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Tracing the Malays in the Malay Land

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to reconstruct and explain the origin of the Malays based on compatible reality. The sources of this article consist of the resources that were used in the well-known written work on this topic, but also a revelation was made upon it. Basic explanations in this article are from the indigenous classical writings, which become the primary sources. This article proposes that the search for the origins of the Malays can be traced based on ancient languages, archaeology, anthropology materials, a physical fossil, genetic and historical resources. The origin of the word Malay and the features of the Malays are discussed too.

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1. Introduction

The origin of the Malay is doubtful. Britannica encyclopedia defines the *Malay* or *Orang Melayu* (“*Malay People*”), any member of an ethnic group of the Malay Peninsula and portions of adjacent islands of Southeast Asia, including the east coast of Sumatra, the coast of Borneo, and smaller islands that lie between these areas. The Malays speak various dialects belonging to the Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian) family of languages (Malay, 2015). Some claimed Malays were among the earliest indigenous peoples in the Malay Archipelago, started from coastal Borneo and then expanded into Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula as a result of their trading and seafaring way of life. That this

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expansion occurred only in the last 1,500 years or so is indicated by the fact that the languages of the Malay group are all still very much alike.

Blust (1986) somehow briefed, “Malay is one of the races in the family of a very broad ethnic group known as the Malayo-Polynesian or Austronesian. Among the tribes in this family are Malay, Javanese, Bugis, Sundanese, Maori, Hawaii, Fiji, and so on. The Malay region is very wide. This is supported by Wallace, an expert in anthropology and world history from Oxford who wrote *The Malay Archipelago* (1863) mentioned, “the Malay archipelago as the whole South East Asia that forms a triangle, starting from Nicobar Island in the East Sea to the Solomon Islands in the South East, and of Luzon in the North to Rotti near the island of Timor in the South”. He divides the vast areas into several groups: Indo-Malaya Islands, Timor Islands, Maluku and Papua islands (Shaharir, 2000).

Mpu Prapanca a Javanese poet from the royal Majapahit, in his *Desawarnama* in 1365 had listed some areas identified as the land of the Malays such as Jambi, Palembang, Jakarta, Kampar, Rokan, Pane, Kampe, Aru, Mandaileng, Tumiang, Lamuri, Barus in Sumatra and Langkasuka, Kedah, Kelantan and Pahang in Malay Peninsula (Malkiel-Jirmounsky, 1939).

The Malay classical texts such as the *Malay Annals (Sejarah Melayu)*, *Undang-Undang Melaka* (1450-1750, MS ~1780), *Hikayat Merpati Mas dan Merpati Perak* (1883, MS 1887), and *Adat Raja Melayu* 1779, ~1850 MSS 1817 (1873 also use the term *sons of the soil* itself which could be traced from a mysterious usage of the word ‘*tanah*’ or sometime ‘*bumi*’ (both could be translated as ‘soil’ or ‘clay’) which consistently appears in In the *Malay Annals (Sejarah Melayu* ed. Shellabear 1977: 138; A.Samad Ahmad’s 1986: 187) the usage of the word ‘*tanah*’ (soil) is as follows:

“Segala Melayu itu tanahmu, seperti kata Arab Al-’abdi tini’lmaulahu, yang hamba itu tanah tuannya”.

Brown’s translation of MS Raffles No. 18 as follows:

“the Malays are your clay as the Arab Tradition says, Al-’abdi tinu’lmaulahu, which being interpreted is ‘the slave is as it were his master” (Malay Annals translated by C.C. Brown 2009 from first published in 1952:124)

In addition, when Singhasari Empire wanted to expend his expedition and subdue the power of Srivijaya Empire, the name of the expedition was called Expedition Pamalayu. This proves that the name of Malay and Malay civilization had been around a long time. There are many theories about the origins of Malays that came from Yunnan and Taiwan. However, the latest theory published by archaeologists in Malaysia said that the Malays were in the country since 74000 BC. Among the archaeologist that issued this theory is Datuk Dr Wan Hashim Wan Teh which rejected the earlier theories (Kamarudin, 2014). It is a fact that Malay ancestors were the first people who founded the political formation or actual government in Nusantara in general and in Malaysia in specific. This could be verified by the 3rd century B.C. Indian primeval texts Ramayana and Vayu Purana which had chronicled an entity called ‘*Malayadvipa*’ in Nusantara.

The next theory talk about the arrival of the Malay was raised by Oppenheimer as saying that the Malays were originally from Southeast Asia. His point is that once during the ice age, the Malay Peninsula, Indonesia, Borneo, Philippines were mutually joined to one another before sinking due to the end of the ice age (Oppenheimer, 2004). As a result of the flood, the Malays were scattered all over the place as far as Hawaii. The myth about the great flood is still kept among the Malay-Polynesian even the ancestors of the Malay or the Malay Proto also keep their own story about the great flood that forced them to spread everywhere.

Malay Proto is one of the aboriginal tribes in Malaysia. Some other aboriginal tribes are Jakun and Temuan. They are actually a group of Austronesian peoples who either accept or refuse civilization from India, China, Arab and others that have influences in the Malay world.

The more advanced Proto Malays normally lived along the coast and exposed to social life and external influences eventually declined their counterpart, whose life was based on agriculture and hunting further inland. Proto Malays conduct maritime trade eventually turned into Deutro Malay. Deutro Malay is the modern Malay today. They then set

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