15
Malaysia and Brunei

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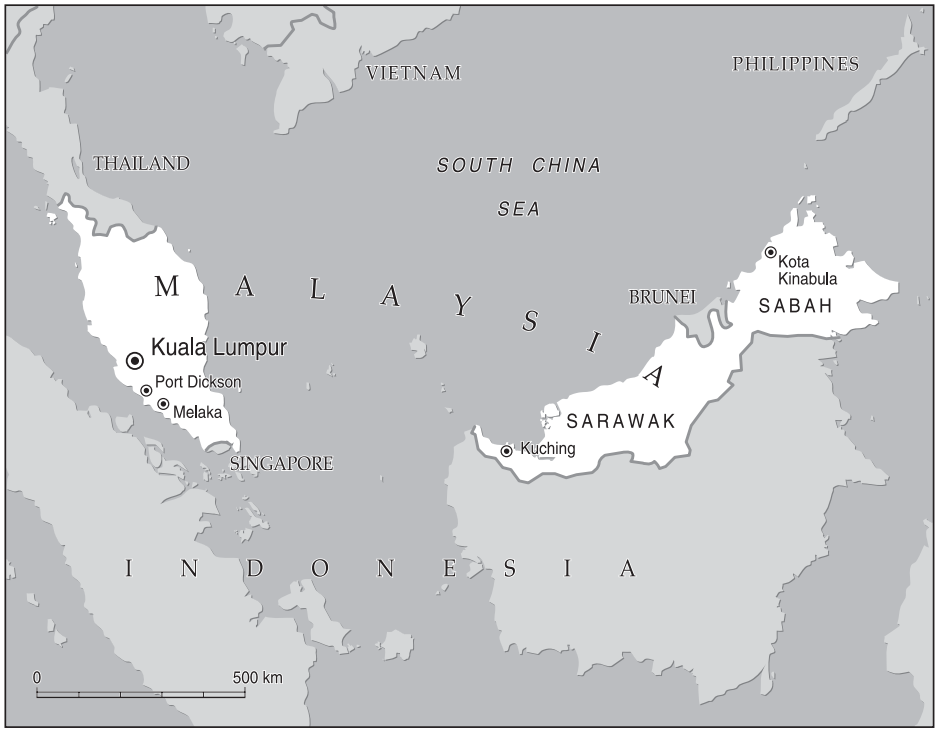
15.1 Introduction

The two Muslim nations of Malaysia and Brunei have many similarities in their demographic, linguistic, and socio-cultural traits and have undergone processes of change and development in the course of their history of civilization which appear to be related to or a reflection of one another. With this background, they appeared to have a similar ethos in their fight for nationalism and independence from British rule, and thence in their effort towards building a modern nation-state.

Malaysia consists of two geographical territories, separated from each other by 400 miles of South China Sea: one is Peninsular Malaysia and the islands to its east and west, and the other comprises Sabah and Sarawak situated on Borneo Island, and the islands along their coasts. The total land area is 329,749 square kilometres, or 127,316 square miles. The population of 25 million consists of 62 per cent indigenous people, 24 per cent Chinese, 7 per cent Indian, and the remaining are those who are non-citizens from the neighbouring countries as well as from other parts of the world. Of the indigenous people 58 per cent are Malays, and the rest belong to more than fifty ethno-linguistic groups which are closely related to the Malays in terms of language and primordial culture. In the indigenous group, according to the national census, are also those of Portuguese descent who have been in Malaysia, specifically Melaka, since 1511, as well as the Thais, known as Siamese, who live in the northern states of Perlis, Kedah, and Kelantan, bordering Thailand. The Chinese belong to a number of dialect groups with Hokkien, Khek, and Cantonese being in the majority, while the others are Teochew, Hokchiu, Hainanese, and Kwongsai, and a few smaller groups. As for the Indians, they include not only the northern and the southern Indians but also the Pakistanis, the Bangladeshis, and the Sri Lankans, showing a higher level of heterogeneity compared to the Chinese, with the Tamil-speaking being the major group.

Brunei is not only a close neighbour of Malaysia but is nestled within the expanse of land wherein lies the Malaysian state of Sarawak. It consists of a land area of 5,765 square kilometres, and has a population of about a quarter million people, about



Malaysia

70 per cent of whom are Malays. There are indigenous communities, some of which are also found in the neighbouring Sabah and Sarawak, and they form about 6 per cent of the total population of the country. The Chinese comprise 15 per cent of the population, and the rest consist of foreign settlers like the Indians and the Europeans.

15.2 Early History, Occupation, and Independence

15.2.1 Malay Empires, Islam, and Malay Identity

Both Malaysia and Brunei had a glorious history of being rulers of insular Southeast Asia from the early centuries of the Christian era. Both became the centres for the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism which came from India, especially from the seventh to the fourteenth century, during which time the region as a whole grew not only as a thriving trade centre but also as a meeting point for religious scholars, especially of Buddhism, from India and China.

It was only with the adoption of Islam and the development of the already existing Malay civilization into one that can be called a Malay-Muslim civilization that the empires centred on the Malay Peninsula and Brunei grew to a height which brought them fame to the east and west as great commercial hubs and centres of the finest in

culture. While the Malays had their own indigenous writing systems, these were at best rudimentary and were mainly the tools of shamans; it was the Indians who introduced a 'proper' system of codes to write their language, the Pallava script from South India. However, knowledge and acquisition of the script was confined to a handful of people close to the rulers who were the 'gurus' to the rulers, while the rulers may have regularly been illiterate, as were all their other subjects.

Literacy came to the Malays, regardless of the social class they belonged to, with the coming of Islam and the conversion of the Malays to Islam in the fourteenth century. To be Muslims they had to read the Qur'an in the Arabic script, although they did not understand the meaning of the text. Recognizing the matching of symbols and sounds in Arabic led them to adopting and adapting the Arabic writing system for their language. This was the beginning of the great Malay literary tradition, which can be seen in the production of a large number of literary romances and the recording of the oral traditions of the pre-Islamic era in Arabic script (which for the purpose of indigenization has been termed the 'Jawi' script). Literacy through Islam also made it possible for the Malays to codify their laws and statutes in the governing of the land, which to all intents and purposes from that time was based on the laws of Islam.

Literacy became a right for every Muslim Malay and was not confined to the small elite which held the reins of power in the land. The way it spread was in the form of informal teaching of religion in the homes of chieftains, mosques, and village religious schools which were known as *pondok*. These schools were privately funded by villagers through the payment of tithes and small donations, and teachers were paid from the tithes. The *pondok* schools were the earliest institution to provide formal education to the Malays, and they continued to function as an educational institution well into the second half of the twentieth century when their place was taken over by government schools which included religious studies and Arabic in their curriculum.

By the time the first Europeans (the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch and the British) visited the Malay Archipelago in the sixteenth century, the Malay empires were already well-established polities with their own systems of government. The Malay language, while being the lingua franca in the ports in the archipelago, was also the language of diplomacy in the region, and was the language used by the European powers in their communication with rulers in the region. Letters between the royal Malay courts and the courts of St. James, Paris, and Portugal were written in Malay and at this time Malay epistolary became developed into a fine art, not only in the style of writing a text but also in calligraphy and the art form which was a necessary characteristic of the scroll or the leaflet that was sent (Gallop 1994).

15.2.2 British Rule and Education for the Malays

Although the Portuguese came to rule in the sixteenth century and the Dutch in the seventeenth century, there was no attempt to teach their respective languages to the populace. The British who first arrived in the form of the East India Company in 1786

stayed longer than the Portuguese, and perhaps on the basis of their political and commercial pragmatism established schools using Malay as medium of instruction as well as schools using only English. This development not only introduced English as a language through which the Malays and all other groups could attain literacy and a formal education, it also brought the use of the Roman script as an addition to Jawi in the writing of Malay.

The first Malay school of a secular nature was established by the colonial government as a branch of the English-medium school, Penang Free School, in 1816, in Penang, the place where the British first set foot on Malay soil. Other Malay schools that followed were mostly built in the rural areas to suit the location of the greater population of the Malays. These schools were meant to teach the 'three Rs' (Reading, Writing, and 'Rithmetic), basic agricultural skill, basketry, and weaving to the children of the peasants so that they could become better farmers, fishermen, and craftsmen than their fathers. Education for Malay girls, besides the core syllabus of the 'three Rs' was focused on giving them skills in needlework, nursing, cookery, and domestic economy. With the purposes mentioned above, education in the Malay schools never proceeded beyond Standard VI of primary school. Similar schools were set up in Singapore and in Borneo in Brunei, Sabah, and Sarawak, where the British also had commercial interests.

Even at the primary level teachers needed to be trained and the colonial government started teacher training programmes in 1878, but it was only in 1922 that a male teachers' training college was established, the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) in Tanjong Malim, Perak, where boys who had undergone six-year primary education were sent to be trained as teachers for the Malay schools. Boys with a similar career orientation were also brought in from Singapore and the Borneo territories to be trained at the college. A parallel college for women, the Malay Women Teachers' Training College, was set up in 1935, in tandem with the increase in the population of girls attending Malay schools.

The curriculum of the SITC was little more than that of a secondary school. However, what the trainees developed into were not just people who were literate in their own language but people who became more aware of the socio-political situation of their country, and saw a potential threat to the Malay 'sons of the soil' from the influx of immigrants from China and India, allowed and supported by British rulers. The college became an important nursery in the cultivation of a Malay ethnic identity which glued together the Malays of the Peninsula, Singapore, Brunei, Sabah, and Sarawak. Among those who fought for the Malayan (1957), and then Malaysian (1963), independence were graduates of the SITC. Regardless of which British colony they came from, the college gave them an opportunity to see the Malays in a broader perspective, beyond the borders of their individual states, and stretching as far as Indonesia. The idea of uniting the whole, widespread Malay people was already being nurtured, with the relevant identity factors being a package consisting of ethnicity (Malay descent), religion (Islam), and language (the Malay language).

15.2.3 Arrival of the Chinese and the Indians: A Change in the Malayan Demography

Although there were Chinese and Indians who came to settle in the Malay Peninsula from the fourteenth century onwards, these were relatively insignificant in number. It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that immigrants from China and India arrived in large numbers attracted by the growth of the tin mines and the rubber plantations, causing the Malay Peninsula, or Malaya as it was also known (which then included Singapore), to undergo a changing demography, in which the three main races of Malay, Chinese, and Indian found themselves concentrated in different geographical niches: the Malays in the rural areas taking care of their rice farms and traditional fruit lands, the Chinese in the tin mine areas turning themselves into wealthy miners and in the urban centres where they dominated as merchant traders, and the Indians mainly in the rubber estates and along the railway routes where they worked as labourers. Each community carried on with its own socio-economic pursuits, and practised their own ethnic cultures, communicated in their own languages, and built their own schools using their own languages, without much interference from the others. The perpetuation of such separate identities was furthermore endorsed and encouraged by the British rulers of Malaya through a deliberate policy of divide and rule.

Quite generally, while the Malays are homogeneous in terms of their identity factors, the same cannot be said categorically of the Chinese and Indians present in Malaya/Malaysia. Though the Chinese may be homogeneous in one sense, in terms of ethnically belonging to the people commonly known as 'Chinese', the Chinese 'language' subsumes a wide range of dialects which are not mutually intelligible and which separate speakers into different language communities. The Chinese are also not homogeneous in terms of religious adherence, as while most Chinese may be Buddhists and Taoists, there are also those who are Christians and Muslims. As for those referred to broadly as the 'Indians', this label links up many subgroups which differ from one another not only in terms of linguistic affiliation but also in terms of culture and religion. Although the Malaysian Indians originate from all over the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka, it is the southern Indians which predominate in the Indian population in Malaysia. The Malaysian Indian Congress which has been a partner to the Malay political party, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), and the Chinese political party the Malaysian Chinese Association, in ruling Malaysia from the time of independence from the British in 1957, is overwhelmingly Tamil in terms of its membership.

15.2.4 Education System: An Emphasis on Separate Identities

The colonial policy of divide and rule was also reflected in the education system. As mentioned earlier, the Malays were given village-based vernacular schools up to but not beyond six-year primary education. Funding for these schools was wholly taken

care of by the government and even *pondok* schools were given (small) subsidies for their existence, indicating that the government of the day felt a clear commitment to the indigenous Malay population.

The Indians in Malaya were also given their own schools by the colonial government, and these schools were built where the majority of the Indians were, namely on the rubber estates. The medium of instruction was Tamil, and the objective was to give Indian children the 'three Rs' skills as in the Malay vernacular schools. All funding for the establishment and the maintenance of these schools became the responsibility of the colonial government. As explained in the colonial papers of the time, the government felt it was their obligation to the Indian community to provide an education for their children because these people were brought in by the Calcutta-headquartered British East India Company to work on the rubber estates (Omar 1976).

No similar obligation was felt towards the Chinese, as this group had arrived of its own accord, attracted by the wealth that was awaiting them in the form of thick layers of tin ores that ran throughout Central Malaya. Accordingly, not even subsidies were granted by the government to the Chinese schools, it being rationalized by the government that the Chinese community could itself easily get financial help from its own wealthy Chinese merchants and guilds. The Chinese community therefore went on to build schools in places where there were large groups of Chinese, notably in the tin-mining areas and in major towns. Having the freedom to form their own curriculum, the language chosen as medium of instruction was commonly Mandarin Chinese, though this was actually not the mother tongue of any of the Chinese groups. The Chinese schools provided an education beyond the primary level up to middle and high school (similar to the level of lower and upper secondary school today), and had a clear orientation towards China. Those students who passed out of a Chinese high school could directly enter universities in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Later on, when Singapore set up its own Chinese university, the Nanyang University, in 1956, this added a further channel for Malaysian Chinese to pursue a tertiary education.

By way of contrast, there was no opportunity whatsoever for Malays and Indians who had attended vernacular schools to enter into secondary education, let alone tertiary education anywhere, not even in Indonesia or India itself. Malay and Indian children could hope to continue their education to higher levels only if they entered English-medium schools.

15.2.5 The English School: A Gateway to a Higher Socio-economic Status

The idea of providing education in English was to train Malayans to work in the government service, mostly as clerks and general administrators. With proficiency in English they were able to interpret government policies to the people.

More and more English schools were built following the first one in Penang, both by the government as well as by Christian missionaries. Although run by different bodies and missions, these schools had common core syllabuses for both the primary

(six years) and secondary (five years) levels, and all these schools provided teaching in science and arts subjects. At the end of the fifth year of their secondary schooling, students had to sit for a standard set of examinations designed and assessed by the Cambridge body known as the Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. A good pass in the Senior Cambridge Examinations (as it was known) would allow students to enter a two-year pre-university programme, at the end of which they had to sit for the Higher Cambridge Examinations which would take them to tertiary education in the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth countries.

Tertiary education in Malaya and Singapore only saw its beginning in 1948 with the establishment of the King Edward VII College of Medicine and Dentistry in Singapore, a university college of the University of London. It was only in 1952 that this college, together with other faculties added to it, became a full university, known as the University of Malaya. The university provided another place, and this one closer to home, for students who had had the privilege of attending the English schools to pursue a higher education. In 1956 a second branch of this university was built in Kuala Lumpur, and in 1962 the two branches separated, the one in Kuala Lumpur remaining as the University of Malaya while that in Singapore became known as the National University of Singapore.

As the English school was not to be identified with any racial group, it was supposed to be a common mixing ground for all the races present in Malaya. However, the idea of a free mingling of all races in the English schools was not to be achieved, as enrolment in such schools was in the majority (85 per cent) Chinese. The main reasons for this were the location of the schools and the costly subscriptions they entailed. The town areas where the schools were built were not convenient for ordinary Malay peasants to send their children to, and this was also the plight of the poor Indian rubber estate workers. Furthermore, these schools were not free of charge as were the Malay and the vernacular Indian schools. As a result, only children of the very few wealthy Malays and Indians were ultimately able to set foot in these schools.

In an effort to increase the number of Malay children in the English schools, bright Malay children were subsequently taken from Malay schools at the end of Primary IV to enter a programme known as the Special Malay Class in the English schools. This was a two-year programme in which the students were immersed in a curriculum which was totally run in English. At the end of the two years they were promoted to Form I of the secondary school where for the first time in their life they saw themselves sitting with children of other racial groups.

The obligation that the British felt towards the 'sons of the soil' (i.e. the indigenous Malays) motivated the British to establish a boarding school in 1925 based on Eton in England and intended for the sons of the Sultans, the Malay aristocrats and chieftains. This was the Malay College Kuala Kangsar (MCKK) which produced some of the earliest English-educated Malay elite, who were then channelled to universities in the United Kingdom, including Oxford and Cambridge. In 1948, a parallel school was built for the girls in Kuala Lumpur, known as the Malay Girls' College.

It should be added that all these educational 'innovations' in the life of the Malays were localized in the Malay Peninsula, but served those who were in Singapore and the British territories in Borneo including Brunei. Just as common people in Brunei were given the opportunity to join the SITC in Tanjong Malim, so members of the Brunei royalty were given places in the MCKK and in the other well-placed English schools. This made it possible for the British colonial government to set up a single core syllabus for all the territories, with direction from Kuala Lumpur. The same was also true for the training of office administrators, with a common system set up by the central government in Kuala Lumpur.

15.3 Language and Identity Issues

15.3.1 Awareness of Group Identity

It was not by any design that the three major racial groups of Malays, Chinese, and Indians were worlds apart from one another in terms of language, belief, and value systems. Each had its own traditions and was rooted within those traditions before their members came in contact with one another on the Malayan soil. The divide and rule cum divide and educate policy of the British colonial government however emphasized the division.

In the early days of the settlement of the Peninsula by immigrant groups, each group went its own way without causing discomfort to the other. To the native Malays, the presence of others had never been a problem, as long as their simple socio-economic life as farmers, fishermen, and craftsmen was not disturbed, and there was no threat to their possession of their land. The Malay language did not contain derogatory labels or negative metaphors used to disparage other ethnic groups, and the actual concept of *identity* itself did not exist in the language prior to the 1960s when Malay finally borrowed the term from English. Following this, in the 1990s Indonesia coined the term *jati diri*, a combination of *jati* (Sanskrit, meaning 'genuine') and *diri* (Malay, meaning 'self'), which is now used as a synonym to *identity*.

However, during the twentieth century accentuation and highlighting of the differences among Malaya's ethnic groups began to gradually engender feelings of 'us' against 'them', and this fomented inter-group animosity, particularly between the Malays and the Chinese. Seeds of this animosity initially began to grow from the 1930s with the formation of Malay nationalistic movements, many of which registered themselves as language and literary associations as well as Islamic associations, warning Malays of the danger of being displaced by the immigrant population if they did not improve their socio-economic status and fight their cause.

The search for a bigger group of 'us' subsequently spread to and found inspiration from neighbouring Indonesia. The rise of nationalism in Indonesia and the success of the Indonesians in uniting all the islands hitherto under Dutch rule gave the Malays an encouragement to 'recapture' their own motherland, which seemed to be slipping

away from under their eyes. The earliest stimulus in the Malays' awareness of themselves as a political, not just a racial group came when Soekarno (later President Soekarno of Indonesia) and his colleagues succeeded in bringing members of the nationalist movements of the Indonesian islands to take the pledge known as *Sumpah Pemuda* (Youths' Pledge) on 28 October 1928, in Jakarta. It was a three-pronged pledge which in essence was an assertion from those who made it that they belonged to one people – the Indonesian people (*bangsa Indonesia*), with one motherland – Indonesia (*tanah air Indonesia*), and that they spoke one language of unity (*bahasa persatuan*) – *bahasa Indonesia* (the Indonesian language). Although the Malays before this were never fanatical about their language, the Indonesian *Sumpah Pemuda* gave them an idea of the role that language could play in forging them as a strongly coherent group as well as in giving an identity to a new Malaya, where all the races could be united through a single language. The Malays were also intrigued by Indonesia's selection of bazaar Malay as their language of unity, because this Indonesian variety of Malay was essentially a pidginized one (see Simpson, this volume, chapter 14). The great Malay linguist, Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, better known by his pen-name Za'ba, who had been writing since the early part of the twentieth century had continually warned the Malays not to adopt the 'market Malay' of the Indonesians, but to stick to their tradition of using refined Malay.

A common targeted identity factor for the Malays was therefore found, and this was that Malays should habitually speak the Malay language. This property of habitually speaking Malay (applicable also for those who did not necessarily have Malay as their mother tongue or primary language), coupled with professing the religion of Islam and leading a Malay way of life (which people find difficult to define) became the necessary ingredients in the definition of the Malay (people) in the formulation of the Federation of Malaya Constitution in 1956, just before independence on 31 August 1957 (Omar 1979, 2003, 2004a). When Malaysia was formed in 1963, this definition was maintained, and has been so maintained ever since. This means that to be a Malay and to be protected by the constitution in terms of preserving Malay rights (such as in land ownership, qualifying for scholarships for further studies, etc.), one has to manifest all the three identity factors enshrined in the constitution. By this definition, the term *Malay* in modern-day Malaya/Malaysia is more of a cultural rather than an ethnic concept. *Malay* as a category now is an open group which admits anyone from any other group (Chinese, Indian, European, etc.) as long as he or she displays all three critical identity factors. The other indigenous groups of Malaysia such as those in Sabah and Sarawak are not automatically considered as Malays, unless they are seen as having the three key properties referred to in the definition of the Malay in the country's constitution.[1]

[1] However, all the indigenous groups of Malaysia including the aborigines and the Malays are automatically grouped together in a larger category known as *bumiputera* (sons and daughters of the land) which also includes inhabitants of Malaysia of early Portuguese and Siamese descent.

The Malaysian definition of the Malay is not shared by Brunei, where all the indigenous groups present in the state are defined as belonging to the Malay race. The majority of these are indeed Muslim Malays like those in Malaysia, and these are defined as Muslim Malays to differentiate them from non-Muslim indigenous peoples. All Brunei's public policies are guided by its philosophy of governance known as *Melayu-Islam-Beraja* (abbreviated as MIB), literally Malay-Islam-Monarchy, meaning that it is an Islamic Malay monarchy. What is meant by Malay in MIB is a Malay person who speaks the Malay language, professes Islam, and leads a Malay way of life, hence a definition identical with that of the Malay in the Malaysian constitution. In Singapore, the Malays are defined according to ethnicity and language, without any reference to religion.

15.3.2 The Quest for National Identity: The Great Bargain

Before British intervention in the Malay Peninsula, the Malays lived in their separate little kingdoms owing allegiance to their Sultans, and there were nine of these altogether, ruling with their circles of lords and tribal chiefs. Over the centuries the British managed to draw the Malay territories under their influence, engaging with the sultan of each state separately. In 1948 this culminated in the formation of the Federation of Malaya, with each state maintaining its own government but subject to the policies determined by the Federal Government with its headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. The unification of the Malay states in 1948 for the first time at the official level proved motivation enough for the Malays to subsequently fight for independence as a nation, and as history records, the Malays sought the co-operation of the Chinese and the Indians to fight for this as a common cause.

The winning of Malayan independence turned out to be a triumph of negotiation, not armed conflict. In the new nation, the Malays wanted to see their native rights preserved: landownership, their religion, the rule of Malay monarchy through their sultans, Malay language and custom. While the Malays wanted the non-Malays to recognize all this, and at the same time preserve their own primordial heritage be it from China or India, they also wanted the latter to co-operate in giving the country the image of a Malay nation. The Malays were not willing to forge a nation which reflected anything other than being part of the Malay world, and such an image was firmly embedded in language, namely the Malay language, which had already been used as a lingua franca by all the groups in Malaysia.

Malay was therefore chosen as the one and only national language, but not without significant bargaining. The non-Malays had their own ideas about the choice, and were not in favour of a monolingual national language policy. Non-Malay groups suggested having four official languages, Malay, English, Mandarin, and Tamil, each with its own script, a practice that they were already familiar with in their dealings with the colonial government. Others suggested that the choice be narrowed down to only two: Malay and English. A major fear among the non-Malays in accepting Malay

as the one and only national language was that they would be automatically disadvantaged in certain important domains of communication, knowledge of Malay among non-Malays being widely restricted to a basic competence in pidgin(ized) Malay at the time of independence. For the Malays, however, the designation of a language as the national language of Malaysia was seen as a highly important, symbolic act, expressing the sovereignty of the newly independent nation, and there was no question of having any other language imported from outside their native world to be placed on a par with the language of their choice, let alone usurp its position. If that happened, Malaya in their eyes would no longer retain its position as a Malay nation. Potentially putting English side by side with Malay on an equal national language footing was also unacceptable for the simple reason that it was a colonial language with negative associations in addition to having a foreign origin. An exoglossic choice for national language was therefore out of the question for the Malay population.[2]

Malay also appeared to be the natural choice for national language for various reasons other than being the mother tongue of the Malays. First of all, the language projected a sense of history from within the land itself and was not a language transported from outside. Secondly and connected to the first factor was that Malay had had a long tradition of being the language of the successful empires that had ruled insular Southeast Asia, and a wealth of fine literature.

As negotiations continued, unending squabbles between Malaya's racial groups ended up delaying the granting of independence by the British government, until UMNO, the Malay political party which had spearheaded the fight for independence, offered a solution in what is now commonly known as 'the Bargain', an agreement which related to the granting of citizenship to non-Malays in the country. It was noted that for the first fifty years of the twentieth century approximately a million new immigrants had entered the country, but less than 10 per cent of the total immigrant population were actually citizens in the years leading up to independence. To qualify as a citizen, an immigrant settler had to furnish proof of his residence in the country, provide proof of his good conduct, and pass a simple Malay language test. While most of the non-Malays could get through the first two provisions, they found the language test a real obstacle, hence a great majority had to content themselves with remaining as non-citizens. The Bargain outlined by UMNO was that of the principle of *jus soli,* citizenship by birth. According to this principle, all non-Malays born in Malaya on or after the date of independence would automatically become Malayan citizens. This was an offer made by the Malay leadership to non-Malays on condition that the latter accept Malay as the national language and recognize the special rights and privileges of the Malays as natives of the land. The offer and its acceptance in turn facilitated the writing of the National Language Act, Article 152, in the Constitution of the

[2] As was, also, the possibility of designating the pidginized variety of Malay as the national language, despite the fact that this was understood all over the country. Only non-pidginized Malay was seen as being qualified to fulfil the symbolic role of serving as the country's national language.

Federation of Malaya. When the Borneo British territories, Sabah and Sarawak, became part of Malaysia in 1963, the National Language Act was amended accordingly to include them.

Independence and the offer of citizenship by birth for recognition of the central place of the Malay language in Malaya reflected a critical way of thinking in the minds of the Malays: that language was their soul and the soul of the nation as contained in their slogan *Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa* (language is the soul of the nation). This slogan has since become the motto of the *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (Institute of National Language), established in 1956, a year before independence, to implement all policies concerning the development, use, and usage of the national language. The importance of the national language as a symbol of the sovereignty of the nation is echoed in many other slogans to the same effect. It has become part of the belief system of the Malays that they have to uphold the language come what may, because in it rests their whole ethos and standing as a race and as a nation. It is believed that if language progresses, so will the people.

The stance of the Brunei Malays with regard to the Malay language has always been similar to that of their counterparts in Malaysia. However, they did not find themselves in the position of needing to negotiate with a significant non-Malay population when making their choice of national language at independence in 1985, and there has never been a principle akin to that of *jus soli* in Brunei.

15.3.3 Allocation of Language Use: Accommodation and Preservation of Ethnic Identity

A monolingual national language policy is widely considered as important for the forging of a united nation. This is tied to the belief that speaking in one and the same language has the potential to bind a multiracial population together, a belief which in Malaya/Malaysia has been more firmly held among the Malays than among the country's other ethnic groups. The situation in neighbouring Indonesia, in which all the country's ethnic groups have accepted Malay as the national language without protest has been cited as the ideal goal that Malaysians themselves should have tried to aim for. However, apart from Malaysia and Indonesia having an indigenous population with the same basic ethnic origins, every other aspect in the demography and the social, economic, and political life of the Indonesians and Malaysians was quite dissimilar. Consequently, the 'idolization' of Indonesia among Malays in Malaysia only went as far as admiration of the success Indonesia enjoyed with its selection of Malay as the country's national language.

While Malay became established as the national language of Malaysia, there has been (and still is) also significant recognition of the importance of English, and to a lesser extent, of the other languages of Malaysia. In the Constitution of 1957, where Malay was enshrined as the national language, Malay together with English were simultaneously recognized as the two *official* languages of Malaya for a period of ten

years following independence, after which it was planned that English would be phased out as an official language, leaving Malay as the only national and official language. This provision relating to English was maintained when the constitution was further revised with the formation of Malaysia in 1963.

In Malaysia, as in various other countries, a clear distinction is made between the roles of a national and an official language. A national language is seen as one that gives identity to the country as a sovereign nation and is the language of the national anthem, while an official language is one that is designated for use in official situations, such as official ceremonies of the government, in debates in Parliament and the Senate as well as in the state legislative assemblies, and is used as the language of administration in government departments and statutory bodies. The 'grace period' for the use of English as an official language ended in Peninsular Malaysia in 1967. However, a dispensation was made for the continued use of English in the law courts in the interest of justice. This arose from the fact that the judges and the lawyers were trained in the United Kingdom and were more capable of conducting trials in English than in Malay, and had to use interpreters when clients could not understand English. It was only in 1982, twenty-five years after independence, that the Lower Courts started to hold their trials in Malay. The High Courts took a slower pace, and English still seems to be the preferred language of trials in these courts.

The use of English as an official language alongside Malay for ten years after independence was also incorporated in the constitution when the states of Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo joined Malaya in the Federation of Malaysia. Sabah was able to conform to the provision of the constitution such that from September 1973, the situation as far as official language use was concerned was in line with that of Peninsular Malaysia. Sarawak through its Legislative Council managed to postpone the implementation of the official language policy using Malay in all official situations until 1985, that is, twenty-two years after independence within Malaysia.

Considering the situation in the law courts and the drafting of Malaysian laws and regulations, English has never really been phased out as an official language. Although towards the end of 1990s, more and more laws and regulations began to be drafted in Malay, there has always been the requirement that all important government documents have to have an English language version as well. And this special position of English is more accentuated in private businesses, especially in the financial sector, as well as in the professions such as engineering, medicine, dentistry, etc. (Omar 1992, 1995, 1996; Said and Ng 1997).

At the same time, the other languages of Malaysia have continued to function within their own specific communities. For example, Chinese merchants and shopkeepers continue to use Chinese in carrying out their business, and Tamil-speaking Indians do likewise with Tamil.

Earlier, during the colonial period, all government circulars to the people and all the notice boards used to be written in four languages, using four different scripts:

English with its Roman script, Malay with its Jawi script, and Chinese and Tamil with their own separate scripts. When Malay became the national and official language, the script chosen for it was the Roman script, and this has been incorporated in the constitution. Sacrificing the Jawi script which has been part of the Malay identity since the fourteenth century was seen as a step towards accommodating non-Malays in the country, so that they would find the language easier to learn and accept it as the national language of the whole country. The Jawi script with its special calligraphy now remains as a cultural trait specific only to the Malays, and is not used as a medium for public writing of the national language when directed at all citizens of the nation.

Despite the fact that Malay is now the only official language of the country, English, Mandarin, and Tamil are freely permitted for use on signboards in commercial centres and in advertisements, though there is a rule which states that prominence in terms of size of the script made use of should be given to the national language. All the four languages furthermore have their own newspapers, and the government channels in Radio and Television Malaysia provide programming in all four languages.

15.3.4 Planning for National Identity Through Language in Education

It had been realized even before independence that for a national language policy to succeed as an instrument in the forging of a national identity, it was necessary for it to be used as a medium of instruction in educational programmes attended by all groups of the population. In 1956 a committee known as the Committee for Education was set up to recommend a system of education for independent Malaya. This committee was more popularly known as the Razak Committee after its chairman, Abdul Razak Hussain, who was to become Malaysia's second Prime Minister. A significant recommendation of this Committee was the setting up of a national system of education which would use Malay as the main medium of instruction, and also make use of a common core syllabus. As a start it recommended the extension of Malay-medium schools to secondary-level education. At the same time the Report of the Committee for Education stressed the fact that the changes to the existing system should be effected gradually, bearing in mind the sensitivities of the non-Malay groups, who would continue to enjoy the right of using their own ethnic languages.

Beginning from 1957 there existed two streams of education using a common core syllabus from the primary to the Higher School Certificate level, one using English (the already existing English schools) and the other using Malay. The schools using Malay were named 'national schools', and all other schools came to be known as 'national-type schools', hence, national-type English schools, national-type Chinese schools, and national-type Tamil schools.

Adjustment in the medium of instruction also had to be made in universities to accommodate Malay-medium students whose only opportunity for a full tertiary education in the national language was previously in a Malay Studies programme. For

other subjects, especially in the sciences, they still had to grapple with English which they learned as a subject while in school.

In the period following independence, the forging of a national identity through the attempted strengthening of the use of the national language in education still seemed far from being achieved, however. The Malay-medium stream was almost wholly populated by just Malays, and the populations of the English schools and of the other national-type schools remained as they were in the days before independence. It was obvious that the national education policy was doing very little to bring the races together, and acceptance of the national language was seen only in getting a pass in the different levels of proficiency required for promotion to certain ranks in the government service.

15.3.5 Racial Riots, the Sedition Act, and Renaming the National Language

While the Malay population in the 1960s seemed to believe in and be striving towards the creation of a national identity facilitated by a common national language, such a commitment was not obviously shared by the non-Malays. In debates over national policies whether among politicians or academics, the special rights and privileges of the Malays as well as the use of the national language were regularly brought up as topics of discussion and complaint, and these two themes were perennially major bones of contention among non-Malays. On the other hand, the Malays themselves appeared very despondent over their socio-economic inferiority when compared to the non-Malays, especially the Chinese. Mistrust towards one another led to conflicts in the market places and in May 1969 this gave rise to the most serious ever racial conflict in the country's history, beginning on 13 May, and lasting for over a week. The communal violence which is now referred to as the May 13 Incident led to the suspension of Parliament and for twenty-one months Malaysia was ruled by a committee known as the National Operations Council (NOC) chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak Hussain.

It was during the rule of the NOC that the important New Economic Policy was formulated with a two-pronged objective: to eradicate poverty and to restructure society in the country. The Sedition Act was also amended in a significant way to make it illegal to criticize constitutional clauses relating to Malay special rights, the national language, the Sultanate, and the citizenship rights of the non-Malay communities (T. A. Rahman 1984: 8). It was additionally during the administration of the NOC that the nomenclature of the national language was changed to *bahasa Malaysia* (language of Malaysia) from *bahasa Melayu* (language of the Malays). The idea behind such a change was to give the language a more 'national flavour', as it had been argued by dissenters that the national language was really just the language of the Malays, not of the Malaysians in general. In connection with this name change, there was the local precedent of Indonesia which had taken (a form of) Malay and renamed it *bahasa Indonesia* (language of Indonesia), thereby apparently winning greater

acceptance for it as the national language of Indonesia. By renaming the national language in Malaysia it was hoped that parties hitherto averse to accepting *bahasa Melayu* as the national language would find it easier to identify themselves with *bahasa Malaysia* as the language of the whole country/the Malaysians, and not just the Malays. This name change was never incorporated into the constitution, however, and the official name as far as the constitution goes has always been Malay (*bahasa Melayu*). It can also be noted that thirty years after the May 13 Incident, when the position of the national language had become fully stable as official language as well as the main language medium in education, the term Malay (*bahasa Melayu*) has resurfaced, spearheaded by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, with the argument that the official name as recognized by the constitution was indeed *bahasa Melayu*, not *bahasa Malaysia*. So far there has not been any protest against the renewed use of the term Malay/*bahasa Melayu*.

15.3.6 New Education Policy and Wider Use of National Language

In time it became obvious that extension of the Malay-medium schools to a full programme of primary followed by secondary education paralleling that of English-medium education did not do much to bring the children of the different races together. The disparity in academic achievement between students attending the English stream of education and those attending the Malay stream was most apparent. A solution had to be found to bridge the gap, and what was attempted was a phasing out of the English schools to become (Malay-medium) national schools. This was done very gradually beginning with the first school year in 1971, which saw the teaching of all Primary I subjects through Malay in all English-medium schools. A schedule for the change in the language medium according to subjects and class levels was carefully laid out by the Ministry of Education and a programme in the retraining of teachers was also mounted at the same time. At the end of 1976, students in the arts stream had to sit for the Malaysian Certificate of Education Examinations fully in Malay. The science stream was two years behind in the full use of Malay in the teaching of its courses.

In converting the English schools to Malay-medium national schools, the original national goal of having schools with a common core syllabus and a common language of instruction was finally realized. Students in the schools and the universities from all ethnic backgrounds now became immersed in the national language together and used Malay as a common means of inter-ethnic communication, and competition for jobs among graduates was no longer related to whether they were from English or Malay-medium schools but simply on their performance after undergoing the same strand of education.

The English schools were chosen for conversion into national schools for two reasons. Firstly, from the primary right to the higher secondary level they followed the curriculum provided by the Ministry of Education in the same way as the national

schools, and there was a continuity for them at the tertiary level. Secondly, the English schools were not formally identified with any particular ethno-linguistic community (though a great majority of their students were in fact Chinese), so the issue of disadvantaging any specific ethnic group by their discontinuance did not really arise.

The other two groups of national-type schools, the Chinese and the Tamil, were left undisturbed in their use of Chinese/Tamil in the teaching of their school subjects, though the curriculum of each has to conform to that prescribed by the Ministry of Education. In this way, the ethnic rights of the Chinese and the Tamils were seen to be safeguarded, and there was no hindrance to these groups perpetuating their ethnic identity through educational means.

The national language also received much important government support for its development as a language of academia. A rigorous corpus planning programme was mounted in 1972 with the setting up of the Language Council of Malaysia and Indonesia (*Majlis Bahasa Indonesia-Malaysia* or MBIM for short, Omar 2004b), because from the policy makers' point of view the development of the Malay language to suit its role as a language of the sciences in the years to come had to be in tandem with the growth and development of *bahasa Indonesia*. Prior to the setting up of the Council, there had been very little exchange of scholarly materials between Malaysia and Indonesia, mainly due to the language barrier that existed at this level. The Malaysian academicians had been using English, while the Indonesians used *bahasa Indonesia*. And when the Malaysians had come round to writing in Malay, the terms they used were based on English sources while those used by the Indonesians were based on Dutch and on new coinages which had a heavy influence from Sanskrit.

The MBIM subsequently worked to bridge the information and the conceptual-cognitive gap between Malaysian and Indonesian academicians and professionals. Their first achievement was in the standardization of the spelling systems in use in the two countries, as each country had previously followed the tradition of spelling taught by their different colonial occupiers. Since 1972 there has now been a common system for the writing of the shared national languages of Indonesia and Malaysia.[3]

With a revised system of spelling in place, the Council moved on to working on guidelines for the coining and borrowing of technical terms, the compiling of dictionaries of technical terms, and other related projects. Time-tested traditions and also the need to preserve national identity have always been important factors in discussions between Malaysia and Indonesia on the standardization of technical vocabulary. However, this was to a certain extent assisted in the early days of détente between Malaysia and Indonesia by the latter's willingness to use English sources for technical terms, rather than Dutch ones.

[3] Though it was not possible to achieve complete uniformity as each side wished to preserve certain aspects of its own history of traditions and identity. However, differences in the spelling of *bahasa Malaysia* and *bahasa Indonesia* were reduced to so few that this no longer hinders close linguistic co-operation between the two countries.

In 1985, after having obtained independence from British rule, Brunei Darussalam joined the Language Council, which motivated its renaming as *Majlis Bahasa Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia* (*MABBIM*), that is, Language Council of Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, and Malaysia. With its use of Malay as a language of governance alongside English, and its similar approach to language use in education, Brunei's presence in MABBIM did not add a new stance in the planning of technical terms and related issues, and in many aspects of corpus planning Brunei is able to identify itself closely with Malaysia. The coming together of the three Malay nations in developing their common language has therefore been an important landmark in the social history of the Malay language.

15.3.7 Losing English and the Recovery Procedure

With the New Education Policy, the role of English in Malaysia is placed in a clearer framework in the life of the nation. No longer an official language in government administration, although to a certain extent used officially in courts of law and widely in the professions, English has now been given the role of 'second most important language', second only to the national language. In reality it had always been playing this role, but the role had never previously been explicitly stated in formal circles in view of the sensitivities relating to the position of the national language.

With the demise of the English schools, English in the education system came to be taught only as a subject, and as such was no longer seen as a rival to the national language in education. Recognizing and highlighting its continued *de facto* role in daily life in Malaysia in the 1970s was in a way a desensitization and distancing of its colonial past. And with the continued importance of English duly spelt out, all schools in Malaysia no matter what category they belong to now have to teach English as a compulsory subject, and students have to take examinations in English. This means that in the national schools students have to deal with two languages, Malay and English. On the other hand, those in the national-type schools are faced with three languages: Mandarin or Tamil (as primary medium of instruction), and Malay and English as compulsory school subjects.

The label 'second most important language' has now been truncated to 'second language', an act which confuses applied linguists because English had never been treated as a second language in the school curriculum, that is, in being a medium of teaching some of the school subjects, and has instead just been taught as a subject on a par with other subjects such as history, geography, etc. Applied linguists would be more likely to refer to English in Malaysia as a foreign language, similar to its status in Indonesia and Thailand. However, such a way of referring to English did not sit well with Malaysians, who may feel offended to be identified as inhabitants of an EFL (English as Foreign Language) country. To most Malaysians Malaysia has always been an ESL (English as a Second Language) country.

At the same time that the national language policy was being successfully implemented in the schools and universities and students of all ethnic backgrounds were becoming more proficient in Malay, a linguistic deficit also appeared in the form of a decline in proficiency in the English language. A majority of Malaysian university graduates were found to be unable to express themselves in English, and the private sector, especially the multinational firms, became reluctant to employ them. A popular remark on the subject was that a whole generation of Malaysians had lost the English language. However, this is actually a misrepresentation of the situation. The generation that could speak English well before English was 'lost' due to the national language policy consisted for the greater part of non-Malays. The generation that has experienced, as it were, a loss of (or failure to acquire) the English language consists of all Malaysia's ethnic groups.

At the beginning, the attempted 'recovery' of the English language was a procedure that was not in any way detrimental to the interests of the national language as a medium of instruction. English language teachers and teacher trainers were brought in from the United Kingdom to help recover proficiency in English among the Malaysian population, and English language campaigns were held, reminiscent of the national language campaigns in the early days of independence. In 1990, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, who had been Prime Minister since 1982, announced to the people his public philosophy for Malaysia in a paper entitled *The Way Forward*, originally a speech given to the Malaysian Business Council, and then to academics. The speech contained his vision for a prosperous and united Malaysia. According to his vision, Malaysia would become a fully industrialized nation by the year 2020 (Mahathir's 'Vision 2020'). Malaysia should not remain a consumer of the world's technology and great discovery, but should also be a contributor to the scientific and technological civilization of the future. In his belief that for the Malaysians to be good scientists they should be fluent in English, in December 1993 Dr. Mahathir announced the Malaysian Cabinet's decision to allow universities to teach mathematics and science as well as science-based courses in English.[4] This caused a mixed reaction among Malaysia's academics: although the professors were well able to deliver their lectures in English, there were doubts in the ability of the students in general to understand lectures given in English. The policy was nevertheless implemented. However, because progress did not reach the level that had been expected and hoped for, at the close of 2002 Dr. Mahathir announced a major change in the language policy in schools, declaring that with the opening of the school year 2003, all schools in Malaysia, national and national-type, primary and secondary, would teach all their science and mathematics subjects through the medium of English. In making such a dramatic switch there was no step-by-step or year-by-year changeover schedule as was the case when the English schools were converted into Malay-medium national

[4] Mahathir's stand on the importance of English for Malaysia was actually first made known before he became a minister in the government, and has been consistent ever since (Mahathir 1994).

schools. Nor was there any warning given to teachers, parents, textbook writers, and publishers on the change that was suddenly to come. Teachers instead experienced hands-on on-the-job training in teaching these subjects in English and retired teachers fluent in English were brought back to teach in the schools. Textbooks were written as the teaching proceeded.

As the result of such a policy, there is now no longer any single-language-medium school in Malaysia. All the national schools are bilingual, and all the national-type schools are trilingual. At the time of the initial change, there were protests from all sides. The most vehement came from the Chinese, especially the Chinese Teachers' Association. Their protests were based on the belief that Chinese culture was being eroded and this was set to be heightened further by the new language policy in education. At first the Chinese stand was supported by one of the political parties, the *Gerakan*, which is a component in the National Front, the big umbrella party that comprises almost every ethnic group in Malaysia, and which has ruled Malaysia since independence. The argument put forward was that to the Chinese mathematics is understood better in the Chinese language with their tradition of using the abacus. However, the protestations came to no avail.[5] To the Indians, the policy was greeted as a positive development for the national-type Tamil schools which were and still are undergoing a decline in number of students as a majority of Indians prefer to go to the national schools.

The Malays registered their unhappiness over the policy as it went against what they had fought for from the time of preparing the country for independence through subsequent efforts to develop the language as a universal medium of instruction in the national education system. However, the protests were localized; they were centred in the precincts of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, the guardian of the Malay language. The populace at large seemed to accept the assurances given by the government that the policy was for the good of everybody, especially the Malays. If in the past the Malay slogan was *Hidup Bahasa, Hidup Bangsa* (If the language thrives, so will the nation), Dr. Mahathir's solution was *Hidup Bangsa, Hidup Bahasa* (If the nation thrives, so will its language). The latter continually stressed that the Malaysian nation and the Malay race would only survive if they equipped themselves with modern knowledge and this could only realistically be achieved through attaining a higher level of proficiency in English.[6] Furthermore, the survival of the Malays as a significant

[5] With regard to the idea of whether Chinese culture has undergone erosion over the years in Malaysia, it can be noted that many urban Chinese and particularly those living in Kuala Lumpur have now adopted English as their first language, with this having natural effects on the maintenance of traditional Chinese culture.

[6] With the use of English as a medium of instruction in the universities, Malaysia has also been able to attract students from all over the world to study in its universities, and branches of foreign universities have been set up in Malaysia to cater to students from the Asian region. Among these are branches of the University of Nottingham (United Kingdom), Monash University (Australia), and Curtin University (Australia).

power in the country through improvement of their socio-economic status would in turn also ensure the continued existence of their language as the national and official language.

15.3.8 The Brunei Language Policy

Brunei's history as a Muslim Malay Sultanate dates back to the fourteenth century when it occupied more geographical space than it does now. Part of its empire which was present-day Sarawak was given to a British adventurer of fortune, Charles Brooke, in the nineteenth century in return for the latter's help to ward off piracy along the coastal areas of the region. In 1906, Brunei became a British protectorate, just like the other sultanates in the Malay Peninsula.

As mentioned earlier, with British intervention in Brunei, the institution of school education there became almost a carbon copy of that found in Malaya. In 1959, when Brunei was still a British protectorate, it had its first ever written constitution, which specified Malay as its national language. Brunei's effort to develop the Malay language along the same lines as in Malaysia were manifested in the establishment of a language development agency in 1961, now known as Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, after the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in Kuala Lumpur. From that time, Malay became a language of administration in Brunei side by side with English, with efforts made to gradually replace English in this domain.

In the education system during British rule, there were Malay and English schools and also one or two Chinese schools. However, young males of noble families and those with scholarships were sent to Malaya for their education. In Brunei itself, English-medium education was available to children who had undergone six years of primary education in Malay. English schools were built by the private sector in the 1930s after the development of the oilfields, and the first government English school was constructed only in 1952.

In 1959, the Brunei government commissioned two Malayan education experts to re-examine the education policy and to make recommendations on the content of education in Brunei schools. These two, Aminuddin Baki and Paul Chang, came up with the Report of the Education Commission, also known as the Aminuddin Baki–Paul Chang Report, which recommended, among other things, the setting up of a national system of education for children of all races in Brunei, which would use Malay as the main medium of instruction. This recommendation was reminiscent of the Malayan Razak Report of 1956. However, the recommendations in the Aminuddin Baki–Paul Chang Report were never implemented. In 1972, another Education Commission was set up, and the recommendations in terms of language allocation were more specific: it was suggested that Malay should be made the main medium of instruction in national primary and secondary schools as soon as possible in line with the requirements of the constitution, and that the standard of English in the primary and secondary schools should be raised (Jumat 1992).

Brunei achieved her full independence from Britain on 1 January 1984, and a new education policy was instituted at the beginning of 1985, in the form of the Education System of Negara Brunei Darussalam, which has been in implementation to this day. The policy provides for a single system of education in which Malay and English are languages of instruction for all schools. The provision of this system is that in the first three years of primary education, instruction in all the subjects is given in Malay, except for the English language class. From Primary IV right through to the A-Level, subjects are taught in English and Malay with the following allocation: English language and all the academic subjects comprising mathematics, science, history, geography, economics, principles of accounts, and any technical subjects are taught in English; Malay as a medium of instruction is used in teaching the Malay language, Malay literature, Islamic knowledge, civics, arts and handicraft, and physical education. This allocation of language use is also reflected in the university, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, the only university in the country. Degrees in Malay and Islamic Studies can be taken wholly in Malay, but for all other programmes the language of instruction and examination is English (Jones 1992, Ozog 1992).

When Brunei instituted its bilingual policy in education in 1985 this was not well received by hard-core nationalists who had wanted Malay to be the main medium of education. However, the government emphasized that Brunei as a small country could not afford to isolate itself from the rest of the world through not encouraging a knowledge of English among its citizens. The use of English in Brunei is therefore conceived of as primarily instrumental in nature, and is not felt to deprive Bruneians of the emotion and love that they feel for their country. It is widely accepted that the importance of Malay should never be seen to be compromised by the encroachment of other languages, as encapsulated in the country's public philosophy of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (Malay–Islam–Monarchy), the three pillars of the Brunei nation.

Historically, Brunei has had the advantage of watching and studying the policies of its neighbours, especially Malaysia, in the choice of language in the education of its people. Although in the early days Brunei shared a common ethos with Malaysia, it was fortunate in being able to identify the steps that Malaysia had taken that might not benefit the Brunei people. This led Brunei into embarking on a full-swing bilingual policy right from the beginning of its independence. Another 'pitfall' that Brunei has been able to avoid concerns avoiding the loss of the traditional Jawi script for Malay. In Brunei this has been retained as one of the two official scripts for writing the national language, the other one being the Roman script.

15.4 Conclusion

Concern for identity exists at all levels of the society, and this concern often surfaces when a particular group feels its existence threatened by others. In the Malaysian situation, national identity had its origins within the Malay ethnic group when the Malays belonging to separate little kingdoms on the Malay peninsula began to think

of themselves as belonging to a single ethnic group collectively dominated by a foreign colonial power, the British. And this stance and the nurturing of a sense of belonging together with those who share the same distinctive ethnicity had an infectious effect; it flowed on to the other ethnic groups present in Malaya, later Malaysia.

Official Malaysian government policy has never strived to obstruct the growth and development of ethnic identity. In fact considerable assistance is given by the government for the different racial groups to nurture and perpetuate their separate cultural traits, including their linguistic heritage. Cultural diversity is considered a significant asset to the country. Whilst supporting such diversity at the sub-national level, the overall identity of the nation and the identification of all racial groups with a single national image has been promoted through official endorsement of one common language as the main medium of everyday communication in the nation. This was the idealized picture and goal right from the beginning, stemming from the Malay belief that a national language is the soul of the nation, and that the growth of a shared national language is possible only in the common use of a single language, unopposed by other languages at the level of national communication. Socio-economic developments in the country and processes of globalization especially in the area of education and technology subsequently motivated a change in mindset and it came to be believed that the national language, Malay, could maintain its critical position as the single most important symbolic embodiment of national identity, even if certain linguistic space was ceded to another language for use in various official and formal domains, notably English. The acceptance of English as a language having pragmatic usefulness in formal domains has subsequently been made in Malaysia, paralleling the situation in Brunei.

The concept of national identity and its construction and maintenance is important not only for the value it has in potentially giving a sense of belonging to different racial groups in multi-ethnic nations such as Malaysia, but also for the projection of the image of a nation relative to other nations. In Malaysia there is a feeling that the nation has to show to her southern neighbour Indonesia that she too has a sense of pride in a linguistic identity that is indigenous to the land. Upholding Malay is a manifestation of this sense of pride, especially in the face of criticisms from Indonesia in the early days of the implementation of the national language policy that Malaysia's progress was over-slow. According the status of 'second most important language' to English and converting national schools into bilingual schools did not come to pass without brotherly, though unsavoury comments from Indonesia. However, Malaysia, like Brunei, is in full control of what she wants for her people, and national identity receives its definition and direction from the people of a nation themselves, not from others.