemard government in Malaya, and of L.S. Amery, the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1925, who were both sympathetic towards the Malays and worked to conserve their

¹⁰ Alatas' review of key British works on the Malays from the late nineteenth through mid twentieth centuries shows that the authors had repeatedly insisted that the Malays were lazy, with the exception of R.O. Winstedt, Evans' contemporary, who like him, contended that the Malays were mistaken for being indolent because they were agriculturalists who did not need other forms of employment. Alatas, *Myth of the Lazy Native*, pp. 38-50.

¹¹ Evans, *Native Life in the Malay Peninsula*, pp. 17-21, quote on p. 20.

culture.¹² Beyond a match to the ideological stances of the colonial and metropolitan governments, Evans' description of the Malays can be read as a complement to the pro-Malay policies recently introduced in Malaya (discussed in earlier chapters). His claim that the Malays were not so idle after all and moreover had redeeming qualities imply that they were worthy of British efforts to protect them from being victimised by immigrant settlers. Even if the Malays fell short of the qualities possessed by the immigrants, at the very least, they were the most civilised group of locals and were quite incomparable with the aborigines.

The British Empire Exhibition, as elaborated in Chapter Two, captures a point of transition in the colonial rhetoric on the Malays, from colonists to indigenes of Malaya. This discursive change involved a worsening representation of the aborigines vis-à-vis the Malays in terms of their degrees of civilisation, and can be traced via a comparison of publications generated by the 1924-1925 exhibition and that of the earlier Colonial and Indian Exhibition in 1886. Evans explained that aborigines—the Negritos, Sakais and Jakuns¹³—occupied different levels on the ladder of civilisation, the lowest of which belonged to the Negritos, 'a very ancient and primitive stock' with 'childish' facial and cranial features, a 'dying' race with no more than a thousand members still living. By suggesting a relationship between the Negritos and a 'Negroid race which dwelt in parts of Europe during the Aurignacian age of the Palaeolithic period' (circa 32,000 to 25,000 years ago), Evans constructed

¹² Goh, "Ethnographic Empire: Imperial Culture and Colonial State Formation in Malaya and the Philippines, 1880-1940", pp. 199-201 (quote).

¹³ They are now respectively known as the Semang, Senoi and Proto-Malay.

the Negritos as ‘contemporary ancestors’ of the British, an Other from a distant place and time.¹⁴ The Negritos were said to have adopted their techniques of shelter construction and their language from the more civilised Malays and Sakais, respectively. Though superior to the Negritos, the Sakais were inhibited from further civilisational progress because of their nomadic practices of shifting agriculture and evacuation from places where death had taken place. As for the Orang Laut (sea people, who were classified as Jakuns), Evans commented that their ‘now much civilised descendants’ in Singapore were of mixed Malay ancestry.¹⁵

In stark contrast to Evans, Leonard Wray (curator of the Perak Museum) noted in a guidebook for the 1886 exhibition that the aborigines could be found in ‘wilder parts of the State’, without referring to them as ‘wild’ people. Neither did he label the aborigines as primitive people, even as he touched on the Semang’s (Negrito) nomadic lifestyle and characterised Sakai ornaments and spears as ‘rude’ creations. Wray’s sympathies lay with the aborigines rather than the Malays, whom he blamed for causing the Sakais to become ‘very shy, and [to] avoid strangers with the instinct of wild animals’, for prior to British intervention on the Peninsula, the Malays had often raided them and had no qualms about killing them.¹⁶ In fact, Evans too dedicated most of his academic work on the aborigines and even professed his fondness for the

¹⁴ I borrow the term from Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 121, cited in Raymond Corbey, “Ethnographic Showcases, 1870-1930”, *Cultural Anthropology* 8, 3 (August 1993), p. 361.

¹⁵ Evans, *Native Life in the Malay Peninsula*, pp. 5-8 and 10-2.

¹⁶ Leonard Wray, *Notes on Perak, with a Sketch of its Vegetable, Animal and Mineral Products* (London: William Clowes & Sons, 1885), pp. 8-10.

Negritos in his autobiography, but he found it necessary to make intellectual compromises by focusing on and making favourable judgements of Malays in his pamphlet. Evans' compromises highlight the importance that he, as a government official, placed on such pro-Malay representations to an international audience,¹⁷ at a time when the justificatory rhetoric of British influence over Malaya had broadened from providing enlightened governance and economic development, to encompass the protection of indigenous Malays against their immigrant economic competitors. In this vein, the pamphlet endeavoured to persuade readers that even though the Malays were not the Peninsula's first dwellers, they were deserving of the most governmental attention and aid by virtue of being the dominant and most civilised group of indigenes.

These generally Malay-centric representations aroused the anxiety of journalists who identified with the Chinese and Indians, and prompted them to contest and re-interpret the exhibition literature in trying to win for these communities greater recognition of their contributions to Malaya and more political privileges. For instance, the brief mention of the Malays as having originated from Sumatra, presented in a bland and factual manner in *Malaya in Monochrome*, was transformed in a strongly-worded summary by the editor of the European-run *Times of Malaya*. He understood the account as a 'remind[er] that, like the Europeans and the Chinese, the Malays [were] also invaders of Malaya', though they had

¹⁷ Manickam, "Taming Race", pp. 299-300, 304 and 316.

come much earlier, and that ‘the real “sons of the soil” [were] the Semangs’. This comment carried deeper implications by reducing differences between immigrants and the Malays, and may invite questions on British preferential treatment of Malays as ‘sons of the soil’, even though the editor astutely chose not to dwell on them. Instead, he turned to focus on the Chinese, re-interpreting statements in the book on their economic and numerical prominence to mean that its author had ‘admit[ted] indirectly that much of the progress of this Peninsula [was] due to the Chinese who [were] found in large numbers all over the Peninsula, penetrating even into the jungles’. The editor gave a tribute to the Chinese for establishing and developing the mining industry of Perak, claiming that they ‘still remain[ed] the most efficient and reliable mining prospectors’.¹⁸ It is possible that the writer, based in the Chinese-dominated mining town of Ipoh, had personal connections with the Chinese and so was more sympathetic towards them. Miles away in Singapore, the editor of *The Malaya Tribune* (a newspaper founded and ran mainly by domiciled Chinese and Eurasians) found it ‘gratifying’ that Caldecott’s description of the pavilion acknowledged the contributions of the Malays and Chinese, and also the significance of Indian labour in Malaya. He was, however, disappointed that there was no discussion on the ‘political status of the different races’, even if it were an understandable omission for the British Empire Exhibition.¹⁹ Although he did not elaborate on this matter, it is likely that he was referring to the

¹⁸ *TOM*, 20 Jan. 1925, p. 6.

¹⁹ *MT*, 10 Mar. 1924, p. 6.

colour bar in the civil service, which kept Indian and Chinese British subjects from higher-ranking administrative positions reserved for the Europeans and Malays, a policy that the newspaper routinely lambasted. A few weeks later, the editor seized the opportunity offered by King George V's opening speech for the exhibition to condemn the colour bar. Citing the King's statement on the 'spirit of free and tolerant co-operation which ha[d] inspired the people of different races, creeds, institutions and ways of thought to unite in a single commonwealth and to contribute their varying national gifts to one end', he declared that the non-European British subjects of Malaya were 'ready to give concrete proof of their loyalty' and were 'as enthusiastic for the Empire as Europeans'. Their appeals for the abolition of the colour bar, therefore, should be taken as 'essentially patriotic' and motivated by the desire 'to contribute a "national gift" to the "one great end"'.²⁰ These press commentaries foreshadowed the heightening of inter-ethnic tensions in the wake of economic depression in the 1930s, when the pro-Malay stance of the colonial government, rising wave of Malay nationalism and activism for political rights among the domiciled Chinese and Indians sparked contention on whether Malaya should be for the Malays or Malayans.²¹ Meanwhile, photographs of various resident communities of Malaya commissioned by the pavilion authorities made it clear that the country was for the Malays.

²⁰ *MT*, 25 Apr. 1924, p. 6.

²¹ Cheah Boon Kheng, "Race and Ethnic Relations in Colonial Malaya during the 1920s and 1930s", in *Multiethnic Malaysia: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Lim Teck Ghee, Alberto Gomes, Azly Rahman (Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre; Kuala Lumpur: MIDAS, UCSI University, 2009), pp. 33-44.

3.2. Photographic Representations

The histories of photography and anthropology, both dating back to the mid nineteenth century, are so closely intertwined that anthropology 'define[s] itself through—and against—the nature of photography', as Christopher Pinney has recently argued. Early anthropologists found the study of culture as a lived practice problematic because it was ever-changing. Moreover, they were not proficient enough in vernacular languages to understand their indigenous informants and in any case, they doubted the veracity of indigenous accounts. Under these circumstances, photography enabled anthropological analyses by producing fixed and indisputably factual visual representations of culture. It was only in the mid twentieth century that anthropologists increasingly acknowledged photography's limitations in reflecting the complex fluidity of culture.²² During the heyday of photography in anthropology, photographs of people were studied as manifestations of their dispositions and by extension, those of the larger racial or occupational 'types' of people whom they represented.²³ This section examines how different races were constructed in photographs issued by the Malaya pavilion's organisers. Of all communities, the Malays stood to gain most from these pictorial representations, which complicated stereotypes of them in the exhibition literature as agriculturalists and fishermen, upheld that they were not lazy and gave them a degree of masculine agency.

²² Christopher Pinney, *Photography and Anthropology* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), pp. 14-5, 25-6, 105 and 154 (quote).

²³ James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 180-1.

Photographs of Malaya were disseminated at the pavilion in the form of picture postcards and insertions in publications. Most of these pictures were taken by Frederick Keller of Houghton-Butcher (Eastern) Ltd., Singapore, who conducted a 3000-mile tour in the middle of 1923 for this purpose, passing through all states of the Peninsula with the exception, it seems, of Kelantan and Trengganu.²⁴ Besides his itinerary, little is known about the photographer and his practice. Keller captured snapshots of more than 600 subjects and judging from their captions, which give a sense of what he or the pavilion's organisers wanted the audience to focus on, the majority of views were of scenery, mostly natural sights and a few buildings and urban landscapes.²⁵ The emphasis on showcasing Malaya's natural beauty to appeal to exhibition goers can be understood with reference to the country's lack of historical monuments when compared to its neighbours.²⁶ In accordance with the exhibition's commercial aims, agriculture (coconuts, rice and rubber) and forestry (damar and gutta-percha) were given the second-most coverage, while photographs on the mining industry and railways trailed just behind snapshots of the Sakais and Malays. More attention was paid to the Sakais than to the Malays, despite the latter's superiority in number

²⁴ *ST*, 5 Dec. 1923, p. 9; ANM, BEE Minutes, Meeting 10, 1 July 1923, p. 5; ANM, British Empire Exhibition to be Held in London in 1921, Letter from Victor Lowinger to British Adviser, Kedah, 20 July 1923.

²⁵ This analysis is based on the captions of 551 postcards listed in Mike Perkins and Bill Tonkin, *Postcards of the British Empire Exhibition Wembley 1924 and 1925* (Kent: Exhibition Study Group, 1994), pp. 133-147. I counted 145 subjects on scenery, 102 on agriculture, 66 on forestry, 56 on Sakais, 46 on Malays, 39 on mining, 32 on railways, 32 on flora and fauna, 16 on religious buildings, 7 on the Sultan Idris Training College, 7 on Chinese, 4 on Semang and 12 miscellaneous views on handicrafts, hawkers, etc. These numbers add up to more than 551 because some captions fit into more than one category.

²⁶ I thank Prof. Peleggi for this observation.

and political influence. This skewed representation indicates that the Sakai, deemed as a primitive race that was rapidly 'disappearing' through assimilation into Malay culture, were more interesting ethnographic curiosities than the Malays. Otherwise, consistent with the preponderant representation of Malays at Wembley, few pictures were taken of non-Malay communities. The Chinese, for example, only show up in seven captions, which mainly describe their work in the mining industry. A number of photographs taken at mines feature labourers who were probably Chinese, but the captions emphasise their activities rather than racial identity. Similarly, the Indians who are hardly cited in the captions are likely to appear more frequently as labourers in pictures of rubber plantations.²⁷ It seems that no pictures were made of Europeans, in keeping with conventions of representing the Orient. 'To see without being seen' underlined the 'detached and objective' nature of European gaze on the colonised world and European dominance that enabled their uni-directional gaze.²⁸ The high social prestige of the Straits Chinese possibly deterred renderings of them into photographic exhibits; conversely, most photographs show the peasantry and working classes. Eurasians were also missing from the photograph captions, probably because they would have been anathema to the British audience disturbed by miscegenation. In general, Caldecott complained that the choice and number of subjects were 'faulty', there being 'large quantities

²⁷ I consulted 181 photographs of Malaya produced for the exhibition and came across only two images of Indians at work. See "2334. Rubber. Bringing in the Latex", in David Ng and D.J.M. Tate, *Malaya: Gaya Hidup Antara 1900-1930 [Malaya: Lifestyles, 1900-1930]* (Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti, 1989), p. 49; "Dulang Washing. Tamil Women", in G.E. Greig, *Mining in Malaya* (London: Malay States Information Agency, 1924), p. 28.

²⁸ Mitchell, *Colonising Europe*, p. 26.

of technical pictures which commanded only a limited sale and many unattractive views which had no sale at all'. On the other hand, highly sought-after photographs of 'human or zoological interest' and subjects with which exhibition goers were 'directly or indirectly familiar' were in short supply.²⁹

Among Keller's photographs of Malay subjects, idyllic scenes of inland and coastal kampongs are the most common, suggesting the settled, humble and carefree lives of Malays. They are almost invariably featured in rural settings, be it posing near their stilted houses, fishing, doing household work or planting rice (Figure 12). Similar to the exhibition publications, these images characterise the Malays as self-sufficient fishermen and peasants, leaving no clue of the presence of 'Other Malays', a term that Joel Kahn uses to refer to those who were 'clearly not indigenous to the Malay Peninsula', not 'village-dwelling,



Figure 12: Malay House
Source: *Illustrated Guide to British Malaya*, p. 15.

²⁹ Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 16.

subsistence-oriented, commercially-naïve agriculturalists’, but ‘highly-mobile, commercially astute merchants, land speculators, moneylenders and cashcroppers’, without a ‘strong attachment to place and ruler’.³⁰ ‘Foreign Malays’ made up 19 percent of the Malay population in the FMS in 1921,³¹ and were regarded by the British to be indigenous to Malaya, despite their differences in origin, culture and language with the Peninsula-born Malays. Kahn argues that by the early twentieth century, ‘Other Malays’ in rural areas were mainly traders rather than farmers and they took to urban areas as well as they did to the countryside. The Malays, while underrepresented in towns and cities of the FMS between 1911 and 1947, were definitely not negligible, as they constituted an average of 11 to 15 percent of the urban population. Nonetheless, ‘Malayness’ as envisioned in the 1920s by British and Singapore-based Malay intellectuals (mainly members of the *Kesatuan Melayu Singapura* [Singapore Malay Union]), was associated with ‘a subsistence-oriented rural life lived in distinctive residential units called kampungs’ and ‘marginalisation, disadvantage and poverty’, which consequently necessitated the protection of Malays by these political elites.³² To some extent, Keller’s photographs of kampongs added weight to this construction of Malay identity, though it is likely that he held less of a political motive than a commercial one—to capture a different way of life that would constitute saleable views to the urban metropolitan public. Social inequality and exploitation, however, had no place in the snapshots,

³⁰ Joel S. Kahn, *Other Malays: Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in the Modern Malay World* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), pp. xxi-xxii.

³¹ J. E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya, 1921*, p. 99.

³² Kahn, *Other Malays*, pp. 14, 47-8 (quotes), 55-6.

which conformed to the convention of the picturesque by portraying harmonious social relations between subjects in a rustic setting.³³ The Malays were depicted to be leading simple and happy lives, a favourable image which still avails them to British protection.

Some pictures expose gaps in the common representations of Malays proffered in other pictures and exhibition literature, by portraying Malays in occupations besides agriculturalists and fishermen. A few Malays were photographed standing in a coconut plantation with heaps of freshly-harvested fruits, trading damar alongside the Sakais, vending food and laboriously washing tin in the sun (Figure 13).³⁴ In addition, pictures of Malay artisans and their handicrafts, such as pottery, embroidery and metalwork, are almost as plentiful as images of kampongs. These artisans appear to be concentrating on their crafts, with their gaze fixed on the object of their activity when the shutter was released (Figure 14); also, most of their handiworks come across as being finely wrought, apparently at odds with Evans' complaints on the lack of specialisation among artisans and the degeneration of contemporary crafts (discussed in Chapter Two).³⁵ Nonetheless, photographs of young Malay men receiving education in the ordered environment of Sultan Idris Training College and producing award-winning specimens of basketry suggest the training role

³³ See Gary D. Sampson, "Unmasking the Colonial Picturesque: Samuel Bourne's Photographs of Barrackpore Park", in *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place*, ed. Eleanor M. Hight and Gary D. Sampson (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 89-90.

³⁴ "1113. Coconut Estate", in *Malaya in Monochrome*, unnumbered page; "4138. Malays and Sakai selling Damar at Ulu Serang", in Perkins and Tonkins, *Postcards of the British Empire Exhibition*, p. 140; "7118. Malay Food Hawker", *ibid.*, p. 142.

³⁵ See "Malay Woman Moulding Pottery near Kuala Kangsar, Perak", in Evans, *Malay Arts and Crafts*, frontispiece; "Some Malay Creeses", *Ibid.*, between pp. 16 and 17.



Figure 13: Malay Girls Employed in the Tin Industry
Source: *Malaya in Monochrome*, unnumbered page.



Figure 14: A Malay Silversmith Making a Bowl
Source: Evans, *Malay Arts and Crafts*, between pp. 12 and 13.

of the British and success of their efforts in sustaining indigenous craftsmanship.³⁶

These snapshots of labourers, peddlers and artisans, similar to those of Malays performing domestic chores, fishing and planting, constitute visual evidence against charges of Malay idleness. Even Malay children worked, as can be seen in Figure 13. Indolence can be represented pictorially, as Ayshe Erdogan demonstrates in her analysis of images of Turkish men made by European commercial photographers in Istanbul during the 1870s and 1880s. These men were ‘photographed in seated or stationary poses suggestive of their innate passivity [...and] represented with lethargic expressions, as if they had interest in nothing other than sensual gratification’.³⁷ That the Malays were captured on camera in a very different light complemented Evans’ scholarly attempt at absolving them from idleness, though Keller might not have had this goal in mind. It is more likely instead that the exhibition’s educational and commercial aims encouraged the creation of images in which colonial subjects demonstrated their household work, occupations and products, thus dictating against pictures that would imply indolence. The purposes of the exhibition, in short, impeded the dissemination of the ‘lazy Malay’ stereotype through photographs.

³⁶ “7144. Sultan Idris Training College, Tanjong Malim: A Dormitory”, in Cheah Jin Seng, *Perak: 300 Early Postcards* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2009), p. 149; “7145. Sultan Idris Training College, Tanjong Malim: Basket-Work Articles made by the Scholars”, *Ibid.*, p. 151.

³⁷ Ayshe Erdogan, “Picturing Alterity: Representational strategies in Victorian type photographs of Ottoman men”, in *Colonialist Photography*, p. 121.

Far from being indolent, Malays appear in some images as big-game hunters with their kill, thereby appropriating a representational convention which initially asserted the manliness of colonialists. These pictures in question were contributed by the hunter-turned-conservationist T.R. Hubback and their photographer is unknown. They portray a solitary Malay (or perhaps Sakai) man, usually armed with a weapon, sitting on or next to a dead animal that he presumably killed, and looking straight at the camera (Figure 15).³⁸ Such images are rare among colonial photographs of hunts, which usually focus on a rifle-carrying European near his kill and feature less prominently one or more colonial subject(s) within his hunting party. Even in Hubback's memoirs, photographs are similarly composed and depict him as the hunter, while he recounted that Malays were trackers and was insistent that they keep



Figure 15: A Seladang

Source: Cheah Jin Seng, *Selangor: 300 Early Postcards* (Kuala Lumpur: Editions Didier Millet and Jugra Publications, 2011), p. 178.
(Also in *Illustrated Guide to British Malaya*, p. 32.)

³⁸ "8124. Elephant (Copyright by T.R. Hubback Esq)", in *Malaya in Monochrome*, unnumbered page; "8125. Rhinoceros (Copyright by T.R. Hubback Esq)", *ibid.*

to their roles in subordination to the white hunter.³⁹ His pictures of Malay hunters were likely, therefore, to be made specially for the exhibition and were in line with the general absence of Europeans in the pavilion's photographs. The implication of replacing Europeans with Malays is significant when we consider that underpinning the pictorial convention of the colonial hunt, as James Ryan argues, was the association of the hunter's drive, adventurous spirit and knowledge with the exercise and extension of colonial rule. In addition, the photographic hunting trophy was evidence of 'Victorian masculinity: independent, courageous, physically robust, honest and *white*'.⁴⁰ Hubback's images, however, seem to claim for the Malay these very qualities reserved for white hunters, thus presenting a contradictory figure who was colonised, yet able to usurp European dominance in representations.

In contrast to the Malays, the Sakais were disempowered in the pavilion's photographs, which highlighted the primitiveness of their lifestyles, alike the exhibition publications. They usually appear half-naked in the pictures, posing or hunting with their blowpipes and baskets in the jungle (Figure 16). Although the development of Malaya had caused many people to move away from forests, the Sakais were depicted as though they were unaffected by these extensive changes.⁴¹ Only a few photographs show Sakais fully dressed, living in houses, or being involved

³⁹ Theodore R. Hubback, *Elephant and Seladang Hunting in the Federated Malay States* (London: Rowland Ward, 1905), pp. 14, 23, 28-9, 32, 34-52, 61; Theodore R. Hubback, *Three Months in Pahang in Search of Big Game: A Reminiscence of Malaya* (Singapore: Kelly and Walsh, 1907?), p. 59.

⁴⁰ Ryan, *Picturing Empire*, pp. 106-7 and 110 (quote).

⁴¹ Manickam, "Taming Race", p. 286.

in the damar trade, thereby being part of the larger colonial society and economy rather than leading secluded lives in the jungle.⁴² Emphasis on the markers of Sakai primitiveness struck a newspaper editor, who judged two images as ‘almost shocking’, for the women shown were ‘over-developed and over-exposed’. He was therefore concerned about the visual overrepresentation of the Sakais relative to their population size in *Malaya in Monochrome*, for the ‘unsophisticated visitor’ might misunderstand that indigenous women of Malaya were all half-naked.⁴³ In a way, the editor’s fear was unfounded since no Sakais were shipped to Wembley for the exhibition.



Figure 16: Sakai Showing Blow-Pipe and Carrying Basket
Source: *Malaya in Monochrome*, unnumbered page.

⁴² “425. Sakai Village, Ulu Kinta”, in Cheah, *Perak: 300 Early Postcards*, p. 172; “4110. Sakai Bringing in Damar to Forest Collecting Station, Ulu Jelebu”, in *Malaya in Monochrome*, unnumbered page.

⁴³ *SE (The Straits Echo)*, 20 Jan. 1925, p. 6.

3.3 Cheerful Workers: The Malay Contingent at Wembley

In line with the representation of a Malay-dominated Malaya, twenty Malays were employed in the pavilion during both seasons of the exhibition (Figure 17). Among them were artisans (weavers, silversmiths, basket makers and a carpenter), cooks, salesmen, geological assistants, museum attendants, mining overseers and forest rangers, some of whom were government employees. Therefore, the Malay contingent at Wembley, similar to photographs commissioned by the pavilion's organisers, complicated colonial stereotypes of Malays as agriculturalists, fishermen and artisans. The Malay representatives were drawn from all states of Malaya besides Kelantan, Trengganu and Perlis, and all representatives were men, except for the weavers (three in 1924, two in 1925).⁴⁴ Forced to lead highly-regulated lives in an artificial environment,



Figure 17: Malaya Contingent at Wembley in 1925
Source: NAS, Accession No.: 1217

⁴⁴ The Malayan organisers had initially wanted to station a Chinese pottery maker and some Chinese clerks in the pavilion, but for unstated reasons these plans were not realised. ANM, BEE Minutes, Meeting 6, 4 Mar. 1923, p. 6; ANM, BEE Minutes, Meeting 8, 10 May 1923, p. 5; Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 20; *TOM*, 25 Apr. 1924, p. 7.

the Malays fostered a positive stereotype of cheerfulness in the minds of exhibition goers, repudiating associations of their race with laziness.

Exhibition organisers exerted a large degree of control over how the Malays lived in Wembley, and were motivated by the desires both to protect them and to assert distinctions between the coloniser and colonised. While the exhibition was still being planned, the Malayan executive committee threatened to pull out the Malay party upon learning of the metropolitan organisers' arrangements to house all ethnographic exhibits together in an area far away from the Malaya Pavilion. The London authorities acceded to the committee's demand to house Malays in the Malaya Pavilion instead,⁴⁵ and they eventually placed all contingents in separate accommodations.⁴⁶ Where exactly the metropolitan organisers wanted to quarter the contingents initially is not clear, but it was a common practice at international exhibitions for them to be quartered within the amusement section adjacent to, yet distinct from the exhibition proper, thereby implying their low status within the racial and civilisational hierarchy of the empire.⁴⁷ By insisting that Malays be accommodated in their country's pavilion, the Malayan committee could have been attempting to safeguard Malay dignity, by disassociating them from popular entertainment and underscoring their civilised nature. The Malays resided with 'complete privacy' within a fenced area behind the pavilion. An officer's mess hut was converted into their dormitory and

⁴⁵ Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 20.

⁴⁶ *SFP*, 24 Sep. 1923, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Anne Maxwell, *Colonial Photography and Exhibitions: Representations of the 'Native' and the Making of European Identities* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1999), p. 30.

living room, while three circular steel huts were transformed into a kitchen and separate washrooms for men and women. Organisers went to great lengths to ensure the comfort of residents—their washrooms were even fitted with latrines of the same type as those provided by British sanitary engineers to Muslims in India. The result of this detailed planning was rewarding, for health officials declared the pavilion's dwelling to be 'the best of its kind in the Exhibition'.⁴⁸ Knowledge on sanitation and medicine informed and validated the pavilion organisers' intrusive measures to uphold Malay welfare in the kampong of Wembley, therefore exemplifying the colonisation of the Malay body by modern science.⁴⁹

Once outside of their kampong, the Malays were to conduct themselves according to regulations laid out by the pavilion authorities. With the exception of their day of rest on Fridays, the Malays were stationed in the pavilion every day, where they had to don their traditional dress.⁵⁰ This clothing requirement might, however, have been relaxed or ignored for some individuals, since photographs show a few unidentified male employees wearing western suits and *songkok* in the pavilion.⁵¹ On leaving the pavilion, the Malays were to dress in European style instead, this being presented as a measure to defend them from 'the inquisitiveness of English street urchins'.⁵² Artisans in the pavilion

⁴⁸ Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 20.

⁴⁹ Mustafa, "Camping and Tramping through the Colonial Archive: The Museum in Malaya", pp. 35-6.

⁵⁰ *SFP*, 19 June 1925, p. 5; *ST*, 27 Feb. 1924, p. 9.

⁵¹ *MST*, 10 May 1924, p. 6.

⁵² *ST*, 27 Feb. 1924, p. 9.



Figure 18: Malay Basket Makers in the Pavilion in 1925
Source: NAS, Accession No.: 1209.

demonstrated pre-industrial crafts of weaving, basketry, metalworking and carpentry on raised platforms closed off with railings, which were positioned in the centre of the arts and crafts section (Figure 18). These ethnographic exhibits could thus be contrasted with the exhibition goes in terms of dress, the space they occupied within the pavilion, culture and technological advancement. It was important that such differences between the coloniser and colonised remained clear and what brought the exhibition organisers greatest anxiety was that the divide would be blurred through miscegenation. As a correspondent in London pointed out, these authorities disapproved of the participation of contingents 'who kn[e]w little of the white man since they fear[ed] that a Bank Holiday attendance and the unreasoning enthusiasm of the lower class fair sex might affect the prestige of the Europeans in the various Colonies'.⁵³ Similarly, an official of the Colonial Office severely criticised a proposal to employ indigenes from British territories to perform in the

⁵³ *SFP*, 30 Oct 1923, p. 11.

Pageant of Empire, for it would cause an 'increase in the population of halfbreed births, and a marked demoralisation of the individual natives on their return'.⁵⁴

The Malay contingent had to adapt to new living conditions in Wembley, beginning with the unpredictable English weather, which proved trying. Journalists commented in May and June 1924 that the group was unable to keep warm despite their layers of woollen clothing, hot water bottles and stove heaters in their rooms.⁵⁵ By July, the Malays complained of the heat instead, which made it particularly unbearable for them to remain in the badly-ventilated pavilion for long periods of time.⁵⁶ As can be expected, amidst this uncomfortable and unfamiliar environment some Malays began to pine for home. According to a penghulu from Kedah, the Malay women who '[could] not live without a gossip' were homesick because they had run out of things to say to one another and could not pass time by conversing with visitors since they did not speak English.⁵⁷ Halimah binte Abdullah, a sixty-year-old weaver from Johor who was ostensibly frail to begin with, sadly never made it back home. In the cold weather of May 1924, she yielded to acute pneumonia within a day of hospitalisation after being ill for seven days, and was buried in accordance with Islamic practices on land owned by the Woking

⁵⁴ CO 323/915/24, Minute by A. Fiddian, 14 Sep. 1923, p. 259. It turned out that Fiddian had misunderstood the proposal, which was not to ship contingents from various colonies, but to employ performers from the United Kingdom and consult representatives from colonies to ensure the show's accuracy. Ibid., Memo from exhibition authorities to Colonial Office, 25 Sep. 1923, p. 262.

⁵⁵ *MM*, 2 June 1924, p. 7; *SFP*, 12 May 1924, p. 2.

⁵⁶ *MM*, 22 July 1924, p. 5; *MM*, 9 Aug. 1924, p. 9.

⁵⁷ *ST*, 25 June 1924, p. 11.

Mosque, southwest of London.⁵⁸ Health problems also struck the supervisors of a group of basket makers from Negri Sembilan: in 1925, Penghulu Abdul Latip was hospitalised while Sheikh Ahmad underwent surgery. News on the suffering endured by these three individuals was largely suppressed, making them physical and figurative victims of the exhibition's epistemic violence.

The Wembley experience turned sour for the Johor Malays, who harboured 'some discontent' (possibly related to Halimah's death) and departed for home in August 1924, one month in advance of the Malay contingent. Yet others seemed to have enjoyed their stay, such that three Malays journeyed once more to Wembley in 1925.⁵⁹ Muhammed Jassim, a cook employed during the first season of the exhibition, told a reporter that he was a 'certificate servant' who liked England and wanted to stay on.⁶⁰ During an excursion to Portsmouth, a representative of the contingent assured an interviewer that the Malays felt well-treated in England.⁶¹ Sheikh Ahmad, the retired government official who went through an operation in London, acknowledged in a farewell address that the Malays had met with 'greatest kindness from all' and had 'happiest memories of their sojourn'.⁶² It is hardly possible to know for sure how the Malays felt about their experience in Wembley, for they did not leave behind any personal accounts, but only whitewashed comments in the

⁵⁸ *MM*, 11 June 1924; Certified Copy of an Entry of Death Given at the General Register Office, Qtr J, Vol. 03a, p. 250, Halimah Vinti [sic] Abdullah; Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 21.

⁵⁹ Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, pp. 20-1.

⁶⁰ *SFP*, 12 May 1924, p. 2.

⁶¹ *SFP*, 6 Oct. 1925, p. 14.

⁶² *MM*, 7 Nov. 1925, p. 8.

press. One cannot afford to take these public statements at face value due to press censorship, as well as self-censorship and the poor command of English among some Malays interviewed, which would have hindered them from fully expressing their ideas.

Reviewers of the pavilion dedicated much attention to the 'cheerful' nature of Malays and its relationship with the sunny weather of their homeland, unlike the exhibition publications that focused on their alleged trait of indolence. The Malay contingent therefore contributed to the promotion of a positive stereotype of their race over a negative one among exhibition goers. While a correspondent joked that Malay men at the pavilion could be seen 'doing nothing but smoke a very British briar pipe' for hours,⁶³ another referred to a silversmith as 'an industrious devotee of the art' who spent the whole day at work.⁶⁴ Similar to the latter observer, a fifteen-year-old girl who visited another pavilion enthused about African children craftsmen who were 'not at all lazy and [had] plenty of determination', and were 'hard and willing workers'.⁶⁵ These comments suggest that since indigenous artisans from British territories were specifically employed to demonstrate their craftsmanship, it was difficult for visitors, who saw them working continually, to form the impression that they were idle. Consequently, artisans stationed in the Malaya Pavilion, as with the photographs of their countrymen discussed earlier, served as evidence against the stereotype of Malay indolence.

⁶³ *SFP*, 26 June 1924, p. 12.

⁶⁴ *MM*, 21 June 1924, p. 7.

⁶⁵ *The Wembley News*, 15 May 1925, p. 11.

What took the place of this stereotype in exhibition reviews was another one on Malay happiness, fostered alike by visitors, the Malay contingent, and various circumstances that shaped their encounters and the accounts on their interactions. It was reported that the cook, Muhammed Jassim, had a temper 'as sunny as the sunshine of his native land',⁶⁶ while the weaver, generically speaking, possessed 'the cheerfulness of the region she represent[ed]'.⁶⁷ A journalist wondered aloud if members of the Malay contingent were selected because of their merry nature or was such a trait typical of all Malays.⁶⁸ The answer to this rhetorical question was clear to another writer, who pronounced Malaya to be the 'land of Mark Tapley', thanks to its abundance of sea, sunlight and land, and declared the pavilion's success in exhibiting the admirable 'sunny disposition' of the country's residents.⁶⁹ According to Caldecott, the Malays paid 'unobtrusive and courteous attention' to all visitors, who in return gave them 'polite and kindly interest'.⁷⁰ He acknowledged the Malay contingent's role in overturning certain stereotypes of the Malays among the metropolitan audience:

[T]he term of their stay in England had been marked throughout by an excellence of conduct and enthusiasm of cooperation that had been appreciated not only by the Pavilion Management but by every grade of visitor to the Exhibition, from whom many expression of admiration, both oral and written, had been continuously received. They had thus succeeded in securing for their nation and country a well-deserved place in the affection of the British public, whose

⁶⁶ *SFP*, 12 May 1924, p. 2.

⁶⁷ *ST*, 19 May 1924, p. 9.

⁶⁸ *MM*, 6 July 1925, p. 16.

⁶⁹ *MT*, 28 May 1924, p. 8. Mark Tapley is a character from Charles Dickens' *Martin Chuzzlewit* and is known for his will to stay in high spirits under all circumstances.

⁷⁰ Caldecott, *Report on the Malaya Pavilion*, p. 21.

previous conceptions of Malaya had only too probably been distorted by penny-dreadful stories of piracy and murder.⁷¹

All in all, representations of Malaya's communities at the British Empire Exhibition reveal that colonial stereotypes were not watertight constructions, but were instead marked with contradictions and challenged by both colonisers and colonial subjects. Through Evans' pamphlet, photographs for the pavilion and exhibition reviews, the Malays were mostly vindicated from standard accusations of their laziness. By the next British Empire Exhibition in 1938, the anonymous author of a guide to Malaya no longer found it necessary, despite having consulted Evans' work, to include a detailed defence of the Malays against charges of idleness. The writer merely dismissed that stereotype, as though evidence to support his case was apparent enough without any need for explication.⁷² Such dissonance in the colonial construction of 'Malayness' brings up questions of how and why certain stereotypes gained the most currency at any point in time, as well as how the colonised reconciled with these labels. For example, Malay writers in the 1920s embraced the idea that their race was backward compared to the Chinese and Indians, and was marginalised in the economy and civil service, using these themes as the foundation of their articles in the vernacular press to urge the community to improve itself.⁷³ Despite British insistence at both empire exhibitions that Malays were not lazy, post-colonial UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) ideologists in

⁷¹ *SFP*, 18 Nov. 1925, p. 3.

⁷² ANM, Empire Exhibition Glasgow, 1938, *A Brief Introduction to Malaya*, p. 7.

⁷³ Manickam, "Common Ground", pp. 603-4.

Malaysia during the 1970s tended to affirm that stereotype, in attempts to motivate Malays to cast off associations with slothfulness by actively seeking progress, and arguably, to clear the government of blame in failing to sufficiently improve living conditions of the Malays.⁷⁴ The next chapter turns to study how Malay aristocrat participants of the exhibition exercised agency, alike the above-mentioned Malay intellectuals, by using imperial relations to their political advantage.

⁷⁴ Alatas, *Myth of the Lazy Native*, pp. 147-155.

Chapter Four: **Political Influence, Imperial Hierarchy and Pomp**

The Malaya Pavilion, declared a reporter, ‘can boast one human feature that all the others lack’—‘the possession of a rajah’ among its staff.¹ In addition to the employment of the Raja Muda of Selangor (Tungku Musa-Eddin) in the pavilion, the visits of several Malay aristocrats to London during the British Empire Exhibition provided much exciting fodder for the press. Besides viewing the exhibition, Malay rulers seized the opportunity to raise points of political contention directly with metropolitan authorities, and their actions countered portrayals of them as ineffectual and unimportant leaders in the pavilion’s publications. Malay monarchs took pains to maintain their generally congenial relationship with the British while seeking redress and did not use the exhibition as a platform for protest. The pageantry that they exploited instead were the welcoming celebrations hosted on their return to Malaya, when they made leadership claims over their states and occasionally referred to and reframed imperial relations in ways that supported their cause. These homecoming ceremonies brought the Malay rulers, who had lost much constitutional powers to the British and had limited control over representations showcased at Wembley, into the limelight where they could assert their remaining influence over their states.

¹ *MT*, 28 May 1924, p. 8.

4.1. Malay Rulers and the British: Representations and in Practice

The Malay royalty is hardly mentioned in the pavilion's publications, but these infrequent descriptions offer an image of sultans as rapacious rulers whose inability to maintain peace in their realms set the stage for British 'protection', which made them mostly redundant. Evans pointed out that prior to the onset of colonial rule, sultans customarily sent their retainers to claim produce, animals, even daughters and wives of their wealthy subjects, and also forced their subjects to provide free labour for construction work, padi-planting or battles.² In the *Illustrated Guide to Malaya*, the sultans' ineptitude in controlling piracy and factional fighting among Chinese immigrants and Malay chiefs is stigmatised as the reason for British intervention, sometimes at the request of the sultans themselves. This insistence on the tyranny and ineffectiveness of Malay rulers could have legitimised British rule, a goal to which the book further contributes by stating that Malaya had progressed under British protection. In fact, the publication does not refer to the rulers in any other capacity, except to note that the Raja of Perlis was the president of his state council. Readers can thus be forgiven for thinking that the rest of the rulers were political nonentities, though they were also presidents of their respective state councils, and that there were probably no sultans in Kedah, Kelantan and Trengganu since they are not featured in the guide.³ Nevertheless, Malay rulers who visited the pavilion did not comment on these accounts: reportedly, Sultan Iskandar

² Evans, *Native Life in the Malay Peninsula*, pp. 19-20 and 44.

³ *Illustrated Guide to British Malaya*, pp. 20-8.

Shah of Perak found that the pavilion 'exceeded his expectations' and was 'thoroughly representative of Malaya', while the Yam Tuan of Negri Sembilan (Tuanku Muhammad ibni Almerhum Yam Tuan Antah) felt that it '[did] justice to his own country and its resources'.⁴ Perhaps, the rulers did not read the books discussed here or chose to keep silent, given their close ties with the British.

Brief and simplistic portrayals of Malay rulers in the exhibition publications conceal their somewhat symbiotic relationship with the British. These monarchs, according to Simon Smith, were part of a larger network of 'collaborative elites' that the British cultivated throughout Asia, the Middle East and Africa, in their attempts to exercise indirect imperial rule over these territories, rather than to resort to the much more expensive alternative of formal annexation. Prior to the 1930s, it was British policy to retain Malay kings and add prestige to their status (despite reducing their powers), in order to keep the Malay population, which mainly remained loyal to them, under control.⁵ As for the monarchs, the most significant gain from collaborating with the British was the strengthening of their positions vis-à-vis other aristocrats and potential power contenders. Not only could the Malay kings count on British support against local dissenters, they also enjoyed an inflated esteem since the British granted them honours, presented them to the

⁴ *ST*, 16 June 1924, p. 12; *MM*, 30 Oct. 1925, pp. 9 and 16.

⁵ Smith, *British Relations with the Malay Rulers*, pp. 11 and 16-7; Simon C. Smith, "The Rise, Decline and Survival of the Malay Rulers during the Colonial Period, 1874-1957", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* XXII, 1 (Jan. 1994), pp. 87-8 and 91-2.

public in grand ceremonies and provided them with monthly salaries that afforded them a more luxurious lifestyle than other aristocrats.

The close relationship between Malay rulers and the British encouraged the former to become westernised. An incentive for this was that those who took up aspects of European lifestyle and mixed in European company performed better politically than those who did not.⁶ In addition, more Malay aristocrats were exposed to Western ideas and lifestyles as they received an English education in Malaya or England, a popular option for it opened doors to a civil service career and enabled them to retain some political clout that they traditionally possessed.⁷ Sultan Iskandar Shah of Perak, a key character in this chapter, is an example of Malay royalty who studied in London. Beginning at the age of sixteen in 1897, Raja Alang Iskandar (as the Sultan was then known) lived with and received private training from M.L. Smith, a tutor in Oxford's Balliol College. When he left for Perak five years later, a period of time Swettenham thought 'longer than was necessary or advisable', he had very much assimilated into European culture and lifestyle.⁸

The mutual dependence between the British and Malay rulers in upholding their authority did not prevent an unequal sharing of power, skewed in favour of the former. Yet, no matter how little power remained in the monarchs' hands, they wielded at least some influence over the

⁶ Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, pp. 154-5 and 174-5; Smith, *British Relations with the Malay Rulers*, p. 15.

⁷ Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, pp. 108-9.

⁸ J.M. Gullick, *Rulers and Residents: Influence and Power in the Malay States, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 251.

governance of their states. For one, all Malay kings headed the state councils of their respective states. In the FMS, however, monarchs had limited say over the state councils' composition and meeting agenda, and only retained substantial authority over Islamic affairs. Moreover, the state councils diminished in importance with the establishment of the federal bureaucracy, and although there were durbars held for the FMS rulers (which also included the UMS rulers from 1930 onwards), they were infrequent and purely advisory in nature. Unlike their counterparts in the FMS, monarchs in the UMS possessed far more decision-making powers in their states, since their British Advisors paid more attention to the views of the Malay-dominated state councils.⁹ Nevertheless, the contention that a FMS ruler was 'nothing more than a titular head [...] whose political power was limited to merely rubber-stamping decisions and policies approved by the colonial regime', and that his weak position was masked in his subjects' eyes by the pomp with which he was always presented,¹⁰ is an overstatement. The rulers' significance in British Malaya can be better appreciated if, following John Gullick, one sees a distinction between power and influence. Even though Malay monarchs lost much power, they still retained influence over the British (even in the FMS) primarily because the latter needed their support to stay in power. Such was the dependence and interplay of power and influence between the Residents and rulers, that they 'could [not] afford an open break with the other'.¹¹ Malay kings were not contented with serving as 'rubber

⁹ Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, pp. 175, 186 and 250.

¹⁰ Kobkua, *Palace, Political Party and Power*, pp. 71-2.

¹¹ Gullick, *Rulers and Residents*, p. vi.

stamps' too, as can be seen in the cases of the Sultan of Perak and Yam Tuan of Negri Sembilan, both of whom utilised their trips to London during the British Empire Exhibition to press for political changes.

4.2. A Mission to London

Peter Hoffenburg has described colonial subjects who participated in metropolitan exhibitions as 'imperial pilgrims' on a secular and educational journey which fostered commonalities among them.¹² This analogy corresponds with the perceptions of commentators in Malaya's English-language press, who believed that visits to the British Empire Exhibition would enhance imperial ties. *The Malay Mail's* editorialist urged that all British overseas territories had the duty to strengthen their connections with the metropole and opined that the best way for Malaya to achieve this aim was for the Malays to visit England during the exhibition.¹³ In particular, added the editor of *The Times of Malaya*, travellers would obtain an immediate knowledge of Europe, which would be of substantial advantage to other Malays and their states.¹⁴ He therefore rejoiced upon the return of the Sultan of Perak from Europe, certain that his newly-gained understanding of British economy and society would weave the Malay states more tightly into the British Commonwealth.¹⁵ Given these benefits, *The Malay Mail* was disappointed with the 'mistake' that the Raja Muda of Selangor and Che Hamzah were

¹² Hoffenburg, *An Empire on Display*, pp. 251-2 and 256.

¹³ *MM*, 18 Feb. 1924, p. 8.

¹⁴ *TOM*, 10 May 1924, p. 7.

¹⁵ *TOM*, 13 Sep. 1924, p. 6.

so overwhelmed with work in the Malaya Pavilion that they hardly visited any factories and the countryside.¹⁶

Such comments were not confined to the anglophone community; some Malay aristocrats too styled themselves in public statements as 'imperial pilgrims', and even as tributaries on an edifying trip. Addressing the Federal Council after Sultan Iskandar Shah's return in 1924, the Raja di Hilir of Perak (Raja Chulan) appealed to other rulers to 'visit England and pay their respects to the sovereign who had spread the wings of protection over these states', stating that 'it would broaden the outlook of those who had spent all their lives in the East'.¹⁷ He framed the position of Malay rulers in the same fashion as the British, who sometimes saw indigenous rulers who participated in 'imperial pilgrimages' (be it for exhibitions or other ceremonies), as 'traditional feudatories in the imperial hierarchy' who came to 'pay tribute and pledge fealty' to the Crown.¹⁸ A year later, the 61-year-old Yam Tuan of Negri Sembilan waxed lyrical over his first trip abroad, reportedly 'a complete success' that he 'thoroughly enjoyed from first minute to last'. Everyone in his retinue 'acquired invaluable knowledge'. Commending the 'intelligence and industry' of workers, the Yam Tuan smilingly admitted that 'one British artisan is the equal of four men in Malaya so far as work is concerned'.¹⁹

¹⁶ *MM*, 14 Aug. 1924, p. 9.

¹⁷ *MM*, 25 Nov. 1924, p. 9.

¹⁸ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 112-3.

¹⁹ *MM*, 30 Oct. 1925, pp. 9 and 16.

Yet, both rulers of Perak and Negri Sembilan did far more than to pay homage and gain knowledge at the metropole. They made full use of their visits to express their dissatisfaction with the status quo directly to metropolitan authorities, thus bypassing the colonial government in Malaya. The two Malay rulers mainly broached issues that they were constantly unable to settle satisfactorily with the Malayan government, but despite their discontent, they did not reject British influence over their states in any way. On the contrary, both monarchs acknowledged British dominance as they sought to gain London's support and recognition for the changes that they desired, presenting themselves as 'imperial tributaries' while they were trying to reap benefits from that relationship.

Although Sultan Iskandar Shah had visited England incognito to see the British Empire Exhibition and seek medical care,²⁰ he was honoured at the Association of British Malaya's annual dinner and received by the King, Secretary of State for the Colonies (J.H. Thomas) and Colonial Office representatives. These were occasions which the Sultan employed to champion Malay interests and the decentralisation of the FMS, at the same time as he articulated pro-British sentiments. He first made his ideas known to the Association of British Malaya, a body which kept close watch over developments in Malaya and spared no pains at making criticisms, during its annual dinner in May 1924. The Sultan emphasised that all in his state were 'friends and allies of His Majesty the

²⁰ NAS, Straits Settlements and Malay States Secret and Confidential Despatches to Secretary of State, No. 14, 22 Jan. 1924, Visit of Sultan of Perak (as Raja Mang Iskandar) to England.

King' and complimented the 'intelligent, broadminded and sympathetic' administrators [i.e. the majority of those sitting in the audience] for having brought much 'prosperity and happiness' to the state. After observing these formalities, he proceeded to raise two issues for redress. First, while 'all races [were] gladly welcome[d]' in Perak, particularly the English and Chinese because of their contributions, the chetties, declared the Sultan to laughter and applause, were 'not indispensable' for they 'suck[ed] the blood of the country' by charging exorbitant interest rates on loans. He considered legislating against transactions between chetties and Malays to prevent the latter from sinking into debt and losing their land, and brought this issue up again to the Colonial Office later on.²¹ Second, the Sultan pushed for the creation of a Malay regiment in the FMS, giving the assurance that the Malays '[would] make good soldiers'.²²

In his interview at the Colonial Office two months later, the Sultan focused on the more sensitive issue of decentralisation, seeking to use his influence to regain real power. He called for the reinstatement of authority from the Federal Council to state councils for purely local

²¹ CO 882/10/16, Despatch from Secretary of State to High Commissioner, 26 Aug. 1924, pp. 20-23. The Sultan's recommendation was not taken up, but the Malayan government attempted to reduce Malay reliance on chetties' loans by promoting Rural Co-operative Credit Societies (first introduced in 1922) and encouraging frugality and hardwork among Malays through public education, intensified in the 1930s. Paul H. Kratoska, *The Chettiar and the Yeoman: British Cultural Categories and Rural Indebtedness in Malaya* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1975), pp. 20-6.

²² *ST*, 14 July 1924, p. 11. After WWI, Sultan Iskandar Shah, the Yam Tuan of Negri Sembilan, Raja Chulan and the Undang of Rembau (Datoh Abdullah) began to champion the establishment of a Malay Regiment more actively. However, the British hesitated to accept the proposal largely because they perceived Malays to be idle and ill-disciplined, and therefore unsuited for the military which required men from the 'martial races', such as the Sikhs. The Malay Regiment was eventually formed in 1933. Nadzan Haron, "The Malay Regiment, 1933-1955: A Political and Social Study of a Colonial Military Establishment in Malaya" (PhD Dissertation, University of Essex, 1987), chapters 2 and 3.

affairs, transfer of the Chief Secretary's powers to the Residents and reduction in the Chief Secretary's rank to one below that of the Malay rulers. Essentially, the Sultan wanted 'the Ruler [to] be treated as a Ruler and the Resident [to] carry out on his behalf and with his co-operation the policy arrived at by them and in consultation with a more powerful State Council'.²³ His strategy in negotiation was to underscore his allegiance to the British while challenging their administration, as can be surmised from his handwritten letter to A.E. Collins, an official of the Colonial Office, after the meeting. '[A] chess-board king is not enviable. We cannot help feeling that we are treated like that sometimes,' the Sultan wrote, '[t]he last thing we wish is to lose the British influence, but there is that strong desire to have things done on our behalf.'²⁴ His remonstrations hastened decentralisation in the FMS, which had arrived at a stalemate by 1924 due to power wrangles between the Chief Secretary (W.G. Maxwell) and the High Commissioner (L.N. Guillemard), by persuading the Colonial Office to switch its support to Guillemard to execute the policy. Nonetheless, decentralisation made little headway in the 1920s and the Sultan hardly retrieved any power.²⁵

In 1925, the Yam Tuan of Negri Sembilan raised the questions of his state's boundary with Selangor and his wish to adopt the title of 'Sultan', during his reception by King George V and the Secretary of State

²³ CO 882/10/16, Despatch from Secretary of State to High Commissioner, 26 Aug. 1924, pp. 20-23. Quote on p. 22.

²⁴ CO 717/36/35247, Letter from Sultan of Perak to Collins, 13 Aug. 1924, cited in Ghosh, *Politics of Decentralization of Power*, p. 212.

²⁵ Ghosh, *Politics of Decentralization of Power*, pp. 207-8; Yeo, *The Politics of Decentralization*, pp. 213 and 343.

for the Colonies (L.S. Amery). Claiming the Semenyih district that laid on Selangor's side of the border, the Yam Tuan had continually challenged the boundary treaty of 1878 in 1914, 1918 and 1922, remonstrating with several colonial officials and even the Sultan and government of Selangor without any success. Probably wary that his last-ditch attempt at seeking redress in London might be nipped in the bud, the Yam Tuan only requested to speak with the King about the boundary after receiving Guillemard's approval for the visit.²⁶ He came to the metropole literally as an 'imperial tributary', with a number of gifts or 'tributary goods' for the King. These presents included elephant tusks, bison's heads, crises, fans (for the Queen), embroidery and walking-sticks, and the Yam Tuan later recounted that the King was 'immensely pleased' with them.²⁷ Bringing up the issue of the disputed boundary, the Yam Tuan beseeched the King for help as he had 'no higher authority in Heaven or on Earth to whom to appeal'.²⁸ King George V, on the other hand, had been cautioned by Guillemard prior to receiving the Yam Tuan that it would be 'a meeting of monarchs'. He formed a vivid impression of the Malay ruler and asked Guillemard, when they next met, about the 'splendid sultan'.²⁹ Nevertheless, the Yam Tuan's endeavour was futile—Collins dismissed a review of the case, stating that 'the real question is that of procedure in declining', and advised that the ruler be (falsely) assured of a detailed

²⁶ CO 717/42/25038, Letter from Guillemard to Amery, 6 May 1925, pp. 31-42.

²⁷ CO 717/47/29126, Letter from H.V. de Satge to Clive Wigram, 16 June 1925, p. 300; *MM*, 30 Oct. 1925, pp. 9 and 16.

²⁸ CO 717/47/29126, Translation of Statement HH Proposes to Make on the Subject of the Boundary Question on the Occasion of his Reception by HM the King, 26 June 1925, p. 293.

²⁹ Laurence Nunns Guillemard, *Trivial Fond Records* (London: Methuen, 1937), p. 84.

investigation by the Colonial Office before the King made his final decision on the issue.³⁰

Assuming the title of 'Sultan' was 'practically an obsession' for the Yam Tuan, the Resident of Negri Sembilan, E.C.H. Wolff, observed. Previously in 1908 and 1910, the ruler had received rebukes from the High Commissioner, John Anderson, for employing the title in a formal correspondence and for being addressed as such by his chiefs at an official ceremony. He took a step back then, replying that he did not want to use the title and would correct his subjects' habit of referring to him as sultan. Omitting any mention of these past events in 1925,³¹ the Yam Tuan entreated the King and Amery for a change in his title, reasoning that his nineteenth-century predecessors had styled themselves as sultans and Negri Sembilan should not be regarded differently from other Malay states under British influence, where 'hereditary rights and office were protected'.³² His endeavour, driven by a desire to enjoy the same status as rulers of other Malay states, is comparable to that of Sultan Abu Bakar of Johor. The descendant of a *temenggong*, Abu Bakar had

³⁰ CO 717/42/25038, Minute by Collins, 12 June 1925, p. 29.

³¹ CO 717/48/10741, Memorandum by Resident of Negri Sembilan, E.C.H. Wolff, 22 Apr. 1926, pp. 456-460.

³² CO 717/47/42646, Translation of letter from Yam Tuan to Right Honourable Mr. L.S. Amery, Secretary of State, 3 Aug. 1925, p. 536. According to Caldecott, the Yam Tuan's position was different from a sultan's in three key ways. First, the title 'Yam Tuan' (shortened form of 'Yang di Pertuan') implied that the ruler, unlike a sultan, was not a caliph and this prevented any overlaps between his authority and that which the four Undangs (territorial chiefs and lawgivers) traditionally possessed. Second, whereas a sultan's title was hereditary, the Yam Tuan of Negri Sembilan was elected by the Undangs and only inherited the title of 'Yam Tuan of Sri Menanti', a smaller district within the state. Third, the Yam Tuan received a salute of fifteen guns, two guns fewer than a sultan. CO 717/47/19506, A. Caldecott, Memorandum on "The Yang di-pertuan Besar of Negri Sembilan", undated, pp. 280-5. A change of title, therefore, would help to enhance the Yam Tuan's prestige and authority, particularly over the Undangs, at least in appearance if not in real terms.

successfully gained British recognition as a sultan in 1885, but other Malay rulers remained unwilling to accept him as an equal.³³ This problem informed Swettenham's recommendations on the Yam Tuan's request that were readily taken up by the Colonial Office. Referring to the acknowledgement of Sultan Abu Bakar as a 'generally admitted [...] mistake', Swettenham foresaw objections among other Malay rulers should the Yam Tuan adopt the title of 'Sultan', and advised against British recognition of his claim unless the support of the 'electors and people of Negri Sembilan' could be ascertained. Wolff was given the unenviable task of conveying the message to the Yam Tuan 'as sympathetically as possible' and to reiterate to him the 'cordial friendship of the British government'.³⁴

The cases of the Sultan of Perak and Yam Tuan of Negri Sembilan indicate that even if Malay rulers were left with little constitutional power, they held sufficient influence to make representations to the colonial government in Malaya and London, though not enough of it to arm-twist officials into following their recommendations. While the British Empire Exhibition afforded both rulers an opportunity to be in the metropole and directly influence the Colonial Office's decisions, they did not utilise the exhibition further to show their dissatisfaction or to press their claims. Perhaps, they avoided a showdown for it would damage their relations with the British and endanger their positions as rulers. In the

³³ Gullick, *Rulers and Residents*, pp. 241 and 264, n. 78.

³⁴ CO 717/47/42646, Letter from Swettenham to Grindle, 19 Sep. 1925, pp. 540-3.

next section, we turn to examine the Malay aristocrats' experiences during their visits to London.

4.3. Travellers of Class

Whereas it is well-established that the British perceived their empire in terms of race, David Cannadine argues that they paid more attention to class than race in determining an individual's social status. Underlying such an attitude, he explains, was 'the appreciation of status similarities based on perceptions of affinity', in contrast to the act of othering at work in racial thinking.³⁵ Indeed, the British received Malay travellers to England differently based on their social ranks. At the same time, however, some attempted to exercise paternalistic control over Malay aristocrats, suggesting therefore that there were not always 'perceptions of affinity' involved in the recognition of rank and that racial thinking remained forefront for these Britons.

Having royal blood made a world of difference to the Malays on a visit to England. Such status demanded that they be treated with propriety, an issue which *The Malay Mail's* editor took pains to address. He considered the Peninsular & Oriental to be the best British line to ferry Malay princes to England, but was worried that the diverse group of passengers from the East and Australia would not know how to behave correctly towards these rajas. It was preferable, the editor concluded, for a prince to travel on a Dutch steamer, which possessed 'a real Malayan atmosphere' thanks to its Malay stewards and the ability of everyone on

³⁵ Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, pp. 8 and 123 (quote).

board to speak Malay, because he would be 'treated like a Prince'.³⁶ British officials attached such importance to rank that they constantly prevented the Raja Permaisuri, the Sultan of Perak's consort, from being introduced to British royalty because she was neither the Sultan's royal wife nor of blue blood.³⁷ Similarly, Che Hamzah, a Malayan Civil Service officer employed in the pavilion, could not be presented to King George V because he was a commoner, and the Sultan of Perak did not think that he was of a comparable status with the others at the reception. In contrast to the lady, he won the sympathy of the Colonial Office, whose officials saw him as 'a very useful man'. A representative thus wrote to Caldecott, requesting him to introduce Che Hamzah to the King informally in the Malaya Pavilion and to 'suggest something [that they] could do to please' the Malay officer.³⁸ The different experiences of the Raja Permaisuri and Che Hamzah in England serve as a reminder that in addition to class, gender and other practical considerations (i.e. how 'useful' a person was) shaped a colonial subject's social status in the eyes of the British.

Being of gentle birth did not exempt Malay travellers from certain restrictions on their behaviour or lifestyle that were imposed by the British. The editor who encouraged the royalty to travel to England by Dutch steamers was concerned with a Malay prince being 'treated like a Prince' because he would then 'behave like a Prince'. In rallying support for his recommendation, the editor asserted that 'Malays [were] quick to take colour from their environment, and any unthinking selection in

³⁶ *MM*, 18 Feb. 1924, p. 8.

³⁷ CO 717/40/24893, Letter from E. Marsh to Lord Stamfordham, 25 May 1924, p. 337.

³⁸ CO 717/40/24893, Letter from Paskin to Caldecott, 9 June 1924, p. 352.

[their travel arrangements] might have unfortunate results.³⁹ While the editor was interested in cultivating Malay royalty by manipulating their surroundings, some colonial officials exercised more direct control over the aristocrats by holding their purse strings while they were abroad. The Raja Muda of Selangor was originally paid \$700 per month in England but three months later, his salary was raised to \$1200 (£140) and backdated to his time of arrival. This amount of money was probably still insufficient for him to get by, as he was given an additional \$2500 and another advance of £250 for his voyage back to Malaya.⁴⁰ With such limited budget, socialising became awkward for the Raja Muda who was 'not financially in a state to maintain a position which ha[d] been largely forced upon him as the Sultan's son and heir'.⁴¹ The Sultan of Perak initially found himself in a worse situation than the Raja Muda. Granted \$20000 (around £2000) for his visit and with nine people to support, the ruler quickly discovered that he was cash-strapped while on his voyage to England and wrote to the High Commissioner, Chief Secretary and the Resident of Perak to request for more money. The cash had almost been depleted within days of the Sultan's arrival in England, which led Colonel W.P. Hume (ex-Resident of Perak) to write to the Colonial Office to ask on his behalf for a monthly allowance of £1000 and to stress that it would only reflect well on the British if the Sultan enjoyed his well-publicised

³⁹ *MM*, 18 Feb. 1924, p. 8.

⁴⁰ ANM, Asks for Government Assistance: to Send him to England for the British Empire Exhibition, Telegram from BR, Selangor to Crown Agents for the Colonies, 16 June 1924; and Letter from Crown Agent to BR, Selangor, 14 Aug. 1924.

⁴¹ *MM*, 14 Aug. 1924, p. 9.

trip.⁴² Hume's appeal was approved with money from FMS funds,⁴³ but the Chief Secretary George Maxwell soon wanted to attach the condition that the Sultan refrained from polo and races, taking a step back later to oblige the ruler to declare the 'exact financial results' of his games.⁴⁴ These proposals, together with the Sultan's original meagre allowance, point to the Chief Secretary's paternalistic hand in treating his class superiors, an attitude probably justified by them being his race inferiors.

The Malay aristocrats' financial difficulties in England were concealed by the fanfare with which they presented themselves at the Malaya Pavilion, befitting their distinguished status as royalty. Led by two sword-bearers, the Sultan of Perak who was clad in a western suit graced the pavilion where his standard flew, accompanied by the Raja Permaisuri and five Malay aristocrats.⁴⁵ The eye-catching Raja Permaisuri wore a Malay silk dress and was well-decked with gold bangles and 'hair-combs radiant with diamonds and rubies and sapphires and a jewelled butterfly' (Figure 19).⁴⁶ In the following year, the Yam Tuan of Negri Sembilan made an impressive entrance into the pavilion with around eight men in his retinue, preceded by bearers of a yellow umbrella and other items of his regalia.⁴⁷ A contrast to the westernised Sultan, the Yam Tuan donned a 'black, white and purple striped suit, and broad striped sarong, with a handsome black and gold turban [*tengkolok*]' and a pair of brown shoes.

⁴² CO 717/40/20378, Letter from Hume to Collins, 27 Apr. 1924, pp. 317-8.

⁴³ CO 717/33/23901, Letter from Grindle to Hume, 22 May 1924, p. 290.

⁴⁴ CO 717/34/54245, Letter from Guillemard to JH Thomas, 22 Oct. 1924, pp. 246-7.

⁴⁵ *ST*, 16 June 1924, p. 12.

⁴⁶ *MM*, 14 June 1924, p. 8.

⁴⁷ *MM*, 6 July 1925, p. 7.

Malays employed in the pavilion also dressed for the occasion by putting on white suits with 'highly coloured sarongs', complete with headgears of different hues. The 'only European touch' in their attire, similar to the Yam Tuan, was their boots, and the resulting scene was 'exceedingly picturesque' to a reporter (Figure 20).⁴⁸ These grand ceremonies at the Malaya Pavilion probably accentuated the royal visitors' prestigious status in the eyes of the metropolitan public.

⁴⁸ *SFP*, 7 July 1925, p. 3.



Malayan Royalty At Wembley

Figure 19: The Sultan of Perak and his Retinue at the Malaya Pavilion
Source: *MST*, 28 June 1924, p. 5.



Figure 20: The Yam Tuan of Negri Sembilan and his Retinue at the Malaya Pavilion
Source: *Supplement to The Straits Budget*, 10 July 1925, p. 13.

4.4. Refocusing Hierarchy: Ceremonies and Honours from the 'Periphery'

Social distinctions in the form of a hierarchy with the British Crown at its pinnacle were stressed at the opening ceremony of the British Empire Exhibition and in the awarding of honours to Malay rulers. Hoffenburg points out that exhibition openings were 'rituals of [...] integration' that presented imperial territories and populations incorporated into a commonwealth headed by the British monarch, and revealed 'the essence of imperial identity as allegiance to King and Queen, and the inherent hierarchy of imperial civil society'.⁴⁹ At Wembley, hierarchy was de-emphasised and replaced with a familial rhetoric of brotherly love: in his opening speech, King George V expressed confidence that the exhibition, as a project of 'cooperation between brothers for the better development of the family estate [, could] hardly fail to promote family affection'. Nonetheless, a muted sense of hierarchy was still articulated when the Prince of Wales referred in his speech to the 'other races which [had] accepted [British] guardianship over their destinies'.⁵⁰ Although a racial hierarchy was hinted at in the exhibition opening, the same was arguably not true at other public ceremonies such as coronations, royal celebrations and funerals. These rituals, according to Cannadine, were comparable to the British honours system, which brought the empire together into an 'integrated, ordered, titular, transracial hierarchy' centred on the Crown who bestowed these accolades, thereby creating 'one vast interconnected world'. Both

⁴⁹ Hoffenburg, *An Empire on Display*, pp. 244 (quote) and 258.

⁵⁰ *The Times*, 24 Apr. 1924, p. 14.

ceremonies and honours—‘ornamentalism’, as Cannadine puts it—were manifestations of the British hierarchical perception of metropolitan, and therefore, imperial society.⁵¹

From a metropolitan point of view, the British monarch dominated the social hierarchy inherent in the empire exhibition’s ceremonies and the honours system. Yet, the focal point of this hierarchy shifted from the Crown to the Sultan of Perak and the Regent of Kedah in the ‘periphery’ of Malaya, as they took centre stage in festivities organised to celebrate their return from Europe, and spoke about imperial relations and British honours (at times with a nod to the superiority of the British monarch) in ways that boosted their leadership claims over their states. If we recognise, as I have argued, that Malay rulers had political influence despite their limited constitutional authority, then these welcome ceremonies should not be dismissed as a grandiose cover-up for the lack of real power. Instead, these rituals were avenues for the Malay kings to assert their influence and if need be, reinvent their roles in order to sustain or enhance their influence.

Homecoming celebrations can be seen as means through which the metropolitan British Empire Exhibition broadened its reach into Malaya. They were, however, different from the exhibition because they involved a far larger number of Malayan participants, and more importantly, because they gave the rulers prominent space to represent themselves in a manner attuned to the ideological changes in Malay kingship. Anthony

⁵¹ Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, pp. 90 (first quote) and 88 (second quote).

Milner argues that pre-colonial Malay kings held their realms together by bestowing unto their subjects *nama* (rank), which constituted the subjects' identities within the hierarchical society, and by providing social order through regulating *adat* (custom). The rulers' duty was to preside over ceremonies; day-to-day administration of his realm was left to district officials.⁵² Due to the influence of Western notions of governance and in an attempt to answer critics who adhered to these ideas, Malay monarchs began to be portrayed in *kerajaan* (court-produced) literature in terms of their administrative achievements, e.g. in modernising or developing the state, in addition to their traditional roles.⁵³ At the welcoming ceremonies, the Sultan of Perak thus styled himself as a ruler of all races residing in his state, whereas the Regent of Kedah appeared as a capable spokesperson for his state in the international arena. Moreover, these rulers' hybrid homecoming pageants featured both Malay and European elements, allowing them to incorporate new idioms of power (e.g. guard of honour, gun salutes) into their rituals and highlight their modernity, thereby reaching out to modern as well as traditional crowds.⁵⁴

⁵² Anthony Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule* (Tucson, Arizona: Published for the Association for Asian Studies by the University of Arizona Press, 1982).

⁵³ Milner, *The Invention of Politics*, pp. 207 and 219.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 240-1; Similarly, King Chulalongkorn's royal progress through Bangkok on the occasion of his return from Europe in November 1907 involved a mixture of Thai and European elements of pageantry. During the welcome ceremony, Rama V and the minister of municipal government made speeches that detailed aspects of progress attained during the fifth reign and so, explicitly lauded the King's success as a moderniser. The nine elaborate triumphal arches and electrical lights installed for the royal entry would have served as a visual attestation of progress for the public. Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), pp. 113-129.

On the morning of 11 September 1924, the Sultan of Perak on board the P. & O. s.s. Morea arrived at Penang, anticipated by a big group of Malays who had come mainly from Perak's capital, Kuala Kangsar. Clad in a military uniform with his accolades, the ruler received his relatives and friends, as well as Malay and Chinese representatives of the state council and general public on the captain's deck. The Sultan and his retinue continued the rest of their journey from Prai to Kuala Kangsar by train and were reportedly welcomed by throngs of people at every station that they passed. Cheered on by the locals and greeted by public figures, the Sultan projected his authority through the state during the course of his royal progress. Subsequently, the contingent reached the overcrowded Kuala Kangsar station, which had been transformed into 'a beautiful scene of colour and splendour' embellished with hanging plants, palm leaves and flags. Cheers resounded as His Highness descended from the carriage and after that, the chief *kathi* (magistrate in the Shariah court) delivered the *doa selamat* (thanksgiving prayer). The ruler was then introduced to public notables and the central organising committee of his four-day welcome celebrations,⁵⁵ which comprised twelve Malays, nine Indians, six Europeans, four Chinese and a Japanese, under the leadership of the Regent.⁵⁶

On exiting the station, His Highness received a salute from the guard of honour before he mounted, with the Resident, an elephant

⁵⁵ *TOM*, 12 Sep. 1924, p. 7.

⁵⁶ *TOM*, 29 Aug. 1924, p. 2; The committee received donations of \$500 from the Malay community, \$1500 from the Chinese and a commitment of at least \$1000 from the Europeans. *TOM*, 1 Aug. 1924, p. 7.

carrying a gold and white howdah, flanked by two *panglima prang* (war leader) on foot. Their elephant was second in line in a procession of fifteen elephants that carried the state's public figures, mainly Malays and Europeans, but also a few Chinese, a Sikh and a Tamil, in the order of their social ranks. Leading the parade to the Istana Bahru were the state *nobat* (court orchestra), sixteen umbrella bearers in blue and purple dress with yellow and white umbrellas, the same number of spearmen with Perak colours tied to their spears, *penghulus*, *orang besar enambelas* (sixteen dignitaries), *kathis* and ulamas. On the first elephant sat the *panglima besar* (supreme war leader), with an unsheathed *sundang* (straight-bladed dagger). Upon reaching the Istana Bahru, the ruler dismounted from his elephant and walked in between two rows of spearmen towards the building, as a seventeen-gun salute was fired. Just then, His Highness' mother ran out and hugged him, and 'with tears of joy running down her face led him very affectionately' into the Istana to meet his relatives. Another procession took place thereafter, this time in cars, as dignitaries escorted His Highness to his residence at the Istana Nagara. After greeting the Raja Perumpuan (royal consort) and other visitors, the ruler finally saw for the first time his infant son of a few days old.⁵⁷ The day ended with tennis games on the Residency courts, a Malay feast, Malay dances and fireworks.⁵⁸ Amidst grand pageantry in the capital, the Head of State 'retook possession of the city' and 'metonymically of the whole realm',⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *TOM*, 12 Sep. 1924, p. 7.

⁵⁸ *TOM*, 11 Sep. 1924, p. 7.

⁵⁹ Peleggi, *Lords of Things*, p. 128, with reference to King Chulalongkorn's welcome ceremony in Bangkok, in November 1907.

before he retreated into the domestic sphere and regained charge over his household too.

The second day of the welcome celebrations began with an exchange of addresses between the Sultan and representatives of various communities at the new Polo Club grounds on Kenas Road. Upon the arrival of His Highness with the Resident by car, the state band performed the Perak anthem and the guard of honour presented arms. Passing through two rows of umbrella and spear bearers on either side, the Sultan took his seat on the uppermost level of a three-tiered dais adorned with gold paper and Perak colours. The Resident and three heirs apparent sat with the ruler, whereas lower-ranking dignitaries occupied the two remaining tiers. A procession of fifteen elephants conveying prominent members of public appeared shortly, led by District Officer R. Crichton and the *Orang Kaya Temenggong* who carried an ornate golden casket containing printed speeches to the ruler. Representatives from the European, Malay, Chinese, Tamil, Punjabi and Japanese communities took turns to read addresses in their respective languages to His Highness, who stood throughout their presentations.⁶⁰ They voiced a 'most loyal and affectionate welcome' to the Sultan, congratulated him on receiving the KCVO (Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order), and wished that for a long time he might be 'spared to watch over the destinies of the many races' in Perak.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *MM*, 13 Sep. 1924, pp. 9 and 16; *TOM*, 15 Sep. 1924, p. 7.

⁶¹ *TOM*, 13 Sep. 1924, p. 7.

In his response, the ruler assured the audience that he always had the 'greatest interest' in residents of all origins in his state,⁶² and he desired that they collaborated in endeavours of 'benefit [to] the state'. Perhaps, this vague exhortation was targeted at the chetties, whom he had lambasted in London but chose not to do so in public back in Perak out of political expedience. His Highness professed that the 'proudest moment of [his] stay' was when he received the KCVO from King George V,⁶³ an honour that he would treasure as 'one of the dearest objects of his life',⁶⁴ and hoped that it would 'ever be remembered in [Perak] in memory of that great Queen'.⁶⁵ Despite his gratitude towards the King and respect for Queen Victoria, the Sultan did not choose this moment to reiterate the pro-British remarks that he made in London or to give comments similar to the Raja di Hilir's at the Federal Council, which highlighted Perak's position under British influence and the benefits it had gained. Instead, he played up his credentials as the ruler of not just the Malays, but of all races within the state, a claim that was also associated with other contemporaneous sultans in *kerajaan* literature.⁶⁶

Rain poured after the exchange of speeches, but events went according to

⁶² According to another newspaper article, His Highness proclaimed that he 'considered every one in his state with the same affection as he regarded those connected with him by blood', which contradicts his rebuke of the chetties while he was in London. *TOM*, 12 Sep. 1924, p. 7.

⁶³ *MM*, 13 Sep. 1924, pp. 9 and 16.

⁶⁴ *TOM*, 12 Sep. 1924, p. 7.

⁶⁵ *MM*, 13 Sep. 1924, pp. 9 and 16.

⁶⁶ Milner notes that *The Account of Johor and the History of the Late Sultan Abu Bakar*, published in 1908, portrays the Sultan to be interested in the welfare of Chinese in his state. *The Account of the Coronation* (1939) of Sultan Abdul Aziz of Perak, Sultan Iskandar Shah's successor, records that Malays, Chinese, Ceylonese, Indians and Japanese announced their allegiance towards the new ruler. In a speech printed in the volume, the Sultan made known his friendship with other races in the state and acknowledged their contributions in developing Perak. Milner, *The Invention of Politics*, pp. 214 and 244.

plan. A tea party was held on the polo grounds in the afternoon, followed by a game of *sepak raga* and a match between the European and Malay state football team kicked off by His Highness. The night wrapped up with a fancy dress party in honour of the Sultan at the Idris Club.⁶⁷

Aquatic sports at the Perak River kick-started the third day of festivities. In one segment, ten elephants were engaged in two spirited races, one in water and the other on land, and the Sultan won the latter. A polo match between the Malay Iskandar Club and European Perak Club was held at the Iskandar Polo Club in the evening, followed by a decorated motorcar procession.⁶⁸ At dinner, District Officer Crichton welcomed the Sultan, president and founder of the eponymous Polo Club, with a speech in Malay that communicated the public's gladness at his return. Without him, the British official eulogised, they were comparable to sailors on a ship that was lost in a vast and rough sea. Thanking Crichton for the speech, His Highness stressed that he 'did not seek honours for himself but for his people', a comment which broadened the significance of the KCVO he received from a matter of personal esteem on a 'transracial hierarchy' centred on the British Crown to a testimony of his commitment towards the state.⁶⁹ The company was later entertained with performances of *makyong*, *wayang kulit* and *runggeng*.⁷⁰ On the final day of fête, the Sultan exercised his traditional role as the bestowal of *nama*

⁶⁷ *MM*, 13 Sep. 1924, pp. 9 and 16.

⁶⁸ *TOM*, 16 Sep. 1924, p. 7.

⁶⁹ *TOM*, 17 Sep. 1924, p. 7.

⁷⁰ *MM*, 13 Sep. 1924, pp. 9 and 16.

by installing chiefs at the Istana Nagara, before a game of hockey and dinner drew an end to the festivities at last.⁷¹

Around a month later on 12 October, welcome celebrations on a smaller scale were held for the Regent of Kedah, who returned with his brothers and the British Advisor, W. Peel. The party was received in Penang by five senior officers and travelled via train to Alor Star, where the Regent greeted high-ranking officials and public figures, and inspected a guard of honour. By way of a carriage pulled by two white horses, His Highness was then transported to a pandal where civil service officers, selected members of public and students from English, vernacular (Malay), Koran and Chinese schools had gathered. Opposite the pandal, a guard of honour stood along an arch and saluted the Regent on his arrival. Representatives of Malay and European civil service officials, the Malay, Chinese and Indian-Ceylonese communities subsequently made speeches to welcome him. His Highness struck an image of a dedicated statesman in his reply. Expressing happiness at returning to Kedah after a five-month stay in Europe, he assured his audience that he had nonetheless kept himself updated on state matters throughout his absence. As for the CVO (Commander of the Royal Victorian Order) that he had obtained, the Regent did not perceive it as a 'personal honour but an honour bestowed on the state'.⁷² This remark echoes that of the Sultan of Perak's, and gives the impression that the Regent was humble and placed the state's glory above his own.

⁷¹ *TOM*, 11 Sep. 1924, p. 7.

⁷² *MM*, 13 Oct. 1924, p. 13.

Later in the day, around 130 people attended a state dinner held at the Balei Besar, which was touted as the first gathering of Malay, Chinese and Indian-Ceylonese residents from all over Kedah. The Regent proposed the first toast to King George V, a diplomatic gesture of loyalty which also reveals his comfort in the etiquette of Western dining. In his speech, the Regent shared that he found the king 'very genial and kind', and was 'very grateful' for the CVO decoration, reiterating that it was an honour to the state. He visited the exhibition several times and gained 'great pleasure' from viewing displays from Kedah. Besides being received by the Queen and the Prince of Wales (who were 'extremely kind'), His Highness interacted with 'many people of high rank' and introduced them to Kedah, a 'flourishing country' where all races 'lived in peace and contentment'. The Regent therefore conveyed an impression of himself as an active diplomat raising Kedah's visibility on the international stage, particularly among the upper echelons of society, rather than an imperial tributary paying homage at the metropole, especially since his references to the British royalty were not couched in clearly hierarchical terms. Before concluding his speech, His Highness announced that the two penghulus from Kedah who were employed in the Malaya Pavilion were also received by the Queen, seemingly implying that the British royalty had a special regard for the state. Finally as the night drew to a close, the guests were entertained with performances of *ronggeng*, *makyong*, *merrorah*, Siamese and Chinese wayang and Indian drama and music.⁷³

⁷³ *SE*, 15 Oct. 1924, p. 5. Led by Wan Yahaya Haji (the State Secretary), the general

On an ending note, this chapter has shown how Malay rulers had at times played up their roles as ‘imperial pilgrims’ or tributaries, and on other occasions, foregrounded themselves in the imperial relationship as competent and legitimate monarchs. Their identities were thus situational, as they navigated through traditional concerns and changing conditions in their states, and also the different space of the metropole. The Malay monarchs resourcefully made use of the British Empire Exhibition to represent themselves—their identities and desired political changes—through homecoming ceremonies and meetings with metropolitan authorities. The rulers’ participation in the exhibition therefore contrasted starkly with images of their despotism and impotence in the Malaya Pavilion’s publications, strongly suggesting that the portrayals did them much injustice while glorifying British colonialism.

committee in charge of the Regent’s welcome celebrations comprised three more Malays and two Englishmen.

Conclusion

Staged at a time of major administrative reorganisation in Malaya, the metropolitan British Empire Exhibition was an opportune platform for organisers, visitors and reviewers to express their differing visions of the country. Overall, the Malaya pavilion's layout, exhibition representations and press commentaries offered the image of a pan-peninsular country by downplaying contrasts among the variety of states and political systems that it encompassed, and highlighted Malaya's pride of place within the empire. Portrayals of Malaya were centred on the Malays: the Indo-Saracenic pavilion stressed Malay Islamic identity (though ironically the architectural style was imported from India), the arts and crafts section only featured Malay items, and both the pavilion and section underscored the British role in shaping the country's material culture. In pavilion-issued publications, Malays were touted as the most civilised 'natives' in Malaya, who had been wrongly accused of laziness. Instead, they were represented as deserving of help in the form of British protectionist policies, given their weaker position vis-à-vis Chinese and Indian settlers in terms of numbers, and economic and political standing. This thesis has shown that even though the exhibition aimed at strengthening imperial control over British territories, Malay rulers turned it to their advantage by exploiting their visits to London for political deliberations, and their homecoming ceremonies to project leadership claims over their states.

How did the vision of a politically-consolidated peninsula, theme of the not-so-indolent Malays threatened by immigrants, moulding of Malaya's Malay material culture, and the Malay rulers' use of exhibitions to enhance their political influence pan out? The gathering of disparate constituents to form a unified Malaya, successfully carried out in the exhibition, was never attained in reality during the interwar years. Decentralisation led to limited increases in state authority in areas such as local legislation and control over certain departments, but the policy was not executed any further due to opposition from commercial interests and the UMS rulers (as elaborated in Chapter One).¹ It was only with the introduction of the Malayan Union scheme in 1946 that all states on the Malay Peninsula (including Penang and Melaka, but excluding Singapore) were subsumed under a single administration. Nonetheless, a number of Malay writers in the early twentieth century took the Peninsula as a geographical scope for their efforts to uplift their community.

On a few occasions, Malays concerned with the fate of their 'race' addressed exhibitions as sites that exposed Malay backwardness in relation to other communities, but also afforded opportunities for them to progress. In a review of the 1932 Malayan Exhibition in Kuala Lumpur, an editorialist urged Malays to understand the show's meaning, and eagerly investigate how exhibits were made and how they worked. By doing so, the Malays could improve their handicrafts and entrepreneurial activities,

¹ By 1939, the Departments of Agriculture, Education, Forestry, Medical Services, Mining and Public Works were brought under the purview of state councils. Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, pp. 248-252.

and 'defeat' (*mengalahkan*) immigrants in their nation.² Another commentator criticised Malays for their unvarying displays through the years, which had brought the community bad press. The immigrants, in particular, noted that most Malays kept to an outdated (*kuno*) way of thinking rather than to embrace the ideas of more knowledgeable Malays, despite numerous exhortations in newspapers and magazines. Should an analogy be drawn between Malaya and a gambling den, continued the author, it was clear then that the foreigners were always winning the game and pocketing Malay wealth.³ In motivating the Malays to improve themselves, both writers pinpointed mental lassitude as the key obstruction to their advancement, and provided advice on how to think.

British role in the making of Malay material culture was foregrounded at the exhibition, both in the pavilion's Indo-Saracenic style, introduced by the British into Malaya, and in depictions of the British as protectors of declining Malay arts and crafts. Nevertheless, colonial subjects held some agency in shaping the country's material culture on display at Wembley. They were involved in the production and selection of exhibits, and contested certain architectural features of the pavilion, while accepting the Indo-Saracenic style as representative of Malaya. Malay aristocrats loaned or donated their belongings for display, but did not go further to fashion themselves alongside the British as nurturers of traditional Malay crafts. Years later, however, some Malay aristocrats

² *MG (Majalah Guru)*, Aug. 1932, pp. 184-186.

³ *MG*, Sep. 1932, pp. 223-226.

actively promoted court-produced and village handicrafts, and consequently enhanced their cultural relevance and public visibility.⁴

It is unknown whether the Malay rulers' attempts at asserting control over their states during their welcome ceremonies were effective. Yet, after the British Empire Exhibition, Malay rulers did not seem to have exploited other major shows for their political gains. For one, none of them participated in the next empire exhibition at Glasgow, which was smaller in scale and poorly covered in the Malayan anglophone press when compared to its predecessor at Wembley. This disinterest among the largely pro-British Malay rulers and press was perhaps born of political expedience in the rising tide of nationalism—held in 1938, the show coincided with the founding of the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (the Union of Malay Youths), a group which championed the formation of an independent, pan-Malay archipelagic nation. While Malay rulers took part in a few exhibitions in Malaya and abroad after 1925, their actions and speeches were barely reported, making it difficult to determine if, and how, they utilised the shows for their advantage.⁵ Nonetheless, the rulers employed other forms of pageantry, such as coronations, royal progresses and ceremonial investitures of chiefs, to declare their authority over their

⁴ These figures included Sultan Alam Shah of Selangor and Nik Ahmad Kamil, the *Mentri Besar* (Chief Minister) of Kelantan. *ST*, 4 Aug. 1939, p. 1; *ST*, 11 Sep. 1948, p. 8.

⁵ In 1935, Sultan Sulaiman of Selangor opened an art exhibition in Kuala Lumpur, which featured works from around fifty countries. *SFP*, 28 Mar. 1935, p. 7. The Sultan of Kedah and his daughter, the Sultan and Sultana of Johore, and the Yang di Pertuan Besar of Negeri Sembilan and Tungku Ampuan were present in London during the Festival of Britain in 1951. *SFP*, 9 July 1951, p. 4.

states, and to justify it through tradition and their leadership qualities suited to the modern bureaucratic state.⁶

Despite massive publicity at the time of its staging, the British Empire Exhibition was thereafter mentioned only infrequently and briefly in the Malayan anglophone press,⁷ and became largely forgotten in the country. Nevertheless, the loss-incurring exhibition could be defended from criticisms of it being a waste of money and time, for it stimulated expressions of patriotism to the empire in Malaya, and these sentiments were likely to be longer lasting than the public memory of the exhibition itself. For its present-day audience, the British Empire Exhibition exposes potential trajectories of the country that eventually faded away during the interwar years—a polity united across the peninsula, which gave credit to Malay diligence and offered Malay rulers more room to exercise their political and cultural influence through the medium of exhibitions. These unfulfilled possibilities, as illustrated in this thesis, open our eyes to the understudied role of exhibitions in the colonial construction of a predominantly Malay Malaya and Malay indigeneity to the peninsula; the dissonance within and resistance to colonial stereotypes; and the Malay monarchs' agency in using pomp, not as a farcical disguise of their limited political power, but as a tool of cultural technology to consolidate their domestic influence.

⁶ See Donna Jeanne Amoroso, "Traditionalism and the Ascendancy of the Malay Ruling Class in Colonial Malaya" (PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, 1996), pp. 93-140; and Milner, *The Invention of Politics*, pp. 214 and 244.

⁷ After its closing, the Wembley exhibition was mainly cited in comparison with its Glasgow successor, and in newspaper articles on the careers and obituaries of its official organisers and royal participants. See *SFP*, 11 Jan. 1938, p. 7; *SFP*, 10 Dec. 1935, p. 3; *ST*, 3 Apr. 1960, p. 10.

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